

The Star of Bethlehem in History

It was the early evening of June 17, 2 B.C.E. All the cities around Babylon in Mesopotamia were aglow with talk about a spectacular astronomical event being witnessed in the western sky. What had been monitored for several weeks was the planet Venus moving eastward among the stars on what appeared to be a collision course with the planet Jupiter. Now the expected event had happened right in front of their eyes.

This astronomical drama being enacted in the western part of the sky showed the "collision" of the two brightest planets in the heavens. So small was the separation between them that to the naked eye they would have appeared not as two stars, but as one brilliant star shining far brighter than any other star or planet. Though the two planets were millions of miles away from one another, to observers in Babylon in the year of 2 B.C.E., they appeared as a single star dominating the twilight of the western sky in the direction of Palestine.

The use of superlatives is appropriate in describing this conjunction. Such an awe-inspiring display was unique in the lifetimes of the people watching the event. It would have been especially important to those in Babylon where astronomy and astrological interpretations had been studied and analyzed for centuries. It was celestial pageantry at its best. Such closeness of the planets had not happened for centuries and would not occur again for hundreds of years. At this time in history, such an astronomical phenomenon would have made "front page news" not only in Babylon but also in most regions of the world. The sight would have been observed with a great deal of brilliance in all areas of the habitable earth. Truly, it would have astonished the world.

Modern Astronomers Are Impressed

This conjunction of Jupiter and Venus has also evoked the astonishment of modern astronomers. The use of computers has given astronomers today the ability to have easy reference to all the solar, lunar, planetary and stellar motions and their relationships with one another over the past five thousand years. And within the last twenty-five years no astronomical event of the past has caused more discussion between astronomers and historians than this conjunction of Jupiter and Venus on June 17, 2 B.C.E. It was Roger W. Sinnott, writing in the astronomical journal *Sky and Telescope*, who was the first to draw attention to this unusual conjunction of Jupiter and Venus. He said it was a brilliant "double star" which finally gave the appearance of merging into a single "star" as the planets drew nearer the western horizon. Sinnott showed that only the sharpest eyes would have been able to split them. The twinkling caused by the unsteady horizon atmosphere would have blended the two planets into one "star" for almost all viewers. **"The fusion of two planets would have been a rare and awe-inspiring event."** ¹

Other modern astronomers have said the same thing. Professor D.C. Morton, the Senior Research Astronomer at Princeton University, said this particular fusion of Jupiter and Venus on that day in history was **"a notable astronomical event."** ²

This occurrence also impressed the astronomers at Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles. In the year 1980 a symposium was held at Griffith attended by various scholars and the staff of the observatory. The meeting was convened to discuss the historical significance of several astronomical events that occurred in the years 3 and 2 B.C.E. It was led by the noted chronologist and biblical historian Professor Jack Finegan of Berkeley, California. At the meeting it was determined that the unique conjunction of Jupiter and Venus and other astronomical events covering an 18 month period from May, 3 B.C.E. to December, 2 B.C.E. were of such historical and astronomical significance that there was need for modern

scholars to reappraise the historical accounts associated with these outstanding astronomical occurrences.

This prompted the astronomer John Mosley of Griffith to program the Zeiss instrument in the observatory theater to show the heavens from 3 to 1 B.C. When this was done, there was a private viewing to the observatory staff of this interesting period in astronomical history. The technicians who directed the planetarium instrument back to that period projected the appearance of the sky on the theater dome of the planetarium. When the twilight period of June 17, 2 B.C. came into view, the planets Jupiter and Venus were seen in a magnificent conjunction. All the audience expressed wonderment over this rare sight.

What was being observed was what the astronomers at Griffith had already determined by calculation would happen. The visual effect, however, was stunning. Everyone in the planetarium theater was now seeing it as those in Babylon and Jerusalem would have observed it almost 2000 years ago. What was being witnessed was one of the most spectacular astronomical displays of two planets merging together that the planetarium staff had ever observed. Without doubt, this conjunction of Jupiter and Venus on June 17, 2 B.C.E. would have caused astonishment and awe to people living in the world in 2 B.C.E.

Events in Roman History

When dramatic celestial events are referred to in the historical records, it is often possible to understand what significance the ancients saw in them. Within the last 3000 years, the period from May 3 B.C.E. to December 2 B.C.E. is one of the most fruitful to investigate in this regard. There were several astronomical events within this period of eighteen months that must have inspired many wonderful interpretations by the priests and religious people who witnessed them. This is especially so since celestial interpretations by official religious authorities were reckoned at the time to be of supreme worth in evaluating historical events. There were probably as many or more people percentage-wise interested in astronomical occurrences and their interpretations at this period of history than at any other in western civilization. Historical documents show how serious people were in regard to what they called the science of astrology.

One event can give us an example of this interest. According to Julius Marathus, a personal confidant of Augustus Caesar, the Roman Senate in the year 63 B.C.E ordered all boy babies to be killed who were born in that year because prophetic dreams and astrological signs suggested that a "King of the Romans" was to be born. ³ The Senate ostensibly considered a "King of the Romans" to be anathema to the government of the Republic. So concerned were some of the senators of this astrological interpretation, whose wives were pregnant, that they refused to register births from their wives in hopes that the signs applied to them. We are informed that in that very year (23 September, 63 B.C.E.), the person who later became the first emperor of the Romans (Augustus) was born.

Sixty years later these beliefs among rulers on the supposed veracity of astrological interpretations had not diminished. Recall that the New Testament records that King Herod killed the innocent children in and around Bethlehem when Magi (astrologers) informed him that a King of the Jews had been born. The Magi were serious with their interpretations, and they made a long and arduous journey to show homage to the newborn king. ⁴

Astrological matters at this time in history were reckoned by most people as being first-class scientific indicators to present and future events. Whether one today believes or heartily disapproves in astrology has nothing to do with the matter. If modern historians wish to evaluate in a correct manner the historical events in this early period of the Roman Empire, they must possess a considerable knowledge of the astrological concepts that governed the people who lived in that generation. At no time in the history of Rome was a belief in astrology more fervently believed and practiced than in the early Empire period. The Roman emperors were particularly addicted to a belief in its efficacy. The Roman historian Suetonius took note that for the Emperor Tiberius, "His belief in astrology having persuaded him that the world was wholly ruled by fate." ⁵

Simply put, near the 1st century of our era the majority of people considered astrological interpretations as reliable scientific guides in understanding most historical events,

especially those involving the rulers of the various lands. What a joy it must have been from 3 to 2 B.C. for the astrologers of the classical world (such as the Chaldeans and the Magi) to witness the planetary and the stellar relationships that were happening within the background of that historical environment. The period of 3 to 2 B.C. was especially important to Rome. In the Roman Empire, all political sections of the imperial domains were then in festival and in celebration. Let us look at this particular time.

The Glory of Rome

This time was one of the most glorious periods in the history of Rome. In 2 B.C.E. Augustus celebrated his 25th jubilee year of being emperor of the Romans (from the time he was proclaimed "Augustus" on January 16, 27 B.C.E.). ⁶ This year also coincided with the 750th year of the founding of Rome as determined by the chronological records of the Roman priests. ⁷ In August of 2 B.C.E. (the month named after Augustus himself and still a month we recognize today) there were festivities in Rome and throughout the provinces and client kingdoms. People came to the festivities from all over the Empire and even beyond. In Rome during this year there were magnificent displays and carnival activities. There were sham sea-fights on the flooded Tibertine fields, gladiators in abundance and wild beast hunts. The Roman Empire was in great celebration. Along with this, Augustus, in 2 B.C.E., finally dedicated the new Forum bearing his name after many delays and he sanctified the Temple of Mars Ultor (Mars the Avenger). ⁸

The year 2 B.C.E. was almost as if a Roman millennium had commenced. The Roman poet Virgil, in his *Fourth Eclogue* a few years before, had given a prophetic revelation that a child was destined to bring in a new Golden Age of peace and prosperity sometime within this period. Sir Ronald Syme mentioned the importance of this special year 2 B.C.E. Peace and security seemed everywhere in the air. "East as well as west and north, the horizon was clear of menacing clouds." ⁹ "The third closing of Janus belongs about this time, so it may with some confidence be conjectured." ¹⁰ The shutting of these gates at the temple of Janus was the signal that peace was now on the borders and within the Roman Empire. Political tranquility was everywhere in evidence. Active war had ceased and large numbers of legionary soldiers had been released from military service from 7 to 2 B.C.E. ¹¹

Truly, it seemed at the time that every man would "sit under his vine and fig tree" (Micah 4:4). It seemed that the Roman state under the leadership of the emperor Augustus had secured this for the Roman Empire. By the year 2 B.C.E., the world saw in Augustus a type of "Prince of Peace" who was then in charge of the greatest empire on earth. Virgil's prophecy of a Golden Age was seemingly coming true.

The Father of the Country

Another important matter occurred in 2 B.C.E. Augustus was given his most prestigious title: *Pater Patriae* (Father of the Country). In the previous year a decree went out from Augustus that required "the entire Roman people" scattered over the Empire to register their approval that Augustus should be given the most prestigious title of his career, the *Pater Patriae*. ¹² This registration of people in all areas of the Empire was an oath in which individuals proclaimed the emperor Augustus as the "Father of the Country." This oath took place in the summer of 3 B.C.E. and it was required of all Roman citizens and others of distinguished rank among the client kingdoms associated with Rome. ¹³ This universal census of allegiance to Augustus was demanded of those who claimed any kind of authority within the Empire. The whole of the Roman Empire responded, and Augustus was gloriously proclaimed the *Pater Patriae* (the Father of the Country).

This award itself was given to Augustus by decree of the Senate and the people of Rome on February 5, 2 B.C.E. This was the festival day dedicated to *Concord*. It was the traditional day that honored peace and reconciliation among all classes of people all over the Roman Empire. ¹⁴ Throughout the year 2 B.C.E. Augustus was being recognized as the one who brought peace, security and tranquility to the world. In the festivities and banquets that occurred during that year it was common for people to drink to the health of Augustus with the toast: "Father of the country, Caesar, the best of men." ¹⁵

The Astronomical Events of 3 to 2 B.C.E.

The period of 3 and 2 B.C.E. was an important one for political and social festivities within the Roman Empire. Several important political anniversaries in Rome's history were merging together at that very time. And joining in celebrating the praises of Rome, Augustus and the Roman people, the heavens themselves burst forth with great fanfare. The heavenly bodies celebrated with a variety of conjunctions and stellar/planetary relationships that would have inspired imagination and admiration to the people and astrologers at that time. These celestial events have certainly astonished modern astronomers.

It is known that astrological interpretations can vary with each astrologer and with those of different countries or ethnic groups. But there are some universal concepts that many astrologers of the past generally accepted as indicative of important historical events. To the Romans, these interpretations associated with the period from 3 to 2 B.C.E. seemed to be showing a heavenly approval of the greatness and sovereignty of Rome and its Empire.

For one, there was the extremely close conjunction of Jupiter and Venus on June 17, 2 B.C.E. This was when the planets appeared as one gigantic "star" in the western sky. It is interesting that this conjunction occurred at the exact time of the full moon. While the western quarter of the sky was being adorned by this brilliant planetary spectacle, the dome of the sky itself was being illuminated from the east by the resplendence of the full moon. In that early evening scene, the whole sky was aglow with celestial brightness. These heavenly demonstrations no doubt inspired wonder in Rome and elsewhere throughout the world. This is especially so because, added to this, the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus appeared within the constellation of Leo, the Lion. As I will soon show, the constellation of Leo was the *chief* or *head* sign of the Zodiac both in the secular and the biblical Zodiac. This sign was especially important in astrological circles. ¹⁶ It began the year for astrologers to interpret prime historical and astrological events.

Leo, the Central Sign of Royalty

The sign of Leo was not only reckoned as being the head of the Zodiac but it was thought to be ruled by the Sun (the chief "star" of the heavens). It was a "Royal Constellation." Leo was dominated by Regulus, which was known by astrologers as the "King Star." To the Romans who lived at the time of Augustus, the significance of this conjunction of Jupiter and Venus in the constellation of Leo had associated with it the symbol of Roman "rulership" and "domination."

This celestial event on June 17, 2 B.C.E. would have appeared fortunate to the people of Rome because Jupiter was also reckoned as the guardian and ruler of the Empire and it was supposed to determine the course of all human affairs. ¹⁷ Besides this, Venus (which was now in conjunction with Jupiter) was believed to be the mother (*Genetrix*) of the family of Augustus. ¹⁸ So, here were the two planets dedicated to the origins of Rome and reckoned as special to Augustus now merging together into a "marriage" union during one of the most glorious years in the history of Rome. ¹⁹

That this conjunction of Jupiter and Venus on June 17, 2 B.C.E. happened at the precise time of the full moon was also important to the Romans. Full moon day was especially sacred to Jupiter and a sheep was led along the Via Sacra to be sacrificed to Jupiter. The day itself was called "**the Trust of Jupiter.**" ²⁰ It was celebrated as a time when faith and trust were supposed to be given to the guardian and ruler of the Empire of Rome, whether human or divine.

A Massing of the Planets

There was, however, yet another rare astronomical event in 2 B.C.E. that developed 72 days after the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus. This was a massing of four planets into a close longitudinal relationship. They all appeared in the same region of the sky. This happened in the month of August when most of the Roman festivities for that unusual year were taking place. This massing of the planets took place near the conclusion to the celebrations at Rome, on August 27, 2 B.C.E. Jupiter and Mars were only .09 degrees from

one another with latitude considered while Venus and Mercury were also in close longitudinal proximity to them. Note this: Jupiter was situated along the ecliptic (the path of the Sun in its journey through the heavens) at 142.6 degrees; Mars at 142.64; Venus, 141.67; and Mercury at 143.71. The massing of planets was important to astrologers in the sense that the planets located “together” were astrologically reckoned as being in a “common agreement of purpose.”

To astrologers, a massing of planets signaled a new beginning in historical affairs. And look at this. These planets were clustering near one another in the important constellation of Leo, the Lion. This was the beginning zodiacal sign for the astrological year and it was considered to be denoting royalty and power for any of the planets found within it. A massing of planets in the constellation of Leo could have given astrologers much to talk about. It would have signaled a new and powerful beginning for Rome and the world. [21](#) It could have suggested to many that Virgil's Golden Age was now commencing.

More Astronomical Signs

There were other astronomical signs at that period that would have strengthened the concept that a new Golden Age was dawning. A little over a year earlier (May 19, 3 B.C.E.) the planets Saturn and Mercury were in close conjunction (.67 degrees from each other). Then Saturn moved eastward through the stars to meet with Venus on June 12, 3 B.C.E. At this conjunction they were only a mere .12 degrees from each other. And, as if this were not enough, two months later (August 12, 3 B.C.E.) Jupiter and Venus appeared together in a pre-dawn conjunction which was even closer (just .07 degrees from each other as viewed from earth). Though the planets at this conjunction did not appear to “touch” one another as they did some ten months later on June 17, 2 B.C., they were very close in this meeting. Then look at what happened. What began as a pre dawn “morning star” union on August 12, 3 B.C.E. for Jupiter and Venus, then developed into their “evening star” reunion some ten months later.

There is more. The “morning star” conjunction of Jupiter and Venus on August 12, 3 B.C.E. occurred when the planets were in the last degrees of the zodiacal sign of Cancer which was the *concluding* sign for interpreting the astrological year. Yet the “evening star” conjunction of the same planets in their reunion ten months later happened in the first degrees of Leo, the *beginning* sign of the astrological year. The zero degree line for beginning astrological calculations was between the signs of Cancer and Leo. [22](#)

This means that the “morning star” conjunction of Jupiter and Venus in August 12, 3 B.C.E. happened at the conclusion of the astrological year, while the “evening star” reunion some ten months later occurred in the *beginning* of a new astrological year. These two unions of Jupiter and Venus could well have been interpreted as showing the close of one age in history and the beginning of another age in 2 B.C.E.

Regulus, the King star

There are even more significant events from the astrological point of view that happened in 3 B.C.E. and into 2 B.C.E. Just 33 days after the Jupiter and Venus “morning star” conjunction in August 12, 3 B.C.E., an observer would have seen Jupiter in union with Regulus (a star of the first magnitude). Regulus is the chief star in the constellation of Leo, the Lion, and because it lay practically on the path of the Sun, it was reckoned as a “Royal Star.” Jupiter and Regulus came into juxtaposition on September 14, 3 B.C.E. and as viewed from earth they were only .33 degrees from each other. Here was the “King planet” (Jupiter) now coming in contact with the “King star” (Regulus) and in the “Royal Constellation” (Leo the Lion). If viewed in isolation to other astronomical occurrences, this single event may not have been significant to astrologers, but combined with the other celestial displays of 3 to 2 B.C.E., it soon took on great symbolic meaning. This is because this first conjunction began a series of three meetings of Jupiter and Regulus that occurred in a precise sequential pattern. Note what happened.

Jupiter first united with Regulus and then it continued on its normal course in the heavens. On December 1, 3 B.C.E., Jupiter stopped its motion through the fixed stars and began its annual retrogression. In doing so, it once again headed toward the star Regulus. Then on

February 17, 2 B.C., the two were reunited, .85 degrees apart. Jupiter continued in its motion (still in retrogression) another 40 days and then it reverted to its normal motion through the stars. Remarkably, this movement placed Jupiter once again into a third conjunction with Regulus on May 8, 2 B.C. They were then .72 degrees from each other. [23](#)

The visible effect of these three conjunctions of Jupiter (the King planet) with Regulus (the King star) would have shown Jupiter making a circling effect over and around Regulus. Jupiter was “homing in” on Regulus and pointing out the significance of the King star as it related to the King planet. Notice the following drawing that illustrates what observers would then have witnessed. The drawing is exaggerated. The actual “loop” was more linear. This circular maneuver of Jupiter over Regulus would have signaled to astrologers that a great king was then destined to appear.

Looking Toward the Southern Horizon

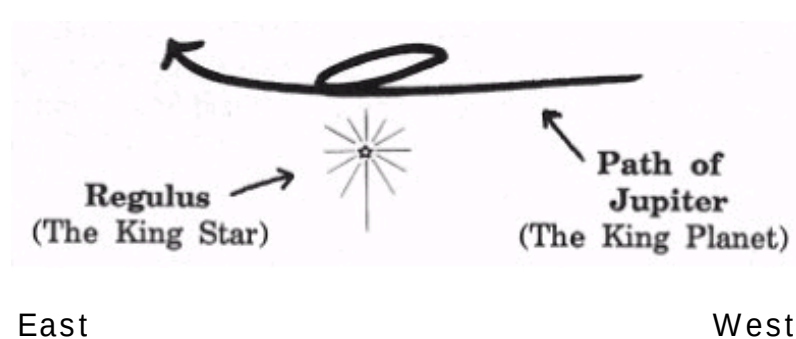


Diagram is for illustration only. It is not to scale.

This motion effect of Jupiter circling over Regulus brings up a most important astrological observation. As mentioned earlier, the zero line for beginning and ending the 360 degrees of the Zodiac was reckoned by some astrologers as existing between Cancer and Leo. [24](#) This means that this motion effect shown by Jupiter circling around Regulus (like a “crown” over the star) was happening in the heavens just east of the zero degree line for astrological measurements. It occurred at the *beginning* section of the astrological Zodiac in the view of some Gentile astrologers. This interpretation is similar to that adopted by Moses in his arrangement of the armies of Israel in the fashion of the Zodiac around the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The biblical Zodiac designed by Moses also began with the royal sign of Leo, but its zero degree line was located in the middle of the constellation, not at its beginning. Whatever the case, these indications would surely have shown to the people of that era that a great king or ruler was then being introduced to the world.

And who was the greatest ruler then in existence? It was Augustus Caesar, emperor of Rome. When were these celestial events happening? Note the chronological significance. They coincided with the 25th year of Augustus’ elevation to supreme power over the Romans, the 750th priestly anniversary of the founding of Rome, and the exact year the people and Senate of Rome gave Augustus his supreme title: *Pater Patriae* (the Father of the Country). To those in Rome, it seemed like heaven itself was giving approval for the emperorship of Augustus and that the government of Rome had the divine right to world sovereignty. Hardly a person in Rome would have disputed that interpretation and most people would have agreed that the astronomical evidence in support of it was overwhelming.

But in another part of the world those outstanding astronomical signs were viewed in a different way. As an example of this, some Magi (Wise Men or Astrologers) from the eastern world were also watching these wonderful celestial phenomena denoting the advent of “royalty.” These Magi decided to skip Rome and its festivities and celebrations. Instead, they headed in the direction of Jerusalem and Judaea looking for this special child whom they considered to be a very important newborn “King of the Jews.”

The Interpretation of the Magi

This historical and astronomical information I am giving in this book provides a clue in identifying the “star” that led the Magi to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem. The evidence is impressive enough that historians and biblical scholars have to give it serious consideration. After all, modern astronomers have recognized that “a notable astronomical event” occurred at that very time in history. It was one that would have astonished the world. Thankfully, attention to these matters is now being given by modern scholars.

In December 1980, Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles was the first in modern times to show the new astronomical drama that was occurring in the 18-month period from May 3 B.C.E. to December 2 B.C.E. Much of this historical and astronomical information was shown in my article in *Christianity Today* titled “The Celestial Pageantry Dating Christ’s Birth” which appeared in 1976 and also in my research study called *The Birth of Christ Recalculated* (first edition, 1978). Because of this historical research, Griffith Observatory decided it was time to introduce a new December Show at their planetarium. Up to this time most planetariums throughout the world normally featured the astronomical happenings from 7 to 4 B.C.E. as the possible ones associated with Jesus’ nativity which brought the Magi to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem. This new astronomical information made the celestial events of that earlier period fade into insignificance. The period of 3 to 2 B.C.E. both historically and astronomically is far more impressive, and it coincides with the majority of the early historical records as well as those in the Bible.

The accounts in these early records make this period interesting. There are historical reasons for this. It is important to note that *the majority of early Christian scholars up to the 4th century placed the birth of Jesus in this very period of 3 to 2 B.C.E.* This is a powerful witness that deserves emphasis. In this book, I will show that the historical and astronomical evidences truly support the basic conclusions of these early Christian fathers.

Since Griffith Observatory recognized the astronomical and historical value of this new information, they began to show these celestial events at their planetarium for educational purposes. Other planetariums also altered their annual December showings to accord with this outstanding display of stellar activity. The *Los Angeles Times* reported on the change made by Griffith Observatory in December 1980 by stating,

“At least 10 planetariums in the United States, Germany and Greece are revising their shows this Christmas season to correspond with the dating theories of Ernest Martin. Scores of others are considering a shift.” [25](#)

By 1990, some ten years later, there were over 600 planetariums showing the 3 to 2 B.C.E. astronomical occurrences.

And it is no wonder. These displays of astronomical events have astonished modern astronomers, and it is now recognized that they would have also astonished the ancient world that personally observed them in the heavens. To modern astronomers, the central event was that of June 17, 2 B.C.E. So magnificent was this astronomical exhibition by two of the brightest planets that Isaac Asimov was impressed to mention it. Since the celestial phenomenon appeared to observers in Mesopotamia as occurring toward Palestine, it prompted Asimov to ask the question, “Is the fact that the unusual ‘star’ was seen in the direction of Judaea enough to make them think of a Messiah?” [26](#)

Indeed, this may have been the very conjunction that led the Magi to Palestine to give gifts to the one they believed to be the king of the Jews. There were serious beliefs even among the Romans that somewhere in this period a mighty ruler was destined to come out of the eastern parts of the Empire. [27](#) People may well have wondered if the astronomical signs in 3 to 2 B.C.E. were heaven’s signal that the new prophetic ruler was imminent. The heavens were certainly making a grand display and the Magi may well have interpreted the signs accordingly, especially in witnessing the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus on June 17, 2 B.C.E.

The Star of the Wise Men

When the full story is known about these matters and what happened astronomically from May, 3 B.C.E. to December, 2 B.C.E., historians and astronomers may now be able to

discover the very “star” that led the Wise Men to the infant Jesus at Bethlehem. Isaac Asimov asked the right question about the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus on June 17, 2 B.C.E. We may share our inquisitiveness with him. Was *this* the “Star of the Messiah” that the Jews and others were looking for? Was *this* the “star” mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew and supported by the account in the Gospel of Luke? [28](#) The word “star” in the 1st century could refer to a planet as well as a fixed star. Could the “star” have been the planet Jupiter? The historical events recorded in the New Testament about the “Star of the Messiah” chronologically occurred precisely at this time, and this is the period early Christian scholars said Jesus was born.

These matters need serious investigation and the academic world recognizes the importance of this astronomical activity. Historians and classical scholars are aware of this new information that was recorded in my earlier article and book. Let me give a few reviews of this new research. Dr. Thorley in England wrote in the classical journal *Greece and Rome*,

“New light has been thrown on the date of the nativity. ... Martin tackles the [historical] problems convincingly. It does seem that Luke’s account of the nativity is turning out to be essentially accurate in its historical details [and that] Luke did not mislead Theophilus, not even historically.” [29](#)

The *National Catholic Register* also reported on this new information.

“Dr. Martin directs a Pasadena-based organization devoted to research on biblical subjects. He has had considerable archaeological experience, and the Education section of *Time* [magazine] for September 3, 1973 was devoted to him and his excavations in Jerusalem. He not only knows his subject but can write simply and understandably. [His work] does seem to afford a solemn astronomical basis for calculating the birth of Christ.” [30](#)

In the 1987 publication *The Christmas Star* published by Griffith Observatory we read,

“Martin has rewritten the history of this period, clearing up a slew of nagging problems. Prominent classical historians are taking his work very seriously, and although it will be years before a consensus is reached, an impartial referee would probably conclude that Martin’s chronology is correct.” [31](#)

This new information inspired *Guidedposts* magazine in its December, 1988 issue to state (having been given the astronomical evaluations of those on the staff of Adler Planetarium in Chicago) that this historical evidence represents the best explanation of the “Star of Bethlehem” yet presented. [32](#)

This was followed in November 1992 with a presentation and discussion of this research on the Star of Bethlehem at the Center for Constructive Alternatives Seminar at Hillsdale College in Michigan. Among those attending were Prof. Owen Gingerich, Professor of Astronomy and Science at Harvard University and several other prominent professors in other scientific disciplines. The astronomer Dr. Craig Chester gave the lecture at the Seminar on the new research, and in December 1993 he wrote a full report about these astronomical and historical findings in *Imprimis* magazine in which he said that among astronomers the First Edition of this book (*The Star that Astonished the World*), “has become the authoritative source on the subject.” [33](#)

There is no question that the astronomical occurrences which took place from 3 to 1 B.C.E. did in fact happen, and they represent some of the most spectacular celestial displays that either astronomers or the general public could ask for to introduce a newborn king into the world. If there were any design to it at all (and I believe there was), most people would think that someone of great importance was then being announced to the world. This is because the whole of the heavenly host was bursting forth into a brilliant panoramic exhibition that would have certainly astonished those who witnessed it.

The Star of Bethlehem Has Now Been Found

When Roger Sinnott over twenty years ago (concentrating on the astronomical events of this period) suggested that the “Star of Bethlehem” could be found with the planetary union of Jupiter and Venus in 2 B.C.E., the door was opened that made it possible to identify that biblical star in an astronomical and historical sense. What Sinnott suggested began to make sense to other astronomers. The results of his research were impressive to several astronomers. C.A. Federer, editor-in-chief of *Sky and Telescope*, said that “Sinnott’s results make the Star of Bethlehem more plausible astronomically than it has seemed heretofore.” [34](#)

In addition to that astronomical appraisal, this present book will show that the same identification also becomes plausible in a historical sense as well. When the records of history are combined with the results of astronomy, it now becomes possible to identify the “Star of Bethlehem” that many people for the past 1900 years have been trying to discover.

What is needed is a serious scholarly consideration for this scientific approach in identifying the “Star of Bethlehem.” Evaluating the data will result in a much better understanding of that historical era of time. The astronomer John Mosley wrote in the *Griffith Observer*,

“It is not often that we see the demise of an astronomical theory that dates back to pre-telescopic times. Yet a theory first proposed by none other than the famous astronomer Johannes Kepler himself, and generally accepted as correct for more than 3 and ½ centuries, is now being discarded ... [by] new historical research of Dr. Ernest L. Martin.” [35](#)

This historical and astronomical research in this book is why many planetariums (well over 600 in the United States alone) are now showing what was astronomically happening at the crucial time in history when Jesus of Nazareth was born. They are, correctly, not making judgments on these phenomena. Planetariums are scientific establishments and are not intended to give opinions on historical or biblical matters. But they are aware of the fascinating and spectacular astronomical relationships that occurred in 3 to 2 B.C.E., the period that history as revealed in this book shows Jesus was born. Because these celestial events were so remarkable and symbolically significant, many planetariums have considered it worthwhile to show them as a service to the general public because of the widespread interest in this period of time.

There is one thing for certain. This astronomical information given within this book makes this period in the history of the world come alive as never before. Whether people today view these planetary/stellar events from the early Roman, Mesopotamian or the Palestinian perspective, or even from a modern secular one, we now have clear evidence that there was once (at the very beginning of our era) a unique appearance of a magnificent star which must be called “The Star that Astonished the World.”



[1](#) *Sky and Telescope*, December, 1968, 384–386.

[2](#) *Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, I.398.

[3](#) Jack Lindsay, *Origins of Astrology*, 246.

[4](#) Matthew 2:1–2, 16–18.

[5](#) Suetonius, *Tiberias*, 69.

[6](#) *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 149.

[7](#) E.J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World*, 77.

- [8](#) B. Allan, *Augustus Caesar*, 216–218.
- [9](#) Sir Ronald Syme, *The Crisis of 2 B.C.*, 3.
- [10](#) *Ibid.*
- [11](#) *Res Gestae of Augustus*, 16.
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