

## "To Whom Shall You Bow?"

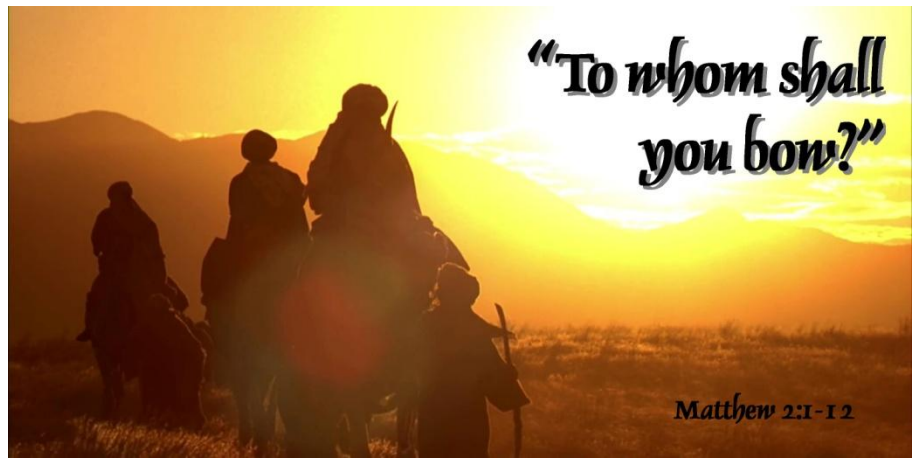
- Matthew 2:1-12

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Matthew 2:1-12 **1** Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, **2** saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." **3** When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. **5** So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: **6** 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.'" **7** Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. **8** And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." **9** When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. **10** When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. **11** And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

**It is** a sad acknowledgement, but the fact is we so often get our theology from the culture around us rather from scriptural facts and historical truths. When it comes to the "wise men" of "we-three-kings" fame, our understanding is generally based on Christmas cards rather than on theologians. The legends run deep! Tales of Asian kings, traditions of three in number, and lores that they represented the three families of Shem, Ham, and Japheth and, therefore, one of them is often pictured as a black man of Ethiopia. It is even believed by many that their three skulls were found "in the twelfth century by Bishop Reinald of Cologne" and are currently on display in the Cologne Cathedral, Cologne, Germany!

But the fact remains we have very little info beyond "There came wise men from the East." We don't know their names. We don't know the details of their lives or positions. But the pictures show them there kneeling with the shepherds at the manger scene, despite the reality that the wise men would have arrived months...even up to two years *after* his birth. But hey, it makes for a good story and it's hard to get everyone together for such a photo op.

The gifts they brought this young "king" also seem strange to us today, even though they are usually just accepted blindly as part of the manger narrative. We are not sure if there was some real meaning behind the choice of gifts or just that they held great value in their day. Christian tradition says that gold was given because such is associated with Kings and Jesus is the King of Kings. That frankincense was given because it is often used in church worship and expressed a heart of worship toward Jesus. And that myrrh was given in that it is a perfume that is put on dead bodies to make them smell nice and showed that Jesus would suffer and die.

One thing for sure is that lost in all the stories and the endless renditions of “away in the manger” is the stark fact that these wise men traveled far to see this Jesus. They were *wise men* and they apparently set aside their lives and normal life pursuits to follow after a ‘king’ for which they no doubt knew little about, but enough to know He would impact the world and time, as well as them individually. They were...by all historical accounts, the “intelligentsia” of their day. These were the “smart guys.” And they were the men who set aside their lives to follow after Jesus. We really only know a couple of things for sure about these guys; *they were smart and they came to find Jesus.*

We live today in an age where Christianity is often presented in media and culture as they stuff of the weak and the ignorant. That Jesus is all well and good for the recovering addict and the socially inept, but never for the educated and the thinking individual. Such therefore says that once you are educated and learned, that the whole God thing becomes clearly a fantasy and a farce, and is abandoned for the clarity and accuracy of science and modern man. Yet it clearly appears today that science alone is running into questions it cannot answer and phenomena that it cannot explain based purely on chemicals and data.

Gregory J. Brewer, Ph.D. and Professor of Neurology and Medical Microbiology at the University of California Irvine says the following: *According to Darwinism, all life on earth arose by natural variation and selection of the most fit. But many questions raised by Darwin's contemporaries remain unanswered today. These problems are compounded by the unique DNA sequence information now in from the human genome project (Venter, 2001; Lander, 2001) and our understanding of the irreducibly complex function of biological systems (Behe, 1996). Intellectual honesty will soon force many scientists to abandon Darwin's theory of the evolution of species in exchange for intelligent design or outright Biblical creation.*

This coming forth on the heels of the overt onslaught on the campus's of American universities against Christianity and even against Christians themselves through bigotry and anti-religious rhetoric and religious discrimination. The open and accepted attacks within the walls of our public educational institutions should bring outrage not only within the Christian society but even within the secular society that hypocritically cries peace and tolerance! The constant and oft overwhelming nature of the assault against this particular group of people has proven too much for many dispassionate, undisciplined and theologically uneducated college students who are at the same time trying to endure the greatest need of their lifetime to be accepted and even embraced by the cultural majority of the day.

Some years ago the author and Creationist Kent Hovind was offering himself to venues such as universities to debate the issue of creationism verses evolution. We tried to bring him here to our local educational institution but could find no one willing to debate him. We reached far and wide in our attempts to find someone within a science or biology department who was willing to step up to the plate and do more than lob rotten tomatoes from the hidden foxholes of “safety in numbers.” What we *did* get ...from professors and "professional" science teachers at several regional institutions, was responses too foul to repeat, and angry...*scathingly angry, ...spitting fire angry,* replies intimating that we had offended them and kicked them in their private parts.

One professor from the University of Minnesota fired off an angry email telling me to get my “F-n head out of the sand” because I believed that God created the earth and not random chance. Ironically, even the very *laws of science* for which they stand on like an island in the midst of an ocean of doubt, disproves their premise. Evolutionism claims that over billions of years everything is basically developing UPWARD, becoming more orderly and complex. However, science's 2nd Law of Thermodynamics says the opposite. The pressure is DOWNWARD, toward simplification and disorder. Meaning things degrade naturally. They do not naturally become better and more complex. So these folks even throw out the very rules of science when they do not fit their preconceptions.

Dr. Gregory Brewer went on to say “*Theories are to be modified or abandoned when they are inconsistent with one significant fact. Based on relationships of similar genes, large numbers of unrelated genes and irreducible complexity, Darwin's evolution of species needs to be replaced by intelligent design. According to the Bible, the Designer was God with more than adequate intelligence and power to create all the major kinds of life in a short period of time. While we will never be able to prove the singularity of creation by God, the evidence better supports faith in God, rather than faith in Darwinism.*”

Recently we have seen the rise of this ‘intelligent design’ movement. The premise here is that the world and its parts are simply too complex to have randomly come together in such fabulous, minute, and symbiotic forms and relationships. Ironically, one of the greatest catalysts for this thinking within the science realm is the advancements in DNA. Bill Gates said that “*DNA is like a computer program but far, far more advanced than any software ever created.*” (— Bill Gates, *The Road Ahead* ) The human genome has just simply pushed evolutionary thinking out and beyond all odds and all explanation and all real scientific thinkers.

Paul Charles William Davies, an English physicist, writer, broadcaster, and professor at Arizona State University as well as the Director of BEYOND, the Center for Fundamental Concepts in Science, says this: “*Scientists are slowly waking up to an inconvenient truth - the universe looks suspiciously like a fix. The issue concerns the very laws of nature themselves. For 40 years, physicists and cosmologists have been quietly collecting examples of all too convenient "coincidences" and special features in the underlying laws of the universe that seem to be necessary in order for life, and hence conscious beings, to exist. Change any one of them and the consequences would be lethal. Fred Hoyle, the distinguished cosmologist, once said it was as if "a super-intellect has monkeyed with physics".*

*To see the problem, imagine playing God with the cosmos. Before you is a designer machine that lets you tinker with the basics of physics. Twiddle this knob and you make all electrons a bit lighter, twiddle that one and you make gravity a bit stronger, and so on. It happens that you need to set thirtysomething knobs to fully describe the world about us. The crucial point is that some of those metaphorical knobs must be tuned very precisely, or the universe would be sterile.*

*Example: neutrons are just a tad heavier than protons. If it were the other way around, atoms couldn't exist, because all the protons in the universe would have decayed into neutrons shortly after the big bang. No protons, then no atomic nucleuses and no atoms. No atoms, no chemistry, no life. Like Baby Bear's porridge in the story of Goldilocks, the universe seems to be just right for life.”*

Astronomer James Jeans claimed “The universe begins to look more like a great **thought** than like a great **machine**.”

But despite all the contrary scientific evidence and the *lack of empirical evidence thereof*, man remains defiant! Psychology and medicine claim to have the answers to our social ills and life's empty despair, and yet would anyone really step back and claim we are succeeding? Or would we not observe clearly that the world is crazier and more unhappy than ever? Edward Shorter of the University of Toronto, who studies the history of psychiatry and medicine writing in the *Wall Street Journal*. says this: “*Modern U.S. psychiatry has adopted a philosophy that psychological diseases arise from chemical imbalances and therefore have a very specific cluster of symptoms, he says, in spite of evidence that the difference between many so-called disorders is minimal or nonexistent. These "disorders" are then treated with expensive drugs that are no more effective than a placebo.*”

“*Psychiatry seems to have lost its way in a forest of poorly verified diagnoses and ineffectual medications,*” he writes. Statistics tell us that one in four people will have a significant episode of mental illness at some time in their life. Stats also tell us that 1 in 10 Americans suffer from some form of depression today. 121 million people around the world currently suffer from some sort of depression and people diagnosed with depression increases 20% per year.

And the bottom line is that only one in three Americans say they're very happy, according to a recent Harris Poll.

What about crime? How we doing in that area? Violent crime has actually decreased in the last decade, but to attain that the USA has a higher per capita prison population in the western world. So it doesn't appear that we have actually resolved the problem but rather locked it away.

No one is saying that science, medicine, government, and our law enforcement is an utter failure or that we should throw it all out. Man has indeed brought an increase in comfort, health, safety, and a general quality of life status for society. But the point is man has not fared well in our self-proclaimed position of God. We still lack the answers, not to mention the cure, to ills of mankind and society. We don't know where we came from, why we came, and where

we are going. From the garden until today we have tried to control the field, and we are losing, but yet there is still no shortage of pride and hubris.

So the shepherds came to Jesus, and so did the "wise men." And the wise men are still coming today. I believe that is the reason this passage found its way into the historical record.

The bible gives record of three other "wise men." These three bowed before the living God but they refused to bow before the world and false gods. Their names were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They...like all of us, needed only to bow to the powers that be in order to "get along," to survive, and have a "good life." It certainly would have gone easier for them. As it certainly is easier for us too today.

Nebuchadnezzar was livid...just like those university professors we contacted! He was incredulous that these men would not bow to his control and his domain. He couldn't understand why they would risk violence and quality of life in order to make such a ludicrous stand. The "why" seemed to drive Nebuchadnezzar a little crazy. Daniel 3:14 records his angst... *"Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up?"*

He goes on saying *"I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. **And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?"***

What God Neb? **My** God. The real one!

Daniel 3:16 - 18 *"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. **But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.**"*

**We will never bow.**

Verse 19 says "Nebuchadnezzar was so **furious**..." Yes, I would imagine so. And such brash stance still drives them to such angry dismay. Maybe, if he had had the tech, he would have also fired off an angry profanity laden email too...that would teach them!

When those wise men knelt that day, there were not three, but rather four in the mix. For God in flesh was there with them. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was indeed thrown into the flames, Daniel records that *"...suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?" "Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did," they replied. "Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!"*

Wise men have been coming to Jesus for a very long time. May we be so wise...

**To whom will you bow?**

**"This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets,  
could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being."**

— Isaac Newton, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*