

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 138

What Day Was Jesus Born?

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Episode Summary

On what day was Jesus actually born? What year? Does the timing matter? Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25, but virtually all Christians know that day isn't the real birth date of the messiah. While that is certainly the case, has the birth date of Jesus been lost to time, or can it be reckoned? This episode of the podcast explores these questions and provides a solution drawn from Scripture, backed by both Jewish messianic tradition and astronomy.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 138, "What Day Was Jesus Born?" I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Merry Christmas, Mike!

MH: Yeah, this is our sort-of, pseudo- (I don't know what to call it) "Christmas episode." Because basically, I'll disagree with December 25th the whole time. But—hey—it is what it is.

TS: I'm excited about this one! I know you've got a video up on this, you've got the blog post, you've got a book coming out about it, so there's a wealth of information about this particular subject. It's good that we're going to have a podcast version of it.

MH: Yeah. Like you mentioned, in the new book coming out (*Reversing Hermon*) there's a chapter in that book related to this. I'm basically going to go through that chapter and add some material. People who have read *The Portent* (which is my second novel, the sequel to *The Facade*) would have gotten the basics of this in dialogue in the book. So it's going to be somewhat familiar for them, but there's a lot more detail to it. I guess consider this a precursor to *Reversing Hermon*, at least in a small way.

TS: I'm ready for it!

MH: All right. That's actually not a bad way to start because we ought to say something about what I am talking about and what I'm *not* talking about. In *Reversing Hermon...* Consider the title—this idea of the biblical theology of reversing the effect of the transgression of Genesis 6. That was part of the Messianic profile. This whole birth issue and the timing and the calendar and all that is actually part of that. If you're new to the podcast, that's going to sound kind of weird. I've said before that if you ask the average Christian, "Hey, why is the world the way it is? Why is it such a mess? Why do we have all this problem with depravity?" the answer you're going to get is, "The Fall—Genesis 3." But if you asked a first century Jew the same question, that is not the answer you'd get. The Fall would be one of three elements. But we're taught only one because we ignore Genesis 6. We demythologize it and pretend it doesn't say what it says. And then we are completely oblivious to the Babel event in Genesis 11, and how Deuteronomy 32:8-9 parses that for us. Again, most people in most churches really for centuries (maybe millennia) have never even heard of Babel talked about in the context of Deuteronomy 32:8-9, but there it is in the text.

So that's going to sound a little bit familiar, but what does the birth of Jesus have to do with the biblical/theological theme of reversing the effect of the transgression of Genesis 6? Well, actually a lot! And that's what we're going to talk about today. That's going to be our focus. Now, that is part of a wider area in scholarship, for lack of a better term called "astral theology" or "astro-theology." It's this notion that the ancients (Jews and Christians included) looked at the heavens and considered what was going on in the heavens as signs of God working out his will or God about to do something. It has sort of a prophetic flavor. We see that generally in the Gospels, like with the Second Coming there will be the sign of the Son of Man or the signs in the heavens. We saw it in the book of Acts with things that have already happened. So that's part of eschatology in biblical thinking.

That's different, though, than what we think of as astrology. They're two things that are sort of conceptually related, but they're actually distinct. Christians and Jews had negative views of astrology like we would think of it, and you say, "Well, how could they be thinking about something the way we think of it?" The answer is actually pretty simple. What offended them in terms of astral religion were a couple of things. The foreign gods element, obviously is going to be offensive to Christians and Jews, but specifically the notion that the movements of the objects in the heavens controlled *individual* destiny, individual fate. That was theologically offensive because (understandably) they would say, "Only God does that. Only God determines someone's fate, not stuff moving around in the sky." So that was a very pagan notion of astronomy or astrology, and in the ancient world those two things (astronomy and astrology) were pretty well blended. They were distinguishable, obviously, because we have a lot of data for that in ancient records going all the way back into Mesopotamia and, of course, Egypt. People knew what they were doing with astronomy and math and what-not to a limited degree, to the naked-eye degree. But all of it had a very deep

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religious flavor, so that it sort of blended with what we would think of as astrological thinking. But Christians and Jews had boundaries here. They rejected the idea that this determined individual fate.

So we're not talking about horoscopes and zodiacs and astrology the way astrologers today do. "Look at the heavens and who am I going to marry, what kind of job am I going to have, should I do this or that?" That's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about the notion among Jews and Christians that "Hey, it was the God of Israel who created the things that we see in the sky and he created them (according to Genesis) to mark times and seasons, days, the passage of time—which, of course, they knew meant the flow of human history, what happened on earth... this "as in heaven, so on earth" thing going on, as well. That's what we're talking about. Let's be clear right up front with the context of what I'm going to be saying and the context that *isn't* there, which is this modern, silly notion of astrology (as we think of it).

There have been Christian writers and thinkers that have been into this heavily. They're going to go places that I don't... people like Seiss and Bullinger and even more recently, D. James Kennedy thought that you could sort of map out the Romans Road—the whole plan of salvation—in the stars, in the zodiac constellations. I don't believe that. But what we're going to be talking about is related to that.

So just before we get started here, I should mention it again (I mentioned it just a few minutes ago, but just to emphasize it) what I'm going to do today, people who have read *The Portent* will have some familiarity with. You're going to get more detail. I actually do have an astronomer that I work with on this. We correspond a lot. So for readers of my fiction, the Mantello character is real. He's not a Catholic priest. In the second book, the character who sort of plays the Mantello role... he's not that guy, either. He's not a kid from Pakistan. There is a touch-point with reality here. Trey and I had a meeting with him in San Antonio (for listeners of the podcast, those interviews were pretty recent—back toward the end of November, so not even a month ago). It was sort of a show and tell: here's what I do, here's how I do what I do. So this guy is real. He doesn't want to be named or photographed, so we're not going to do any of that. But just so that you know, this isn't Mike doing astronomy. I don't know anything about astronomy in any sort of technical sense. I understand what he does and I know a decent amount about astrological lore in ancient texts, specifically Jewish and Judao-Christian stuff. So that's the point of overlap there.

Again, in *Reversing Hermon*, you're going to get what we're going to do today. I'm not going to read through every footnote (although I will read through a couple in this episode), but if you want the documentation of the primary sources and secondary literature, you're going to have to get the book. It's going to be out in February or March. This is just one chapter of the book. I should remind listeners that when the time comes, we're giving away three *Reversing Hermon*

books. So if you want the documentation you're going to get it there. But I will mention three articles in our episode today. Two of them specifically address criticisms of the view that I'm going to articulate, which is tied to dating the death of Herod in 1 B.C. A lot of New Testament scholars would say that's impossible and that it can't be right because Josephus puts it at 4 B.C. and that's why we have Jesus born in 6 B.C. None of that is valid. There's been a good deal of research establishing that there were different dating systems and you can have a 1 B.C. date for Herod. Critics of the view that I'll articulate don't seem to have found these sources, or maybe don't want to find them! So you will get those. They're not publicly available. They're not on the internet. But I will put them in a protected folder, and I'll give the link to that folder in the newsletter. So if you're a newsletter subscriber, you'll get that stuff. If you're not, you won't.

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So let's jump in here to the content of the episode, the guts of it. I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that I think this is going to go down as one of those episodes that's going to be pretty popular in the history of the podcast because it's just really interesting. I think people are going to be fascinated by it, certainly if you haven't heard it. Even if you have, there are going to be other details here so you're going to get a bonus. For me, I began to take this seriously after two things: I read Earnest L. Martin's book *The Star That Astonished the World* and I found it pretty compelling. I knew there were problems, and you go out and you look for other research to sort of solve the problems, so you follow Martin's rabbit trail as far as you can. In my case, I was fortunate enough to have an astronomer (somebody who had their head into all this) to help. There are still issues that need to be worked on and looked at a little more carefully, but I think it's fair to say that the fundamental issues have been resolved. But there are other things. Like anything else, you tweak it as you go.

Martin's book was sort of the first entry point, but the second thing that really drew me in as a scholar was Paul's use of the Old Testament in Romans 10. This is where I'm going to start. So if we go to Romans 10, this is a familiar passage to most Bible students. A lot of people have even memorized parts of this passage. This is the chapter that talks about "whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13), but if you start in verse 5 you get the context for that. It's actually quite interesting and takes us into (believe it or not) this topic of astral prophecy. So Romans 10:5:

⁵ For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus

is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

That's the passage everybody knows. Here's verse 14:

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

I'll just stop there before I read the next verse, which is the springboard verse (18). Paul talks about the necessity of calling on the name of the Lord to be saved. Then he says, "How are they going to do that if they've never heard? For them to hear it, you've got to have someone preaching" and so on and so forth. The problem is that not everybody knows this—or so we think. Not everybody knows what's going on here. And so when Paul sets this up, you think that's just kind of it. Paul is going to say, "Look, this is why we're here, this is why we preach, we've got to get people out there, we've got to evangelize..." And he does all that and he says all that, but then he asks this question. This is the kicker for me. This is what drew me in. Verse 18:

¹⁸ But I ask, have they not heard?

And you expect Paul to say, "Of course they haven't heard! That's why I'm saying we gotta be preachers." But that isn't what he says.

¹⁸ But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have...

And then Paul quotes an Old Testament passage as his proof text that people everywhere have indeed heard about Jesus. You think, "What in the world?" And here's the passage he quotes:

**...for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world."**

Now Paul is clearly describing the necessity of believing in Jesus for salvation. That's easy from Romans 10. Again, lots of people have memorized that. But in order to believe in Jesus, people have to hear about him. Again, that's very obvious. Paul then raises the expected problem: not everybody has heard about Jesus. And he gives an unexpected answer. He says they *have* heard. And you think, "What in the world? Where? How? What's going on here?" The passage that Paul quotes from the Old Testament is Psalm 19:4. Now what Paul does here is he quotes from the Septuagint translation of Psalm 19:4. (The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.) For Paul, everyone had heard or should have heard about the coming of Jesus because "their voice has gone out to all the earth and their words to the ends of the world." Whose voice is Paul talking about? If you go to Psalm 19 you find out. He's talking about the heavens and the objects in the heavens. Let's read the first four verses of Psalm 19. This is also a familiar Psalm.

**The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.**

**²Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.**

**³There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.**

**⁴Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.**

You'll notice there in the fourth verse: "their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world." I'm reading from the ESV, and the ESV has adopted the Septuagint reading in that verse. Some of your Bibles may follow the Masoretic text here. We'll get to that in a moment because it says something different. It's actually going to mean the same thing, but it will say something different. There are a number of terms in those first four verses that convey the idea that the heavens communicate information. Think about what we just read: "The heavens declare; the sky proclaims." The cycle of days and nights "pours out speech" and "reveals knowledge." The heavens have a voice and speech and words that can be heard since their message "goes out through all the earth." It's very clearly attributing communication and the dispensing of information to the heavens. That's just a transparent reading of Psalm 19, and that's what Paul is tracking on.

The key question, though, is: How did Paul think the heavens communicated the coming of Jesus? What I *don't* think Paul is saying here... I'm going to disagree

with Seiss and Bullinger and Kennedy that you can get the whole story of the cross in the heavens. I don't believe that. These writers are well-known. They've attempted to argue that the starry sky (specifically, the zodiac constellations) lay out every detail of the work of Christ and the Gospel. Again, I don't believe that; I think that goes way too far. What I do think Paul was thinking, though, is that the stars specifically communicated the arrival of a divine king. So in that sense, Paul believes it is possible for the news about Jesus' coming to be known to everyone. In other words, everybody should have known that a divine king had been born because the heavens declare it. Or to quote specifically the fourth verse of Psalm 19 that Paul quotes in Romans 10:18, "Their voice (the voice of these heavenly, celestial objects) goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world." People could have and should have known that much—that a divine king had been born. So that's what I think Paul is tracking on.

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Let's take this a little further. Paul's task (and he's doing it in Romans 10) in the gospel was to explain what the coming of this divine king meant—the mystery that Paul referred to as the plan of salvation (Jew and Gentile united together, same savior, all that sort of thing). It is fallacious, though, to presume that the starry heavens could actually explain the way of salvation to someone when Christ himself sent the apostles in the world to preach the Gospel. There was a reason he did that. If looking at the heavens was sufficient for evangelism, why would Jesus send out apostles? So again, I'm disagreeing with Seiss and Bullinger and Kennedy here. The sky has far greater and more immediate coverage, so why bother doing that? Moreover, the message of the traveling apostles was not how to read the heavens. They didn't tell the story of the sky, which is going to be told in a specific passage (and we'll get to it in a moment), but that's not what they do. They talk about the work of Christ on the cross. There's a distinction there. Finally, the notion that the Gospel message could be understood through the stars conflicts with the fact that the disciples themselves didn't understand the cross event until well after the ascension. We've talked about Luke 24 before... The risen Christ is standing in the room and they still don't get it. If the heavenly event of the birth and the signage and the stars was supposed to present the Gospel, they should have been able to understand that. So again, I'm disagreeing with important Christian writers on this that are going to be familiar to a lot of listeners. What I'm not saying and what I am saying is that I think what Paul is tracking on is that there were celestial events, celestial signs, that could have and should have telegraphed to everyone that a divine king had come to earth. Specifically, we're going to get the story of the Magi that factors into this. That's what I think Paul is doing.

I don't think, though, that Paul is thinking specifically of the star in Matthew 2. By the way, that term in Matthew 2 is a term used of a wide range of celestial bodies, so it's not a star *only* like we think of. It could have been a planet. I'm going to agree with most astronomers that it was Jupiter's retrograde motion. (We'll get to that briefly in a moment.) That lone object (the star) by itself wouldn't telegraph anything. You say, "Well, what do you mean? The Magi looked up

there and they could figure out what it meant!" Well, yeah, because what they were looking at had a celestial context to them. That's what we're going to be talking about in a moment. So this celestial object in Matthew 2 (the Star of Bethlehem, whatever that was) and its behavior, its movement... If you're just looking at Matthew 2, you don't have the context for understanding what that is. In other words, if you weren't one of the Magi and you saw that thing in the sky, you wouldn't think anything of it because you lack the astronomical, wider context. You don't really know exactly what you're looking at. You can see something in the sky. You can see it maybe change directions if you went off and came back a few minutes or a few hours later. You can do that. But you don't have the astronomical context because this isn't what you do. You're a shepherd or you're something else.

Well, the Magi understood the bigger picture. They could single out this object and understand what it was meaning because they knew the wider context. So as we transition to what the context was, the question is: Is there anything in the New Testament that might give us that context (that might give the star of Matthew 2 the context that the Magi had, that would inform an ancient sky-watcher that this particular object that's mentioned in Matthew 2 marked the birth of a divine king)? And there is, indeed. There is a context for that in the New Testament. It's found in a passage that few New Testament scholars associate with the birth of Jesus, which is ironic, especially since this passage says what it says in conjunction with the birth of the Messiah! You're going to say, "That sounds kind of insane. How do people miss it?" They miss it for a number of reasons, but since it's in the last book of the New Testament and that isn't part of the birth narrative in the Gospels, people don't make the connection. But the connections are there if you just read the text for what it actually says. In other words, if you let the text say what it says, sometimes (believe it or not) the text just means what it says.

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So Revelation 12 is the passage I'm talking about, specifically the first seven verses or so. Again, I'm going to be quoting a lot from my book here and some sources I use in the book. I will telegraph those when I get to that point. There are going to be a few that I especially touch based with Martin's book, *The Star That Astonished the World* (which is available free online, by the way), and also Beale's massive commentary on Revelation. An important note here before I read Revelation 12: None of what I say (or frankly, of what Martin said) should be construed as Old Testament messianic prophecy. What Revelation 12 describes in terms of astronomy (reading it as an example of astral prophecy) was not prophesied in the Old Testament anywhere. Revelation 12 does not quote the Old Testament when it comes to the messianic birth in the context of the celestial imagery that it gives. In other words, the signs here in Revelation 12 are not part of the Old Testament messianic prophetic complex. What we have in Revelation 12 is, I think, a record of what the Magi saw in a wider lens. It was codified by John well after the birth of Jesus. So John would have to have had a source. That source is ultimately unknown. I'd guess that he got his material (which

would involve dates and events from Jesus' early childhood) at least from eyewitnesses to the Magi visit, and perhaps a few details from Mary. We don't know where John got his source, but we know he had to get it somewhere because he wasn't present there and he wasn't one of the Magi.

It's unreasonable to presume, in my view, that John concocted the material after the fact, even though Revelation 12 was written well after the birth. I think that for a couple of simple reasons. Number one: the date produced by reading Revelation 12 the way we're going to read it coincides perfectly with important calendrical items that are part of Jewish messianic expectation. Number two: the date produced is quite workable (I would say *completely* workable) in the context of the entirety of the rest of New Testament knowledge. So in other words, you couldn't arbitrarily pick a day, time, and year or arbitrarily pick something going on in the heavens that happened—not when you're writing, but at some other point. You couldn't arbitrarily (unintelligently) pick something like that and get lucky that the scene you're picking in the sky, you're making this up after the fact just to write something about Jesus that is going to mystify readers and draw attention to his birth. You can't just pick that and get lucky that the thing you picked works everywhere else chronologically and calendrically in terms of events in Jesus' life (and not only that, but all the other events of the New Testament). Because this date that Revelation 12 produces *does* that. It works. It fits in with everything else. So I think it's a real stretch to say that John just got real lucky with a highly intelligent guess. No, I think he had a source for this, and what he writes in Revelation 12 becomes part of that book and it harkens back to what's going on. So I can't really prove that this is what the Magi saw, but I think it makes a lot of sense if this is indeed what the Magi saw. The best explanation for the star (the celestial object of Matthew 2) is going to be part of the celestial setting that we get when we read Revelation 12. It gives it a context. So here we go with Revelation 12:

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ²She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. ³And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. ⁴His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. ⁵She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, ⁶and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

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Now it's quite clear that the signs in the heavens here in Revelation 12, what John is specifically looking at... Again, he says, "I looked up at the heavens and saw..." They're indisputably astronomical. Sun, moon, and stars are specifically mentioned. The specific signs, though require some attention. Let's take the woman first. The woman is the key figure, the logical starting point for interpreting Revelation 12 astronomically. There are scholars who do this. Probably the major work on this is Bruce Malina's *Genre and Message of the Book of Revelation*. He takes the book of Revelation (the whole book, basically) as astral prophecy. I would agree with Malina's critics. Beale is one, Dave DaSilva is another. They think he sort of takes this a little bit too far, and that he takes it so far that he ignores the book of Revelation's use of Second Temple material and even the Old Testament. So Malina sort of jumps the shark here a little bit with his emphasis. But I think his basic approach is sound.

Since the woman clearly gives birth to the Messiah... There's this quotation from the Psalms: "the one who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron." It's very clearly messianic. The woman gives birth to the Messiah. And then the Messiah is taken up to heaven. That's a reference to the ascension. So you get here in Revelation 12 the birth of the Messiah and the ascension. And then the woman gets persecuted and has to flee into the desert. Since those are the factors, scholars agree that verses 2-6 (I'm quoting Beale here):

...reveal that this woman is a picture of the faithful community (Israel), which existed both before and after the coming of Christ.

Israel, of course, is described as the virgin of Zion in the Old Testament and produces the Messiah in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. This is just 101 sort of stuff (2 Kings 19:21; Isaiah 37:21; Jeremiah 14:17, and so on). Again, Israel is the virgin of Zion. More specifically, when it comes to the actual birthing of the Messiah, Mary comes to mind as the Jewish girl who gives birth to Jesus. But "Virgin Israel" best fits both parts of the description of the woman in Revelation 12. In other words, if it was just the birth, then we might be thinking exclusively of Mary, but since we have the birth, the ascension—and even subsequent to the ascension—Israel (the woman) fleeing into the wilderness, Israel actually fits better. So the Virgin Israel is actually sort of a better paradigm for reading Revelation 12. But we're not excluding Mary because she was a virgin. According to the New Testament, virgin Mary gives birth to the Messiah. We get that. So both things are going on, but Israel is sort of the primary referent here. Now, I have a footnote in the book quoting Beale at this point. I'm going to read some of that. It's pretty long, but I'm going to read it. Here he elaborates on this imagery. Here's his quote in the footnote:

Verse 6 is saturated with a rich diversity of OT, Jewish, and early Christian background. The woman flees from the dragon after the deliverance of her son. She flees so that the dragon will not annihilate her. This is not a mere literal

escape, whether of Christians fleeing the Roman siege of Jerusalem in a.d. 66... or of a remnant of Christian Jews being protected from the future Great Tribulation. As in vv 1 and 2, the woman represents the community of faith, though now it is not that of the OT epoch, but the messianic community after Christ's resurrection [MH: and ascension, again referred to in Revelation 12]. The woman is now on earth and not in heaven because she now represents the true people of God on earth. She escapes into the wilderness for protection because 'there she has a place prepared by God . . .

He goes into all sorts of passages for that. The same pattern of flight is observable with Elijah and Moses, who symbolize the Church in Revelation 11. Isaiah and other prophets do the same thing. This is very rich Old Testament imagery, in other words. It points back to Israel as the virgin of Zion. So we've got both Mary and Israel, Israel being the primary referent point.

Additionally, the connection to Virgin Israel is important, given that the signage would have to be decipherable to Jews at the time of Jesus' birth. At that time, Mary's circumstances would have been entirely unknown. The meaning of the virgin and the twelve stars around her head is evident in Second Temple period Jewish literature, as well as later rabbinic thought. So even the twelve stars which, if we look at this astronomically, obviously the virgin is going to be Virgo, and Virgo does have twelve stars around her head and all that. But if you look at it textually (specifically in terms of Jewish literature), the twelve stars around the head are going to be references to the twelve tribes of Israel. So the woman, again, is virgin Zion: Israel. Beale, again, has devoted considerable attention to the ancient Jewish and Old Testament context for the woman. He writes in part elsewhere that:

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Verses 2-6 reveal that this woman is a picture of the faithful community, which existed both before and after the coming of Christ. This identification is based on the OT precedent in which the sun, the moon, and eleven stars represent Jacob, his wife, and the eleven tribes of Israel (Gen. 37:9; cf. *Testament of Naphtali* 5:3ff.), who bow down to Joseph, who represents the twelfth tribe [MH: the twelfth star]. The depiction could also reflect the portrayal in Jewish writings of Abraham, Sarah, and their progeny as sun, moon, and stars (*Testament of Abraham* B 7:4–16) [MH: this is Second Temple Jewish literature]. . . . Jewish exegetes believed that the sons of Jacob were likened to stars in Genesis 37 to connote the indestructible nature of Israel: as stars appear far from earth and immune from destruction by any earthly force, so also (true?) Israel was ultimately indestructible (*Midr. Rab. Gen. 9; Targ Neof. Gen. 50:19–21*). . . . The twelve stars represent the twelve tribes of Israel. The woman's appearance may also connote Israel's priestly character (cf. 1:6; 5:10), since Philo's and Josephus's explanations of Exodus 28 and 39 use the imagery of a crown, the sun, the moon, and twelve stars to describe the vestments of the Israelite high priests, since the priests represented the twelve tribes before Yahweh in the temple service (Josephus, *Ant.* 3.164–72, 179–87; Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 2.111–12, 122–24; *Spec. Leg.* 1.84–95).

Basically, the whole point is there is a rich tradition within the Second Temple and, of course, the Christian and the rabbinic community later on that identify Israel as the virgin Zion and align her with this sort of vision (the virgin with the twelve stars). So when John uses it, this would have been completely familiar to Jewish readers. Completely familiar. And if you're looking at the sky, Virgo is the obvious referent point. Now, the idea that the woman is a constellation is made plausible when one looks closely at the text. Look at the rest of the description here in Revelation 12. The description that the woman was clothed with the sun is stock astronomical language of the day for the sun being in the midst of a constellation. While the sun is in the woman, the moon is at her feet. For this situation to occur, the constellation of the woman must be (in astronomical language) "on the ecliptic"—the imaginary line in the sky that the sun and the moon follow in their journey through the zodiac constellations. Here I'm going to go back to Psalm 19. Remember when Paul quotes Psalm 19 as his proof text that "hey, everybody should have known that a divine king was born" he says "their voice goes out through all the earth." He quotes the Septuagint. In other words, the stars and celestial objects of Psalm 19 are communicating something here. Of course, in Paul's mind, that something is the birth of the divine king, the Messiah. The Masoretic text reads: "their *line* goes out through all the earth." Some of your translations might have that. The line would be a reference to the ecliptic, and that takes us right back to this point that I was discussing, that if you look at Revelation 12, this is a constellation (Virgo, the virgin). The sun is in her midst, the moon is at her feet, and that means (again, if you're going to align those things) that we need to start paying attention to Virgo. Virgo is on the ecliptic (the imaginary line which the constellations follow through the sky). Again, the Masoretic text would align very well with what we're talking about here, not just the Septuagint. I have a quote here from Martin about this that I want to share with you. He says:

... [T]he apostle John saw the scene when the Sun was "clothing" or "adorning" the woman. This surely indicates that the position of the Sun in the vision was located somewhere mid-bodied to the woman, between the neck and the knees. The Sun could hardly be said to clothe her if it were situated in her face or near her feet. The only time in the year that the Sun could be in a position to "clothe" the celestial woman called Virgo (that is, to be mid-bodied to her, in the region where a pregnant woman carries a child) is when the Sun is located between about 150 and 170 degrees along the ecliptic. This "clothing" of the woman by the Sun occurs for a 20-day period each year. This 20 degree spread could indicate the general time when Jesus was born.

So now we're starting to link what's in the sky and what John is describing with real time during the year. The constellation of the virgin giving birth to the Messiah would, of course, have been viewed as quite coherent by the Magi, especially if they knew about Isaiah 7:14. They're from Babylon, Persia, and

there's lots and lots and lots of Jews there, starting with the exile. Daniel himself was part of this wider tradition of "wise men." To me, it's unthinkable that the Magi would not have been exposed somewhere to Jewish learning, and specifically, the focal point of Jewish learning is the Scriptures. So this is not very difficult to imagine, that if the Magi knew of Isaiah 7:14 and linked it to the Davidic dynasty, this idea of a virgin, Virgo (and we're going to see a few signs in a moment here that telegraph to the Magi very clearly that a divine king was being born, and part of the signage was associated with Virgo being clothed with the sun between the head and the knees here)... They would look at that and go, "Boy, there's that thing in the Old Testament that read 'this virgin shall conceive' and maybe we ought to go look at that. Oh yeah, boy, it was a sign for Ahaz in the Davidic dynasty and boy, oh boy, oh boy." In other words, this isn't hard to do the math for the Magi if they had known the verse, and I think there's more than a reasonable expectation that they did know the text.

But even if they were ignorant of Isaiah 7:14, the astro-theological linkage would still make sense to them, since the sign we know as Virgo had strong associations with other ancient "mother goddesses" (figures that would produce divine kings). So even if they were totally ignorant of Isaiah 7, what they would have been looking at would still have been a neon sign for divine/royal birth. We're going to pick up a few of the other signs that would make that clear in a moment. But the fact that they go to Bethlehem tells you that they were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures.

The detail that the moon was located under the feet of the woman (Virgo) must not be forgotten in all of this. The sun must be in the Virgo constellation while the moon is simultaneously at her feet—somewhere at/under the feet—somewhere there. That condition has to be present for John's vision to be accurately interpreted astronomically. Because of the moon's "behavior" relative to the ecliptic and Virgo in any given year, the 20-day window narrows to a roughly 90-minute period in which to astronomically pinpoint the birth of the child of Revelation 12, which is the Messiah, which was Jesus. So we'll get to that.

Let's talk about the child a little bit. Revelation 12:5 is very explicit that the child is Jesus, the promised Messiah.

⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne

It's a reference to the birth and the ascension. This description is an allusion to Psalm 2:7-9, which prophesied that the Messiah would defeat God's enemies and be installed as ruler over all the nations. The Psalm allusion is coupled with a description of an ascent of the child up to God and his throne. In short, John's wording here and the immediate context is designed to create the impression that it *appeared* as if the devil had won the day. The dragon is right there waiting

to kill the child when it's born. The child is going to be killed and devoured—*but* the resurrection (and of course, the ascension—the ultimate return to the right hand of God) resulted in victory for the Messiah, the child. The dragon was therefore defeated.

So John is combining all these elements in just the space of a few verses. We're very clear who the child is. Now the third figure—the dragon. Scholars of the book of Revelation have long noted the connection of the dragon to Old Testament terminology for the sea monster that symbolized chaos. Again, this is very well-known. I even have a motion graphic video on my website and my YouTube channel about the chaos theme of the sea monster. This is Old Testament 101. As Grant Osborne notes in his commentary on Revelation:

Throughout the ancient Near East, the sea monster symbolized the war between good and evil, between the gods and chaos. . . Obviously, in similar fashion to the meaning of “abyss” in 9:1–2, this builds on the fact that for the nations surrounding the Mediterranean basin, the sea meant unfathomable depths and the chaos of death. Thus, Leviathan or the “dragon” came to represent all the terrors of the sea and thus the presence of evil and death. . . . [I]t also signified nations that stood against God and his people.

This is because the nations become agents of chaos, agents of destruction, agents of destroying the order God wants (which, of course, includes this thing called Israel and the Messiah) because he wants to restore Eden. This is well-known imagery.

There are two major candidates for the dragon with respect to constellations. Malina (again, in his book on Revelation) explains it this way:

45:00

The second sign is the fire-colored Dragon. The color red locates it in the southern sky. . . The fact that the Dragon's tail sweeps (present tense) away a third of the stars of the sky further points to a location generally lacking in stars compared to other sky locations. This, again, is the south, in the region of the Abyss [MH: which is another constellation]. . . The question we might pose now is, which constellation does John label as the red Dragon, the Dragon in the south? Obviously it is not Draco, which is found at the North Pole. Boll [MH: Franz Boll, another author] opts for Hydra. . . Immediately above Hydra and accompanying it are the constellations of Corax (Raven) and Crater, which have seven and ten stars respectively. Corax with seven, corresponding to the number of heads [in Rev 12] lies closer to Virgo. . . On the other hand, Lehmann-Nitsche [MH: another author] argues that the prototypical Dragon of the sky is really ancient Scorpio, originally a larger set of stars than the present constellation. It was truly gigantic, even by celestial zodiac standards, since it originally consisted of two [modern]

zodiacal signs (Libra/Claws and Scorpio). [MH: Libra would form the claws of Scorpio in the ancient world.]

You have two options... just some opinion of my own. Hydra has the advantage of matching the description of the seven heads atop the dragon (Revelation 12:3). It's also conceived of as a sea serpent (imagery that matches descriptions from Revelation, like 13:1 that tells of the beast that emerges from the sea, which in turn come from leviathan material of the Old Testament like Isaiah 27:1). However, Hydra is not precisely on the ecliptic, so we have to ask ourselves if that matters. It's adjacent to the ecliptic and only slightly below the woman. In other words, Hydra is not positioned directly under the feet of the woman waiting to devour the child as soon as it emerges from the woman, but it's close. The ecliptic problem is resolved if we opt for Scorpio as John's reference point. But that said, the text of Revelation 12 only has the dragon present ("it stood before the woman"). It doesn't really say it has to be directly under the feet. So both options are sort of workable and possible. Pick the one that you like. I have a bit of a disagreement here with my astronomer friend. He might win me over, who knows. But anyway, you've got two options there.

The combination of signs—the woman, the sun in her midst, the moon at her feet, the dragon (whether it's adjacent to her, at her feet, or directly under the feet)—this collection of signs is not especially rare. But there are *other* celestial portents or things going on in this scene that are not mentioned by John in Revelation 12, but that were nevertheless present during the time of Jesus' birth (during what John is describing). These other things would have been taken as indications of the birth of a divine king to both Jews and Gentiles. One of the problems that you get with people trying to use Revelation 12 to plot the Second Coming (which I think is ridiculous) is they'll go with Revelation 12 but they'll miss the other things. If you put the elements of Revelation 12 into an astronomy program (I have done that, as well as lots of other people) and you get that picture, there will be people who only take what's actually recorded in Revelation 12 as their reference point. What I'm suggesting (and what lots of other people suggest, as well) is that you actually have to look at the sky because the Magi aren't just seeing what's in John's writing in Revelation 12 when they're looking at the heavens. They're seeing everything. They're looking at the sky, and there are other things that are going to be in the recreated scene. If you just plug it into an astronomy program, these things are going to just stick out and they will be meaningful in deep ways to both Jews and Gentiles when it comes to the birth of a divine king. So let's talk about those.

This collection in Revelation 12 isn't rare, although to be fair, there are only a handful of dates in real time that could accommodate them in the context of New Testament chronology for the birth of Jesus. But those dates narrow to one date once other astronomical events that occurred at the same time (which are not noted in Revelation 12) are added to the celestial profile. One of these extra

events is, in fact, the leading candidate for explaining the star seen by the Magi in Matthew 2. What I'm going to cover here is just the basics. Martin actually has a bunch of other things in his book that are going on in the sky that sort of solidify the really "one best date" for the birth of the Messiah. But I'm just going to hit some of the main points here.

50:00

The constellation directly above the head of Virgo (again, this is stuff not mentioned in Revelation 12)... If we're looking at the sky like the Magi did, that constellation above the head of Virgo (the very next one in the zodiac) is Leo, the lion. The lion was the symbol associated with the tribe of Judah, from which the Messiah would come. The association arose from Genesis 49:9-10, where Jacob blessed Judah and referred to him in leonine terms, while prophesying that a ruler would come from his lineage.

⁹ **Judah is a lion's cub;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He stooped down; he crouched as a lion
and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?**

¹⁰ **The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.**

In other words, the nations. So this is where the "Lion of Judah" imagery comes from. It's part of the Torah. The lion/king association is confirmed in Revelation 5:5.

⁵ And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered..."

The constellation Leo, then, was associated by Jews (Jewish astro-theologians, if you want to call them that) with royalty. This constellation is also important to Gentiles.

It was the chief or head sign of the zodiac and had special importance in astrological circles.

That was a quote taken from Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. If you read through their "Sun, Moon, and Stars" article you're going to find that Leo was considered a royal constellation since it was dominated by the star Regulus. Regulus would have also been in the picture (the recreation) of the circumstances of Revelation 12. So the star Regulus was known by astrologers as the "King Star." It was big and bright. So we have the king constellation (Leo,

Lion of Judah) and the star Regulus in Leo. The status of Regulus and Leo is important because on one of the possible dates of the Messianic birth it came in conjunction with Jupiter. As the largest planet, Jupiter was considered the "King Planet" in astro-theological thinking in the first century. As a result, the constellation Leo (the messianic sign of the Lion of Judah to Jews who literally read the heavens) had two conjoined signs of a royal birth within it. In other words, if you're the Magi and you're familiar with Gentile religious astronomical thinking and you're familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures (which we know they are because they go to Bethlehem)... If you're looking at this sign you've got a virgin with twelve stars, the sun in her midst, the moon at her feet, the dragon... Then above that, you've got Leo, the lion. It's the symbol of the tribe of Judah. And within that constellation you have Jupiter, the King Planet, and Regulus, the King Star, overlapping. They're conjoined at this moment. Remember, we're talking about a 90-minute window where all these things are there. So the combination of astronomical signs produces a unique set of circumstances, which can only be accounted for by one date that matters in the sweep of New Testament chronology. And this date, as we will see... I'm just going to say it here, but we'll talk more about it. This date has dramatic significance in the Jewish calendar. According to all of these signs taken together (and Martin has even more in chapter 5), the day of Jesus' birth—the birth of the Messiah—was September 11, 3 B.C.

When we hear September 11, that just creeps us out because of the context of that date in our own time. It would be a whole separate show to talk about whether September 11, 2001, was some sort of shot across the bow in terms of cosmic evil, for the fate of earth and humanity and all that stuff. I think there's something to that because, again, I'm a supernaturalist. But I'm not going to go there in this episode. For this episode, we want to talk about the original September 11th date—the birth of this Messiah-child in Revelation 12. If we take the chapter for exactly what John says ("I looked up at the heavens and saw...") it's an example of astronomical prophecy, astro-theology, astral prophecy—whatever label you want to give it. Back to Martin and his book, I'll just read you one footnote. Again, he has a lot of other information there that can be borne out by an astronomy program. As Martin details in chapter 5 of his book:

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Reading Revelation 12 this way correlates precisely with the chronological testimony of Luke concerning the timing of the birth of John the Baptist and his father's (Zechariah) priestly duties at the temple, where the angel met him to announce John's birth. The primary objection to this date [September 11, 3 B.C.] is that it violates the accepted date for Herod's death.

Most scholars put that at 4 B.C. You have to have Herod dying after the birth because remember the Magi come one or two years later (depending on how old you think Jesus is at the time of the birth. The Scripture does not say the three Magi come and visit the manger. They come later. The terminology for the child

changes in the narrative. But again, this is very well-known and you can find this almost anywhere online or in most books that discuss what we're talking about today. We don't even know there were three, we just infer that because of the gifts. But the Magi come later than the actual birth event. And after *that* is when Herod dies—basically two years later. So he can't be dying in 4 B.C. if Jesus is born in 3 B.C. It has to be that Herod dies in one B.C.

Despite the objections of many to the September 11, 3 B.C. date on these grounds, a 1 B.C. date for Herod's death is indeed possible—and actually quite plausible. For recent research into how a 1 B.C. date for the death of Herod is historically coherent, see Ormond Edwards, "Herodian Chronology," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 114:1 (1982): 29-42; Andrew Steinmann, "When Did Herod the Great Reign?" *Novum Testamentum* 51 (2009):1-29. The former article focuses on numismatic (coins) evidence for reconsidering how Herod's dates are calculated and understood. The latter casts a wider net for data leading to a 1 B.C. death while also chronicling problems with the 4 B.C. consensus.

I've mentioned these two sources on my blog. These are not publicly available and, frankly, one of them is really hard to find. But if you subscribe to the newsletter, you will have access by virtue of a link to a protected folder and you can read them yourself. There are two fundamental articles here. The Edwards article has several charts using Herodian coins and 1 B.C. and which calendar you're using and all that stuff. It works. Steinman has a lot more data leading to a 1 B.C. death for Herod and shows that the standard 4 B.C. date for Herod's death actually has its own problems. But you typically don't hear that because everybody just sort of accepts it. I would recommend both of those articles. And know that a 1 B.C. Herod death date is not an insurmountable problem by any stretch for the view that I'm articulating here.

Back again to the subject matter, let's talk about Jupiter. Again, we have a Jupiter/Regulus conjunction in Leo. Jupiter is important because it is... You can read a lot of astronomers here, but the best explanation for the "star" of Matthew 2 (whose perceived movement was tracked by the Magi) is related to Jupiter. Jupiter is well-known for what astronomers call "retrograde motion," the appearance of movement back and forth in the night sky. Jupiter's first conjunction with Regulus began on September 14, 3 B.C. (the year that we're talking about here) and it continued through September 11, 3 B.C. Then on December 1 of 3 B.C., Jupiter stopped its normal course through the fixed stars and began its annual retrogression (or backward motion). In doing so, it once again headed toward the star Regulus. Then on February 17 of 2 B.C., the two were reunited. So it's moving around a lot between 3 B.C. and 2 B.C.

Astronomers have known this for a long time. The perception of Jupiter's movement for just about everybody who kind of tracks on this thing is the best explanation for the star in Matthew 2. You have all this going on just before the

Messiah is actually born and then on into the time when the Magi are going to start their journey. It takes quite a while to get to Bethlehem, so during that whole interval of time, Jupiter is doing stuff. This just becomes the best candidate for what the Magi saw in reference to Matthew 2. The timing is right, the Magi embark on their journey a year or so after Jesus was actually born, and this is what they're looking at. I have another footnote here about the terminology in Matthew 2:11:

In Matthew 2:11, where the child Jesus is referred to with the Greek term *paidion*, as opposed to *brephos* in Luke 1:41. While the former can be used of an infant or toddler, the latter is only used of newborn infants or children *in utero*. [MH: see reference in the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*.] Martin (Ch. 5) points out that the account in the New Testament said the Magi saw the star *rising* above the eastern horizon [MH: because they're at a location east of Jerusalem]. And in August 12, 3 B.C., Jupiter *rose* as a morning star which soon came into conjunction with Venus. If the Magi began their own journey toward Jerusalem near this time, this apparent westward motion of Jupiter each day could have indicated to the Magi to proceed in the same westward direction toward Jerusalem. Martin follows this by noting that the Magi could have been "following" Jupiter in the example it was setting. The Bible says the star "went ahead of them." Upon reaching Jerusalem the Magi were told to look toward Bethlehem for the newborn king. [MH: Or they could have known Micah 5:2, but they probably don't know that because they ask Herod where they could find the king of the Jews. It just depends how you take the conversation, what you think they knew and didn't know. Are they being cryptic or poking for information? You can read it different ways.] This occurred when the New Testament says the "star" came to a halt in the heavens (Matt. 2:9). Jupiter stopped its motion and "stood over where the young child was." In a word, the celestial body became stationary. Martin references Kittel's theological dictionary for this point. In commenting on the passive form of the Greek word for the star's behavior (ἑστάθη) Kittel quotes from A. Schlatter's [German] *Kommentar z. Matthäusev* (1929): "In distinction from ἔστη, ἑστάθη implies that the star is halted."

Again, you can look that up if you have Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. So Martin has done some homework here. He's not just making it up. But he's aligning the language quite coherently with the behavior of Jupiter. That brings us to the point where we've talked about the sign of Revelation 12, the signs that John gives us. If you're looking at the sky then, you have these other things going on, and I've narrowed our discussion to the Jupiter/Regulus conjunction in Leo. (Again, Martin has more if you want it.) That gives us a birth of Jesus on September 11, 3 B.C. However, that date was also the Day of Trumpets and it has a connection to Noah's Flood. So here we're going to drift into the Reversing Hermon sort of stuff.

The astronomical context of John's description of what he saw in the heavens in Revelation 12 puts the birth of Jesus on September 11, 3 B.C. Again, that part we know; we can see that. Just put it in an astronomy program and you're going to get that. The literary context of Revelation 12 is of relevance here. Immediately preceding Revelation 12, John described the heavenly appearance of the temple and the Ark of the Covenant (Revelation 11:19). The ark was the central symbol of God's presence with Israel. The birth of the child in Revelation 12 was John's way of saying that the presence of God had indeed returned to the earth in the form of this child, the Messiah. New Testament scholar Greg Beale notes the significance of this juxtaposition by John of Revelation 11 and 12 (the reference to the ark in the temple and the references given in Revelation 12:7—these signs. Beale writes this:

[A] trumpet was to be blown on Tishri 1, which in the rabbinic period came to be viewed as the beginning of the New Year. God's eschatological judgment of all people was expected to fall on this day. . . . The New Year trumpet also proclaimed hope in the ongoing and ultimate kingship of God, in God's judgment and reward according to people's deeds, and in Israel's final restoration.

1:05:00

That's Beale (page 620), and he actually alludes to the Babylonian Talmud: *Rosh Hashanah 16* for that information. Now incredibly, the astronomical reconstruction of the circumstances of Revelation 12:1-7 that produces a September, 3 B.C, date for the birth of the Messiah was also the beginning of the Jewish new year in 3 B.C. (*Rosh Ha-shanah, Tishri 1, the Day of the Trumpets, the Feast of Trumpets*). *Tishri 1* was also the day that many of the ancient kings and rulers of Judah reckoned as their inauguration day. This procedure was followed consistently in the time of Solomon, Jeremiah, and Ezra. If you want proof of that, you can look at Edwin Thiele's *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (page 28, 31, 161, 163). I would say this is a powerful piece of evidence for the astronomical reading of Revelation 12:1-7 as celestial signs of the birth of the messianic king.

Again, there are just too many coincidences here; too many things that are coinciding and aligning neatly. Jewish tradition also held that the Day of Trumpets was the day that commemorated the beginning of the world. This was Jewish tradition that this is the very first day of the human calendar. As Jewish historian Theodore Gaster writes:

Judaism regards New Year's Day not merely as an anniversary of creation — but more importantly — as a renewal of it. This is when the world is reborn.

That's from Gaster's *Festivals of the Jewish New Year*. Although it might sound odd, this tradition is part of a matrix of ideas that link *Tishri 1* (September 11, 3 B.C.—the birth of the Messiah in that year) to the sin of the Watchers, the Flood

of Noah, and the *nephilim*. You say, "How in the world?" Let's examine that for a few minutes.

The first step toward discerning these connections is to understand the Jewish calendar, at least insofar as it relates to our topic. The ancient Israelite, biblical, and Jewish calendrical circumstances are like our own in that multiple calendars are in play. We use more than one calendar. In modern Western civilization, it's common to have a calendar that maps the seasons, one that maps the school year, one that maps the fiscal year... All three calendars would cover 12 months, but their beginning points would differ. Today the Jewish New Year (*Rosh Ha-shanah*) occurs on the first and second days of *Tishri*. Anyone who is Jewish or has Jewish friends knows, however, that this New Year's Day and the New Year's Day we celebrate according to the modern Gregorian calendar are, of course, not the same. Jewish *Rosh Ha-Shanah* occurs in the fall season (somewhere in September or October). The first month of the year is *Tishri*, and that occurs in the fall. Fall was, of course, the season of the harvest (an important idea to which we will return in a moment). Exodus 12:1-2, though, suggests that the first month of the Israelite calendar in more ancient times was not *Tishri*. After the Israelites escaped Egypt, the first month was aligned with the Passover (Exodus 12:3) in order to commemorate the new beginning of the Israelite nation after the Exodus from Egypt. The calendar of Exodus 12 detached the first season of the calendar from the agricultural harvest (remember the new year began in the fall in the "original calendar"), and the calendar gets changed to align with the Passover. So the first month of the new calendar (the one that starts in Exodus 12) is *Nisan*. You have a reference to that in Esther 3:7. Of these two calendars, the agricultural calendar that had *Tishri* as the first month is the oldest (predating the Exodus). The biblical text contains hints of this older calendar in certain passages that describe the ending of the year (Exodus 23:16; 34:22). Whereas *Tishri* marked the fall season, the end of the year was marked by the Feast of Ingathering (fall harvest/ingathering, they're different things here). The important point for our purposes was that the most ancient Israelite calendar began with *Tishri*, which fell in the fall season with a harvest after the rains had produced the fall crop. As Gaster noted, this month was considered a memorial of creation. Why? The answer is simple: Genesis has Adam and Eve placed in a lush garden (Eden). Because of the availability of food for Adam and Eve, the creation must have begun in the harvest season. This is how the Jews reasoned this tradition. So the earliest Hebrew calendar began the year in the harvest season, hence the first month (*Tishri*) fell in the fall harvest. This logic produces the idea that the Israelite New Year signaled a renewal of creation.

Again, if this is in your head and you're thinking *Tishri* 1... If you go back to the September, 3 B.C. date, not only do you have the birth of the Messiah on *Tishri* 1 (which is the inauguration of kings), but that day also meant a renewal of creation. It was new life, in simplest terms. But it's more than that, even. In her fascinating scholarly essay (I'm also going to put this in the folder, so if you

subscribe to the newsletter you're going to get this article, too)... Dr. Ellen Robbins wrote an essay called "The Pleiades, the Flood, and the Jewish New Year." Robbins is a lecturer at Johns Hopkins University. She is not a hack. She's not "Billy-Bob" on the internet. This is not "Christian Middle Earth" stuff. This is Johns Hopkins University, and she's going to map this whole thing out in Jewish tradition. What we do here on the Naked Bible Podcast is we don't speculate and call it "teaching." I take you to actual academic sources. So here we go.

Robbins details how this ancient calendrical thinking factored into the interpretation of the Flood story, including its preamble about the sons of God and the *nephilim*. Let's start at Genesis 7 and we're working into how September 11 and *Tishri* 1 and the signs in the sky and the inauguration of the king and the renewal of creation—how all of that also maps over to the Jewish interpretation of the Flood, including the sons of God and the *nephilim*. That's where we're going here, because when we understand that, we're going to see how, in the Jewish mind, this date—this *event* on this date—which can be mapped astronomically with precision and it works all the way through... We're going to see how a Jew who understood these things would have looked at their Messiah as the one who would reverse the impact and the terrible effects, not just of Genesis 3 (the Fall), but of what happened before the Flood and the disaster that was part of bringing on the Flood (the sons of God event of Genesis 6 and the *nephilim*). It was all one content matrix for them. We are so ignorant of this kind of stuff that we just miss so much material—so much theology—that's lurking in the biblical text. It's just a crying shame! This is why Naked Bible Podcast exists. This is why we write what we write. This is the goal: to try to help you think about your Bible the way the ancient people thought about it, so that when the original writers wrote, you can read it to understand what they wanted you to understand, so you can think their thoughts after them and not somebody else's thoughts—not a Reformer, not the Catholic church (fill in the blank). We're concerned about what the writer wrote and what he intended you to know and to think. That's what we're doing here.

So let's go back to Genesis 7 and Robbins' article, linking this to the tradition and how the Jews understood the Flood.

⁶ Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth. **⁷ And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood.** **⁸ Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground,** **⁹ two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah.** **¹⁰ And after seven days the waters of the flood came upon the earth.** **¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of**

the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.
(underlining added)

According to this passage, Noah had already turned 600 (catch that!) when the flood began. It began in the 600th year of Noah's life in the second month. He had already turned 600 by the time of the second month. Just keep that in your head. As the flood waters were subsiding, just after the dove was released from the ark for the last time, Genesis 8 provides this chronological note:

¹³In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. **¹⁴In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out.** **¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ "Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you.** (underlining added)

The math here is pretty transparent. Barely over a year after the flood began Noah and his family left the ark in the second month of the year. Noah had turned 601 by the time he had left the ark.

Why is this noteworthy? Well, because Jewish tradition took this chronology to mean that Noah's birthday was Tishri 1—the first month. If you've been taught this as a Jew and you're tracking with all the rest of the stuff that we've been talking about in this episode, this would be the same day as the birth of the messiah, Jesus. So to many Jews, they would have believed that the Messiah (Jesus) and Noah shared a birthday. If we take Revelation 12 as indicating the celestial signs present at his birth, then the messiah born on Tishri 1 would inevitably have created mental and theological associations between Noah and Jesus.

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There are other details about the chronology of the Flood that, given the idea that Jesus and Noah shared a birthday, would have moved ancient Jewish readers to associate the Messiah with the prologue to the flood story, (Genesis 6:1-4). The second month of the year, the month when Noah and his family emerged from the ark after the flood had swept the earth clean of its wickedness and the awful *nephilim*, was marked astronomically by the heliacal appearance of the Pleiades. (Again, this is from Robbins' article) A star's heliacal rising "is a phenomenon where a star is first visible in the morning sky. On this day, a star will only appear briefly and be barely visible, since if you had looked a day earlier, it was too close to the Sun for visibility." (That comes from the archaeoastronomy page of the University of Maryland.)

The cluster of stars known as the Pleiades is important for all this. In the Hebrew Bible, the Hebrew term for Pleiades is *kima*. It is mentioned three times in the Old Testament (Amos 5:8; Job 9:9; 38:31). It is always paired with Orion (The Hebrew term is *kesil*), since its position in the sky is close to the Orion constellation. Not surprisingly, Orion was considered a giant in the ancient world. This last reference (Job 38:31) is significant in light of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In one Targum of Job (a Targum is an Aramaic translation) discovered at Qumran, Job 38:31 reads, "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades (*kima*) or loose the cords of Orion" But instead of *kesil*, the Aramaic has *naphila*. This last term (the Aramaic word for Orion) is the Aramaic noun from which *nephilim* derives. I've talked about that in the Unseen Realm. *Naphila* is giant—right there.

How does all of this contribute to the New Testament thinking and *Reversing Hermon*? Well, what I've been reading from here is chapter 4 in the new book (*Reversing Hermon*), and the previous chapter (chapter 3), which is the chapter where I sort of dump the stuff about the Mesopotamian *apkallu* far more than I do in *Unseen Realm*. The *apkallu* story from Mesopotamia is the context for Genesis 6:1-4. The *apkallu*, again, before the Flood they're fully divine, after the Flood they're divine and human mixed. They are the reference point for Genesis 6:1-4, so that if you interpret Genesis 6:1-4 in any other way (like this nonsense about the sons of Seth), then you're ignoring the original context for the material. It's just that simple. You either want to interpret the Bible in context or you don't. So make your choice.

So I go through all the stuff with the *apkallu* and then I hit this birth narrative stuff that we've been talking about. I'm going to try to summarize this with just a few points here. The Mesopotamian *apkallu* is the context for Genesis 6:1-4 because that context is preserved point for point in the Second Temple period, in Second Temple literature—specifically 1 Enoch and a few other things (like the Book of the Giants). In Mesopotamian astronomy, Orion was referred to as "the true shepherd of Anu." Anu was the chief god of the heavenly realm—the sky. That's what Anu means. The shepherd motif was associated in the Ancient Near East with kingship. Orion (the giant), therefore, was Anu's chosen king. But this *naphila* (this giant) wasn't the true shepherd king for the followers of Yahweh, the true God. So there's an immediate theological polemic going on here. The shepherd imagery is overtly messianic.

A quote from Andrew Hill here in his "History of Israel 3: United Monarchy" article in one of the IVP dictionaries. He writes:

... [T]he king took on numerous idealized roles as leader of his people, including the idea of "royal adoption" (i.e., the deity adopts the king as his "son" [2 Sam 7:14; cf. Ps 89:26–27]), shepherd of the people (2 Sam 5:2; 7:7). . . . David became the model of the "ideal king" [MH: the ideal shepherd] for Israel (cf. 2 Kings 18:3; 22:2) and the prototype of the Messiah as the ultimate "shepherd-king" (Jer

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33:15; Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24–25; cf. Rev 22:16).

Again, this is well-known messianic kingly imagery. The theological messaging of all of this is pretty startling. Messiah, whose birth on *Tishri* 1 was followed in the next month by the rising of Pleiades-Orion... That would have signaled the arrival of Yahweh's shepherd-king to combat or oppose Anu's shepherd-king (hearkening back to the original context of Genesis 6:1-4). If you were a literate Jew and you understood because you had read Second Temple material like *Enoch* and the *Book of the Giants* and some other stuff... If you had read that material and you knew the original context for Genesis 6:1-4 and you knew how that fit into the Flood, you knew how to read Genesis 6:1-4, and you knew how to read the Flood account, and the Flood account was associated with Noah (obviously), and Noah's birthday was *Tishri* 1, and now we have the ultimate shepherd-king born on the same date, what would you have thought? I'll tell you what you would have thought! You would have thought that this is the person who is going to reverse the effects... He's going to be the ultimate Noah. He's Noah on steroids. He is going to be the ultimate bringer of the judgment—not just in this case of a flood to wipe out the *nephilim* (because that didn't entirely take care of the problem). *This* shepherd-king, this new Noah *will* take care of the entire problem. It is a sweeping solution to the effects of the sin brought on by Genesis 6:1-4. Of course, in all the Second Temple tradition (and again, this aligns well with the Mesopotamian material), it was the Watchers who corrupt humanity. This is why (going back to the beginning of the episode) if you ask the average Christian why the world is so depraved, they would say it's because of Genesis 3—the Fall. If you asked that to a Jew, it's Genesis 3 (that's the first problem), and Genesis 6, because they believed the stuff that humans used to basically corrupt themselves—warfare, astrology, seductive arts (that they associated with cosmetics), all this stuff. Basically, the self-destructive things people do to each other... They were taught and encouraged and given the tools to corrupt the entire human race by the Watchers. That is the tradition in the Second Temple period.

So when you have someone come along to be the new Noah, the signage cannot be missed. This is the one who is the solution for all that crap. He's here. This is what you would have been thinking. So on *Tishri* 1 (the traditional birthday of Noah), the heavens telegraph in 3 B.C. the identity of the better Noah, the ultimate Noah—Jesus of Nazareth, born as he was from Noah's own bloodline! (That's Luke 3:36.) With the birth of Jesus, the permanent reversal of the ancient pact of the Watchers to corrupt humanity sealed on Mount Hermon had begun. And that is why the date matters. It matters because of the theological imagery, the theological telegraphing that went with it. But we miss all of that. We miss it because of what we do with Genesis 6. We throw that into the tank. We're ignorant of how the corruption of humanity would have been parsed in biblical terms. We isolate things in Genesis 3 and we don't factor in Genesis 6 or the

Babel event. And as I detail in Reversing Hermon, the Babel event is a huge deal when it comes to the Genesis 6 *nephilim* stuff. There are connections there.

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Again, this is a matrix of ideas that they would have had in their heads, and this is how they would parse all of this stuff. So when was the Messiah actually born? I think we're told that in Revelation 12. I think Paul knew this and understood it, and when he says in Romans 10:18, "Yeah, we still need to go preach. I'm the apostle to the Gentiles. We have to tell people what happened at the cross. But people should at least have known... *everyone* should know! They could have known and they should have known that the Messiah had come. The divine royal deliverer had come." You say, "How in the world Paul... are you on acid or something? Where are you getting that?" And he'd say, "I'll tell you where I'm getting it: from Psalm 19." It says, "their voice has gone out through all the earth." Whose voice? Read Psalm 19. It's the message of the stars. It's actually a coherent set of ideas that goes into this talk about Jesus' birth. If you do any reading, you're going to find out why it was aligned with December 25 and why the Church did this and that and the other thing. Hey, go read that. They had their reasons for doing that, pragmatic as they were. But if you really want to know and you really want to know how it fits and what it meant and the picture that it gives you, *this* is what you should be tracking on.

Before we wrap up, I want to say two final thoughts for the sake of having them on record. Critics of the September 11, 3 B.C., date focus only on the Herod problem, which has been resolved. Go get the sources and read them. The 1 B.C. date is entirely workable. The critics don't consider all this other stuff. There's just a truckload of it. All this other information that dovetails with Revelation 12 and the date it produces is coherent and meaningful to both a Jewish and a Gentile audience. The critics don't think about that stuff; they either avoid it or they're ignorant of it. No other date produced textually, traditionally, or astronomically, accounts for all of the data. Therefore, no other date can account for the imagery and the symbolism and the theology. If you want to attack the September 11, 3 B.C., date, then show me another date that accounts for all of it. That's your challenge. I would suggest to you that you're not going to find one.

Secondly, people who are friendly to all this information (they're not critics) need to realize again (I'm repeating this from earlier) that none of this was Old Testament prophecy. It derives from the last book of the Bible (the book of Revelation), and that book looks backward at the circumstances of the birth of Jesus. As such, the September 11, 3 B.C., date should not be construed as fulfilled prophecy, since the date and the assemblage of signs weren't prophesied anywhere. It can't be a fulfillment because it wasn't prophesied anywhere! That's significant for two reasons:

- a) There's no biblical suggestion that this set of signs (which is even wider than we've talked about here) was predicted by any New Testament passage as a harbinger of the return of Christ. There is nothing like that in

the New Testament. There is no verse that says we should be looking for a mimicking of this stuff to know when Jesus is going to come back. That whole idea is contrived. None of what we've covered here today, for example, is ever associated with a phrase like "the sign of the son of man." There's no verse that connects this stuff to that phrase and other phrases. To make such connections and predictions is eisegesis and is irresponsible.

b) That all this could fall into place and not be predicted in the Old Testament should tell us pretty clearly that God can do what he wants. This factors into my eschatology, that God is just going to do what he wants. His hands are not tied by the biblical text that he inspired. That is, God can do things in real time without a script. So to pretend that we know what's going to happen in the future, as though the New Testament was a script that God had to follow exclusively is foolish. Yes, God isn't going to violate his own word. But no, he isn't a slave to what's written. He won't go against it but he *can* go beyond it. It ought to be clear after this episode that what happened the first time around (all this stuff) is probably the way it's going to happen the next time around. So let's not play the fool by setting dates using astronomy or anything else.

TS: Mike, I was going to ask you... You kind of pooh-poohed it, but are there any other dates that are solid candidates as Jesus' real birthdate. I know there are several out there, and you said to go look them up, but can you briefly touch on that?

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MH: No, I'm not going to give dates. I won't even give them to my fiction because of what people will do with it. Now when we were in San Antonio with "Mantello" (let's just call him that), he floated two sets and he favors one and I agree with this part of it... I don't necessarily always agree with *why* he thinks what he thinks. There are parts of his argument that I don't buy, but one of those sets is the one I think is the best for a mimicking of the wider set of circumstances. But again, who cares? Let's say that's the right one. There isn't a single verse in the New Testament that says, "Oh by the way, when the Lord returns, the stuff that happened in the sky at his original birth is going to happen again." There's nothing that says that. What you get is you get very broad terms: "the sign of the son of man" or "signs in the heavens." You have to willfully marry those phrases to Revelation 12 because Revelation 12 doesn't look back and quote anything in the Gospels. The text of the Gospels (at least a couple of them) had already existed at this time. Even if you take the early date of Revelation, you've got a couple. If you take the late date, you're basically going to have your Gospels. So there was every opportunity to make those connections or make that statement—frankly, even in the Gospels themselves—but they don't do that. Now, is God *free* to do that? Well, sure! Again, God can do what he wants. He's not going to violate the script, the biblical text, the information that he's given in the New Testament, but he can go beyond it. His hands are not tied. Again, I think it's very

unwise and irresponsible to say, "Oh, well here's all this stuff that's going to happen. Hold on, I have to write a book now where I can predict the Second Coming so that I can make lots of money." That's basically what people do. I think it's irresponsible. I think it treads upon Jesus' own statement about the day and the hour and no man knows. People can say, "Well yeah, but you can know the year and maybe the month!" If you knew when the event was, I guess you could. But again, we're not told to make these connections and no New Testament writer ever specifically does. So I'm not going to sell speculation as exegesis as others do. I don't do that.

TS: And I know on the podcast it's hard to visualize some of these astronomy alignments, but seeing it as we got to... It's really neat to see how the stars and the planets line up and how it all fits together.

MH: Yeah, what I got most out of the meeting (and I've corresponded with "Mantello" for years) was sort of how he thinks while he's looking at something. In other words, just how he thinks out loud, shows his work (to use that metaphor), how he'll set something up on a screen and move it degree by degree and look at very specific things that he assigns importance to because of star-lore—because of the way a Jew or Gentile would have been thinking when they're looking at that particular thing. There's one specific element of his approach that I don't buy. It's actually not an astronomical item, it's something else. But that's what I got out of it—just being able to sort of inch your way through, degree by degree, and then look for very specific things, knowing that if I was a Jew that had this worldview, what would I be thinking? If I was a Gentile who had this worldview, what would I be thinking? That was very instructive.

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I actually have another book that's specifically on astral prophecy that's a lot wider than the birth stuff. It's about half done. I don't know when I will get back to that because I'm basically going to be out of commission from January through May, and it's either going to be that or the next novel. So it's kind of sort of there, 30-40 percent of it. But there's a lot to do here that is quite interesting. This approach (again, if you're thinking like a Magi, you're following along with the Magi)... there are other events in the New Testament, like the resurrection, like the ascension, like Pentecost, where the symbology... We get references to eclipses and other vague stars in the heavens going on with these other events, but to actually try to think their thoughts after them is kind of startling when you see some of the things that emerge from that approach. Does it mean anything? Well, it meant something in real time at those events. Does it mean anything for later? Who knows? Again, we're just not told to track on any one of these specific things. But we can look back and look at sort of a real-time situation using this approach we can determine how a Jew or a Gentile who understood this would have found it to be meaningful to them in the context of the Gospel and the context of the events of the cross, in the context of the whole story of Jesus that people like Paul were out there preaching. How would it have been useful to

communicate biblical theology to that audience? And there are some very clear ways where that would have mattered.

TS: I can't stress enough how great astronomers the Magi were. They even knew what was going on in the daylight. They knew what was up there when you couldn't even see it. They tracked it 24/7.

MH: If people want to know how they did that, it's called *math*. It's called being able to track things and making records of things and then doing math. They knew days and hours and minutes and they tracked celestial objects through the year. There are immense mathematical tables like in cuneiform tablets for astronomy. They knew quite a bit. They weren't just dependent on what they could see at any given point because they had mathematical tables so they could calculate where things were and when they'd show up again where they could see them. So they had a really good grasp of it all (certainly by first century), building on the older Mesopotamian stuff. People like the Magi by that time knew the world is round and all this... it's just more math. They can do this work, while we pat ourselves on the back and think it's modern knowledge. Well, yeah, I guess to some extent it is. It's more precise, maybe (by a few seconds or something). But it's not like they were just (to use the pun) in the dark about all this. They knew a lot of stuff that would surprise a lot of people.

TS: All right, Mike. Well, that's another good show. It think this is going to be one of our most popular ones. I want to remind people what you brought up. We're giving away three books, and the way we're doing that is if you post anything on social media on the podcast, just getting the word out there and encouraging people to listen to the Naked Bible Podcast... Post something on social media—Facebook, Twitter, whatever you use. I will find it and pick three random winners, and I'll send you a signed copy of Mike's upcoming book that's coming out in February/March. So that's how you can win the book. And also, Mike, transcripts are coming back!

MH: Yep. We're thankful to Brenda, who lives in Ohio, for stepping up to the plate. She does a really nice job with the transcripts. She's picking off the older ones that were missed. I'm trying to remember the numbers... anywhere from 117 through... I can't remember. If you get some of the more recent ones, you'll be able to see that transcripts will look a little bit different. They actually have a little more detail, so I think they're more usable. She told me that she wanted to create them the way she could conceive of people using them, like with time stamps and stuff like that. So I'm sure that's going to be helpful to some people, but we're grateful that she has the time and the talent to do it.
[Brenda: You're welcome! Glad to do what I can.]

TS: Absolutely. So we're almost caught up? She's working hard to get us caught up, so we certainly appreciate that.

Mike, next week we're going to do a Q&A, so be ready for that. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss for this episode?

MH: Just to remind people, if you want to get the three articles that I alluded to today, you've gotta subscribe to the newsletter. You would look for the articles by Edwards, Robbins, and Steinmann. The link you'll get in the newsletter is going to lead to a folder that has more than those three articles in it. But for this episode it's Steinmann, Robbins, and Edwards.

TS: Well, Mike, I just want to wish everybody a Merry Christmas! You and yours, as well.

MH: Thank you.

TS: Thank you, everybody, for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.