

The Gifts of The Magi (Part II)



In this study we will continue to examine the Biblical record of the “Wise Men” that visited Yahshua after His birth. These individuals are mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew here:

“Now when Yahshua was born in Bethlehem of Judaea 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. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

“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. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.” (Mat 2:1, 2, 9 - 12)

This is essentially all that the Bible says of these individuals, but there is quite a lot there in the language to give us some information to study the significance of this event.

First, by the name “wise men,” or “Magi” in Greek, we understand that these were not Israelites. In fact, the term itself signifies a class of priests, scholars, and astronomers originating among the Babylonians, Medeans and Persians. While in Christianity there is quite the mystery as to where these individuals came from, and why they would be seeking out a Jewish Messiah, the answer seems obvious to me.

In the Old Testament, we read of a powerful witness given to just those three nations of people. In the Book of Daniel, we read about the experiences of the prophet who gave his name to the

book he authored, and also several other Israelites that impressed the nations by which they had been captured.

Daniel in particular rose to a position of great influence in the Babylonian government, for “Then the king [Nebuchadnezzar] made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.” (Dan 2:48)

Now, there is that phrase again, “wise men.” The prophet Daniel was set up to be the ruler of Babylon’s Magi. In the kingdoms that followed, we again see that Yah’s messenger was respected, “Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king [Darius this time] thought to set him over the whole realm.” (Dan 6:3)

Now, the story continues... many of those over whom Daniel had been placed became rebellious against him. It was under the rule of Darius that the law was passed that nobody could worship Yahweh for thirty days... a law that the prophet openly and deliberately violated, resulting in him being cast to the lions.

As we know, the lions were restrained by the angels sent by the Almighty, and Daniel was preserved through the night. Following this, we read, “And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.” (Dan 6:24)

This record of faith triumphing over senseless laws should be quite inspiring to us in this generation. Daniel has always had a lot to say about fearless faith, but if we connect the dots, it also answers a lot of questions about the New Testament record as well. Putting the pieces together, quite a remarkable chain of events emerges.

First, we find that faithful, educated young Israelites were captured by a heathen nation. Because of their trust in Yahweh, they not only survived, but they flourished in their captivity, and were made governors and officials of the land. Daniel in particular was made the overseer of the Order of Magi; however it seems that not all of the “wise men” were content with this arrangement.

In the time of the second kingdom, some of those under Daniel attempted to have him killed, and it is significant that they specifically came after him by means of his religion. There were some, it seems, who were resistant to the teachings of the prophet, who would (I cannot help but conclude) be instructing the wise men in the worship of the true Creator, and not the gods of their traditions.

The incident with the lion's den under Darius' reign is not only significant because of Daniel's survival, but also because of what happened afterwards – Daniel's accusers and their families were summarily executed, purging the Magi's Order of those who resisted the prophet's teachings.

So, what does this mean? It means that the Media-Persian Magi, several hundred years before the birth of Christ, became essentially a pre-Christian sect within the Eastern countries.

All of a sudden, the mystery surrounding Matthew 2 vanishes. I am certain that someone, somewhere, has arrived at this conclusion before me; but I've never read it laid out like this anywhere. The SDA commentary does not make this connection apparent, only indicating that the visitors were "not idolaters," and that they studied the Hebrew Scriptures, which fits perfectly with this line of reasoning.

What this all means to me, upon reflection, is that the faith of Yahweh is even more amazing, even more powerful, than it appears on the "surface" of the Biblical record. The more deeply we dig into its secrets, the more treasure we discover.

Now, I am not suggesting that the Magi were wholesale and enduring converts to the religion of Yahweh. In any event, after Daniel's death, I imagine that the influence of the traditional religion asserted itself; yet it is apparent to me that the prophet's teachings remained, and that within the Eastern countries there remained a small group, a peculiar few, who looked forward to those very things that Seventh day Adventism teaches from Daniel's writings – a prophecy of 2300 days, leading up to the appearance of the Lamb of Yahweh.

The visit of the Magi should give us comfort, that the few, the unnoticed, "little known" to the established religious experts that remain in darkness, are often those who come to the Savior in worship, bearing acceptable gifts, and being equipped to endure to the last trials and temptations of mankind.

The three gifts offered to Yahshua represent aspects of our worship, spiritual gifts that we render unto Him. The first gift, gold, represents the faith of Yahshua. Those who trust in the Father and Son are described this way, "And I will bring the third part [the Remnant of Israel] through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried. They shall call on my name, and I will hear them. I will say, 'It is my people,' and they shall say, 'Yahweh is my God.'" (Zech 13:9)

The second gift offered was frankincense, which was involved in the worship of Yahweh. It was added to sacrifices that were called "a sweet savour unto Yahweh." (Lev 2:2) We find that although that particular term appears only twice in the New Testament (Matthew 2 and Revelation 18) this concept appears more than once: "And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." (Rev 8:4)

Note that it does not say that the smoke of the incense IS the prayers of the saints, but it is added to those prayers, just as it was added to the smoke of Old Testament sacrifices in order to make that smoke acceptable to the Most High.

I consider, therefore, that frankincense (white incense) is a purifying ingredient. It takes the thoughts, the words, the actions, of the saints, and makes them acceptable to Yahweh. In the Scriptures, we find these two witnesses: “According as He hath chosen us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Yahshua the Messiah to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved.” (Eph 1:4 – 6)

And... “Wherefore we, receiving a Kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve Yah acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” (Heb 12:28)

In both these New Testament verses, we find an “ingredient,” as it were, that makes our lives and worship acceptable to the Most Pure Father, and it is grace; it is the grace that we have through our connection with Christ.

The third gift was Myrrh, a spice crushed to give off a sweet smell. This represents our willingness to sacrifice and BE sacrificed, enduring persecution in order to be true to our Savior, and to bear witness to the character of the Father. We read, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of Yah, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Yahshua, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.” (2 Cor 4:7-10)

We find that the gifts of the Magi thus represent Faith, Grace and Sacrifice. However, I would like to conclude this study by looking at these three gifts from another angle.

In the Book of Revelation, the Everlasting Gospel is explained quite clearly. It is broken down into three messages, signified by Three Angels, and I have found delight over the years in finding the principles of these three angels’ message in different parts of the Bible. I have discovered that, because that three-part message IS the Gospel, and because the ultimate goal of the Scriptures is to teach mankind that Gospel, those three angelic elements of information are all over the place.

What I find, from this unique angle, is that the three gifts do represent the things that we offer to the Father, but only because we have FIRST received them from Christ as the Everlasting Gospel.

Consider; we of ourselves have nothing. We are told, and not just about material wealth, “freely ye have received, freely give.” (Mat 10:8) What I am about to say is enough for an entire weekly

study, so I will just mention it briefly, and then explore it in our next meeting, but it is this: The Father and Son are the only Beings in the universe that have perfect love. When we become Christians, when we become converted, we receive and then become channels of that love. We have it, because we have received it, even though we are not its source. In other words, the love that we give to others, and to the Father (by our obedience to the commandments, and in our following the principles of the Faith of Yahhsua) is perfect and pure Agape, because it comes from the Son, and flows through us to the Father and to the World. The fulfillment of the Two Great Commandments in the law is even more simply this: Be Christ-like. In being Christ-like, we permit His perfect Agape to manifest in us, and through us... and it returns to the Father as worship, as it is written, "So shall my Word [Christ and His Love] be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void." (Isa 55:11a)

Whatsoever we offer to the Father comes to us from the Father, through the Son, and by means of their Holy Spirit.

Briefly, then...

The first gift, gold, represents faith. As we have seen in numerous studies before, Faith is the goal of the First Angel's Message. It says to worship Yahweh. This can only be done in a life of Victory. It is the "living," the spiritually alive, those who have awoken to righteousness so that they "sin not" (1Cor 15:34) that can offer Yahweh acceptable praise. (Isa 38:19) Thus, the first gift that we offer to the Father is the First Angel's Message that we accept when we receive Yahshua: the Faith OF Yahshua that gives us victory over sin.

The second gift, as listed in Matthew, is the frankincense. As noted above, this represents purity and grace. It is the "cleansing" agent that makes our lives fit for everlasting glory. We read this of pure, holy teachings, "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my Law." (Pro 4:1, 2)

Remember, the frankincense does not represent the prayers themselves, not the smoke rising before Yahweh, but that which is added TO the burnt offering so that the smoke will be sweet. The prayers and actions of the genuine saints may look similar to the words and works of the nominal believers, to that of the insincere, and the deceived... but what is added to the saints' worship is the purity that comes from escaping fallen Babylon, the grace that allows us to separate ourselves from the "leaven" of the world, (Mat 16:6) and to stand firm for principle in the face of overwhelming deception.

The Second Angel says, "Babylon is Fallen," and that is a most perfect way of expressing this idea. The confusion has ended; grace and purity are upon those who are called out from the confusion of denominationalism and the compromise of ecumenicalism.

Finally, we read of the Third Angel that it gives a warning about the Mark of The Beast. We are told that there will come a time (and such a time has already come) that the laws of the land will

be contrary to the Law of Yah. All who will overcome the Enemy of Souls must do so “by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” (Rev 12:11)

Those who will endure unto the end must take up their crosses and walk. They must be willing to sacrifice, to be crushed like myrrh, to be firm as steel to principle. The sweetness of Myrrh is the Word, the Gospel itself, that goes to the world when it is attacked. The best that Satan can do is spread the Gospel faster by his persecution of the saints. But just as with the other two gifts, our willingness to be bruised for the sake of the Gospel, to “suffer as a Christian” (1Pet 4:16) is not something that comes from the carnal mind. It comes from Yahshua. It is a gift that we offer to the Father after we receive it as the Third Angel’s Message from the Son.

Here, then, in the Gifts of the Magi, we find the Three Angels’ Message, easily and clearly expressed. We find in these gifts symbols of that which we accept from the Savior, that which we use to fill our lives, that which makes our worship and sacrifices pure, and that which motivates us to resist the Devil, so that even in the last days he shall flee. (James 4:7)

The promises of Yahweh are “Yea and Amen” to His people, positive and certain. The light He sheds upon His people are for their joy, their blessing, and their growth. We have great cause to rejoice, for we are loved by One infinite in power, and limitless in His desire and ability to comfort, strengthen, and glorify His people. Let us think on these things in the sacred Sabbath hours ahead.

The Function of the Great Test :

In this wicked generation, being a Sabbath-keeper does not make one a Christian. Mere obedience to the 10 Commandments does not necessarily indicate that one has the spirit of Christ. It is by faith, and not obedience, that we are saved in the end. It is the fruit of the spirit, love, patience, kindness, joy, that attends one who avoids the dreaded Mark, for without these things, religion (even a “mostly correct” religion) will only harden the heart, making it cold and unfeeling.

It is by the faith of Yahshua, that transforms the character, that enlightens the mind, and that softens the heart, that mankind is prepared for Heaven, and the only “test” that could separate the sheep from the goats in this age is one that identifies and reveals those characteristics. Who is like Yahshua? Who acts as Yahshua would act? Who would trust in the Father, and not the strength of men as expressed in a union of church and state? These are the things that the Mark of The Beast and his image MUST test, or it would never be able to accomplish its purpose as described in the Book of Revelation.