

King Of Kings

This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. –Luke 2:12-13 NASU

The political climate at the birth of Christ was more volatile than we know it today in America. If someone wanted to make an accurate movie about the times Christ was born in, it would be a fascinating movie full of war, espionage, national and personal struggle. Rome was the terrible beast of Daniel's vision, and had devoured most of Europe into the Middle East. The Jews left in Judea were under the rule of Roman governors whose primary aim was to keep the captive nations in relative peaceful submission.

Just before Christ's birth were the days of Julius Caesar. The Roman Empire was being ruled by a triumvirate of Caesar, Pompey and Crassus, until Julius Caesar's adopted son/nephew Caesar Augustus became the emperor of Rome in 27 B.C. Julius Caesar, Pompey and Crassus had been busy extending the Roman Empire and conquering more kingdoms, nations and lands, so that by the time Julius Caesar was killed and Caesar Augustus inherited the rule, the Roman Empire was a prolific world power. Their subjugated territories generally loathed their very oppressive rule, and the land of Judea was no exception.

What's suspiciously missing in most accounts of this world history is the equally powerful Parthian Kingdom. In fact, from (about) 64 B.C. to 225 A.D., Parthia and Rome were considered co-equal world powers. (Think world superpowers akin to USSR/USA.) This matters to the Christmas story, and it matters in history. It's important we grasp the dynamics of this to some extent, but it's hard to find an accurate expounding of it.

Rome's aggressive kingdom's eastern boundary vacillated along the Euphrates River, with Armenia being a hot spot of

contention for dominion. I'm going to expound on this a little because it's quite important. The Scythian Kingdom was north of the Parthian Kingdom, above the Black and Caspian Seas. Parthia was akin to the ancient Persia Empire in geography, and in its early days was in the Persian Empire. Rome had moved across Europe and northern Africa and had taken dominion through the Middle East up to about the Euphrates River, and was constantly trying to subjugate Armenia.

Because Rome was the terrible beast of Daniel's vision, you have to envision a formidable adversarial empire bent on conquest. They had brutally overthrown Carthage in the famous Punic Wars and expanded across north Africa, through Egypt and into the Middle East. They were still trying to expand east beyond Judea into what was Parthian territory.

Israel had fallen to Assyria in stages, with their capital Samaria falling in 721 B.C. This is really important and most of what I've observed in western Christianity doesn't get this right. Israel and Judah were two different countries since the days of King Rehoboam, Solomon's son. They never merged again, and the northern kingdom of Israel was ten tribes, while the southern kingdom of Judah was two. Israel fell to Assyria in 721 B.C., and while the Assyrian king took Israelites into captivity, it was in no way the entire nation of Israelites.

In fact, there were waves of captivity along with waves of mass emigration. In 745 B.C. Israelites were carried into captivity, and then five years later Tiglath-pileser, the Assyrian King, invaded Israel and took captive three and a half tribes: Naphtali, Reuben, Gad and the $\frac{1}{2}$ tribe of Manasseh. [See 2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chron 5:26] At this time scores of Israelites could see the writing on the wall and fled Israel over the next decade. Spain, Iberia and the Black Sea region were territories the Israelites resettled. The Israelites who migrated to the Black Sea region were known as Scythians. This is such a big deal, so big that I want to

sidebar on it...

The Scythians derive their name from "Sacaе" or "Saka", which in Hebrew terms refers to the ancestor Isaac. [Hebrew drops the vowels, and variances are run accordingly. For example: iSaaC becomes variances of S-C with any combination of vowels inserted. Hence, the SaCae named themselves according to their ancestor patriarch Isaac. The Persians called the Scythian tribes the "Sacaе". The Encyclopedia Britannica called the Saka and Scyths "synonymous".] This is equally a big deal when you realize that Latin writers (think Rome again) use "x" for "c". So Rome referred to the Scythians as "Saxoi" or "Saxones", from where we get "Anglo-Saxon". The reason this is such a big deal is part of the scattered Israelite tribes can be traced quite easily to the Scythians/Saxons.

More sidebar: When Paul wrote in Colossians 3:11, "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all, and in all." He is writing contrasts, opposites. And he places Scythians opposite of Barbarians. "Barbarian" literally means foreigner or alien, which clearly implies Scythians were NOT foreigners. They were in fact, fellow Israelites.

We discover that roughly 27,000 Israelites were taken captive when Samaria fell in 721 B.C. [2 Kings 17:6] One-third of Israel were taken captive thirteen years earlier in 734 B.C. That roughly leaves about two-thirds of the Israelites as migrants, or refugees to other lands.

End sidebar.

The reason this migration of Israelites is so important is because we need to realize they didn't die and they weren't in Judea; they simply moved and renamed themselves. Scythia and Parthia were neighbors sharing a north/south border. The

Jews in Judea in the days of Christ's birth in Bethlehem were Jews of the tribe of Judah.

Parthia was established in 521 B.C., about 200 years after the fall of Israel and Samaria. It was a 500 year kingdom under ONE dynasty: Arsacid. They were known to be of common origin with the Scythians and were subjects to King Darius under Medo-Persia until they revolted and placed themselves under Scythian protection for a period of time.

I need you to connect the dots to really gain understanding here. If they were common origin with the Scythians, they were most likely in part or whole Israelites. The indicators of this are many. Arsaces was the first king of Parthia, and from where they get the Arsacid dynasty name. The Parthians used an Aramaic title for king, known as MLKYN, which literally means "king of kings". It is derived from the Hebrew word for king used 2500 times in the Bible: MLK.

Parthia was ruled by what was called a "Council of Parthians" which consisted of two primary groups: Kinsmen and Wise Men. The Kinsmen were the royal house of the royal Arsacid male bloodline, while the Wise Men consisted of the Senate (secular leaders) and the Magi (priests). The Wise Men and Magi were known jointly as Megistanes.

Kings were elected by a concurrent vote of the two houses. The Parthian empire was based on a feudal system that foreshadowed medieval Europe's feudal system. Parthian rulers were well-educated and multi-lingual. The Magi (priests) numbered upwards of 80,000 and were considered a hierarchy of priests descended from ancient times.

I'm going to skip a lot of history here and nutshell that Parthia was under Greek's rule during the days of Alexander the Great, but revolted and declared their independence in 256 B.C. Parthia actually won their independence in 237 B.C. and shortly thereafter eastern Scythians merged into Parthia.

There were a series of famous Parthian kings from the line of Phraates and a long line of battles for territory and sovereignty over the next several decades, which eventually culminated in a series of battles with Rome. I'm going to go over some of the history of this because it is so very important, and try to stay with me, even if it seems irrelevant. As I continue, keep in mind that one of the primary roles of the Wise Men and Magi is the anointing, placement and deposing of the kings.

The Parthians suffered loss by the Seleucids in 129 B.C., which is the time of the Maccabees. This is significant because the Maccabees gained independence in Judea for a short-lived time here.

A curious thing happened in 62 B.C. when Pompey made a promise to Parthia for territories in exchange for support in their war against Armenia. After the war, Pompey reneged his promise to Parthia and Rome grievously insulted Parthia by not calling the Parthian King Phraates III by his title, "king of kings". From that point on, Rome and Parthia were adversaries and the Euphrates River became the recognized border between their empires. Note that this is about sixty years before Christ's birth.

Crassus attacked Parthia in 53 B.C. and Rome suffered severe losses. Parthia retaliated three years later by attacking Rome's eastern provinces. A series of battles from 40-37 B.C. caused Parthia to capture Judea and push Rome out of Asia Minor. Phraates IV captured 35,000 Roman soldiers. The Jews asserted their independence from Rome in this time and placed a Jewish prince, Antigonus, to rule Palestine as a Parthian satrap. (They would have been under Parthian rule at this time.) Note how close we are to Christ's entrance.

In 37 B.C. Rome counterattacked and regained their territories. Mark Antony had the Jewish Vassal King Antigonus beheaded and King Herod replaced him. Now the dots should be

connected. It was in this year, 37 B.C., that Mark Antony (yes, famous with Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt) invaded Parthia with 16 legion and 113,000 man army to try to recover the seven legions of soldiers captured under Crassus. Parthia dominated this battle. Rome lost 10,000 men and retreated in winter through Armenia. Rome recaptured the land west of the Euphrates at this time, and a sort of treaty was reached agreeing to a co-existence on their respective sides of the Euphrates. Rome had yet to win a significant battle against Parthia and Caesar ordered peace with Parthia at all costs.

I'm not going to join the ranks to declare exactly when Christ was born, as there seems to be credible evidence for a few different dates. However, we do know Herod the Great was the Roman King at the time of Christ's birth. Now see what happens...

*Matt 2:1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea **in the days of Herod the king**, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,*

Remember that Wise Men was the proper title of Parthian Megistanes. The Greek word translated "wise men" is "magian", which literally means "Persian astronomer or priest". Parthia governed Persia at the time, so the wise men were Parthian nobles &/or priests.

Parthian Megistanes did not travel lightly. They would have traveled with an entourage of servants, family, animal handlers, etc. under a military company of troops. Because they were traveling with so much wealth, they would have had an impressive infantry around them. Josephus and other historians record such caravans into the tens of thousands. At the very least it would have been a company of a couple thousand, but more likely 20,000 or more.

Matt 2:2 Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

The Parthians were Scythians (who were part of the scattered tribes of Israelites). Therefore the Parthians were Israelites. The Magi were the priests of Parthia (who were of a hierarchy of priests who descended from ancient times). The Magi were none other than the Levitical priests! The Magi were responsible for keeping the line of the kings of Israel. The Magi (Persian priest) were responsible for following the kingly bloodline. While their first inclination would be the kingly bloodline in Parthia (the Arsacid dynasty), they would equally be familiar and aware of the bloodline of Judah, as David's royal bloodline is heir to the throne over all Israel, and is the bloodline the Messiah was prophesied to come.

The bloodline of Judah resided in Judea, while the scattered tribes of Israel were in various places. Ample research indicates the Scythians/Parthians were predominantly of the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim*, of whom the priestly tribe of the Levites would be interspersed within. Their ancient knowledge and traditions would 1) know the prophecies and 2) would know the timing of Daniel's prophecy and 3) would know how to watch and interpret the signs.

It was no small feat for the multi-thousand ensemble of priests, royalty, military and servants to pack up and travel to Judea! What would make foreigners even **care** about someone born in another country?? They wouldn't! Unless it mattered to them personally! And of course the Israelites would care a great deal about fulfilled prophecy and the "King of the Jews". They would risk national security to acknowledge the birth of the long-awaited "King". They would bring gifts of frankincense (anointing oil), gold (royal treasuries), and myrrh (embalming oil, prophetic) because it would be entirely appropriate and fitting for the Magistans to anoint and acknowledge the birth of the King.

Matt 2:3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

Jerusalem is a trading city that would receive caravans regularly. Three travelers would not have caused the alarm of the entire city. But a massive military escort from their enemies under a peace treaty entering their territory inquiring of a King would greatly alarm both Herod and the city. Recall their peace treaty that neither empire would cross the Euphrates River, and now a military escort in the tens of thousands had entered town. Thirty years ago the Parthians had crossed the Euphrates and taken back Judea. To squash the revolution Mark Antony had the Jewish vassal king beheaded. This would have been in the forefront of Herod and Jerusalem's thinking. Surely they were trembling at the fear of war!

The Parthian Megistanes had an immediate audience with King Herod and an inquiry was made. Herod feigned compliance, but it was probably more because he didn't have the troops to defend should the Parthians have an aggressive intent. [He would have less troops because they were under a peace treaty.]

Herod conferred with Jewish hierarchy about their prophecies to ascertain Bethlehem from Micah 5:2. (Why would Persian priests care about Israeli prophecies??) The Jews and wise men would have been familiar with Daniel's prophecy (9:25-26) and known the timing was upon them for the Messiah...

So this Christmas season marvel at the pinnacle of history in the birth of Christ! It is a story unparalleled in all of time! The Scriptures should come alive as we envision the Parthian Magi traveling with their tens of thousands to worship the newborn king! Marvel at the revelation of His Name, (which we now understand is the title of the Parthian kings):

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on

His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." –Revelation 19:11-16 (NASU)

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