

Prophecy Lesson 4 – The Christmas Star Heads Up Sign - Part 1 (December 13, 2020)

This lesson will be longer because I want to share the background about why I came to believe with all my heart that the 2 BC Venus Jupiter conjunction was the Christmas Star. It took about 2 years to pull all the pieces together but what follows is a condensed version of how it came about.

After watching Rick Larson's **Bethlehem Star** DVD in 2011, I was thrilled to learn that a naturally occurring event like a Venus Jupiter conjunction might actually be the Christmas Star, but I was greatly disappointed in the resulting story Larson developed around this incredible appearance. The facts that the conjunction formed a single star; that it took place in the constellation Leo (the Lion of the tribe of Judah) and that it occurred in the early summer of 2 BC all fit with and support Scripture. A June date for Christ's birth was clearly a believable date because shepherds would not be tending sheep in the fields in December just as they don't today, and Caesar would never order an enrollment census to take place in the winter. The ancient world shut down for the most part in the winter just as it does today and, there was absolutely no way Joseph would take his pregnant wife on week-long+ journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem in the winter. These are common sense facts that shouldn't be hard to understand.

Unfortunately, Larson developed the story around the star by explaining that the wise men saw the 2 BC conjunction as the "star in the east" (Ma 2:2) from their home in the east. Then, after it appeared, they departed their home in the east (Babylon in his version) in time to coincidentally arrive in Bethlehem on December 25th (the traditional Christmas day). To complicate matters, the heavenly sign the wise men followed from Jerusalem to Bethlehem in the winter was not actually the 2 BC conjunction they had seen the previous June, but rather, it was Jupiter, who's retrograde motion created a supposedly observable loop that could be seen in the southern sky as the wise men made their journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to worship a six month old Christ child. Below is a brief summary of my major concerns with this scenario:

1. The star the wise men claimed to have seen in the east according to Matthew 2:2 (appearing in the eastern sky) could not have been the Christmas star because the 2 BC conjunction appeared as the evening star in the western sky, not the morning star in the eastern sky. Since the wise men were in the east when the star appeared, they would have reported that the star they had seen was in the "west", not the east, upon their arrival in Jerusalem. The sighting of the June 2 BC conjunction from their location in the east does not fit with Scripture (Matthew 2:2).
2. Larson gives no explanation about what motivated the wise men to depart Babylon in order to arrive in Jerusalem in mid to late December, six months after Christ's birth. While doing research on the timing of the wise men's visit to Bethlehem I learned there are scholars who believe the wise men may have visited Bethlehem as long as two years after Christ's birth, and still fulfill Scripture. This is not true. Luke's nativity chronology lays out a clear timeline that has Joseph, Mary and the baby departing Bethlehem about 40 days after Jesus' birth, never to come back. The biblical chronology is: If the star appeared to mark Christ's birth on June 17th, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day - June 25th (Luke 2:11). When the time of Mary's purification (40 days- Leviticus 12:1-4) was completed, the child was taken to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord (Luke 2:22) - on or shortly after July 27th. At the end of their time in Jerusalem, Matthew's account reveals that Joseph fled with Mary and the child to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-14) and Luke indicates they returned to Nazareth in Galilee (Luke 2:39). In either case, there is no reference in the Bible to indicate that Jesus ever returned to Bethlehem after the 40 days of

Mary's purification. In The Bethlehem Star presentation, Larson has the wise men arriving in Bethlehem six months after the birth, but Jesus was not there. He was in Egypt.

3. Jupiter's retrograde motion as "the Christmas star" is not supported by Scripture. Matthew 2:9 says, "After they heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was." The 2 BC conjunction and Jupiter's retrograde motion cannot be the same star. I've since learned the following about Jupiter's retrograde motion: It takes Jupiter 12 years to orbit the Sun. In doing so, the planet spends about one year in each of the twelve constellations along the ecliptic. Earth passes Jupiter in its orbit once each year and every time this happens, Jupiter appears, as viewed from the Earth, to stop in its orbit, reverse course and track backwards 10 degrees before resuming its orbital path (it's like passing in a car). These retrograde motion events take place annually over a six month period, so half the time Jupiter is observed from Earth, the planet is in retrograde motion. This motion is virtually impossible to observe unless it can be observed with respect to a star or other fixed object in the heavens. Therefore, Jupiter by itself was not special; it did not meet the requirements of Matthew 2:9 and it could not have been the Christmas Star.
4. Another problem with Jupiter's retrograde motion is that it can only be observed at night because the planet is not visible in daylight. For the wise men to be able to see Jupiter in the southern sky (in or out of retrograde motion) on a trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, they would have had to make the trip at night. Since there is no historical evidence that wise men or any royalty for that matter, ever travelled at night, if not in distress, the trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem had to take place in daylight. Therefore, whatever the star was that the wise men saw in the east, it had to be observed as the same star in daylight in order for Scripture to literally and accurately be fulfilled. The day star issue, which is critical to the nativity story, will be addressed in an upcoming lesson. Despite the problems discussed above about Jupiter being the Christmas star, Jupiter does play the second most important celestial role in the nativity story as will be discussed in detail in the next lesson.

Even though I had the concerns expressed above from the second part of The Bethlehem star presentation, it was clear to me that the 17 June 2 BC Venus Jupiter conjunction was an incredibly significant event, if for no other reason than the 2 BC date fits well within the 2-3 year window thought by most scholars to be the timeframe of Christ's birth. Thus began a concentrated effort to learn as much about Venus Jupiter conjunctions as possible. The first of my two primary resources for analysis was a summary of 9400 years of Significant Venus Jupiter Conjunctions graciously provided to me by Christian brother Allan Johnson (can be viewed on the Christmas Star website - link below)

<http://thatwebhostguy.com/ChristmasStar/TheChristmasStar/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/9400YearsSignificantVenusJupiterConjunctions.pdf>. For brevity I'll call it reference

A. Reference B was a survey of 200 years of Venus Jupiter conjunctions for the period 1900-2100 I developed using my Starry Night Pro software:

<http://thatwebhostguy.com/ChristmasStar/TheChristmasStar/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/StatisticalAnalysisOf200YearsOfVenus.pdf>. It was from reference B that I estimated the percentages of notable (49%), significant (51%), major (.005%) and extraordinary (0%) conjunctions by category as shared in lesson 1, and from which it was determined that Venus Jupiter conjunctions occur on average about once per year. More on this as the discussion continues.

In order to avoid going into too much detail, I'll summarize the critical facts that contributed to my primary conclusion – that the 2 BC conjunction was indeed, the Christmas Star.

1. Extraordinary conjunctions are those where the center to center angular separation between the two planets is less than .5 minutes of arc or .01 degrees. All extraordinary conjunctions appear to the naked eye as a single star (even in today's atmosphere and sky conditions).
2. Reference A confirms that only four extraordinary Venus Jupiter conjunctions (out of more than 6,000 to date from the Creation) have ever occurred - in 3438 BC, 1128 BC, 2 BC and 732 AD. The 732 AD conjunction appeared more than 700 years after Jesus' birth and the 1128 BC conjunction more than a thousand years before his birth. Incredibly, especially if it wasn't God's plan, only the 2 BC conjunction clearly fits within the timeframe of Christ's birth.
3. The most significant distinction between these four extraordinary conjunctions was their elongation or separation distance from the sun when the conjunction occurred. The 2 BC conjunction was 45 degrees from the sun whereas the other three were 21, 20 and 15 degrees respectively. This means that the 2 BC conjunction was visible for a full 3 hours after sunset (in 3 or 4 time zones) as a single star whereas the other three conjunctions were only visible for a little over an hour before sunrise or after sunset.
4. In spite of these incredible statistics, they mean nothing if the conjunction could not be observed in the part of the world where it was intended to be seen. The 2 BC, conjunction could be seen for the entire evening until it settled below the western horizon across the four time zones between the Middle East (Israel), Africa and western Europe – which essentially covered the entire Roman Empire at the time of its appearance. And, for history's sake, it was recorded in the Bible. Was this just a coincidence or was it God's plan?

Many believe the Christmas Star was a miraculous one time appearance, never to be repeated. Based on the above, I agree except that Venus Jupiter conjunctions have been repeated many times. Despite the facts that Venus and Jupiter are the most commonly observed and well known planets in our solar system and that conjunctions between the two are a common occurrence, nothing, including every other Venus Jupiter conjunction, has ever appeared with exactly the right parameters in exactly the right location at exactly the right time in history as did the Christmas Star to mark the birth of Jesus. God truly can take the ordinary and turn it into something extraordinary. It became clear from my research that there was no other naturally occurring alternative to the 17 June 2 BC Venus Jupiter Christmas Star conjunction worthy of consideration. The fact that the Christ Star appeared as the Christmas Star only one time in history in extraordinarily close conjunction with Jupiter was certainly not a problem for God. He set the two planets into orbital motion on Day 4 of the Creation week knowing exactly when and where they would come together for His purposes. And, they did just that. While the above data convinced me that the 17 June 2 BC Venus Jupiter conjunction was, without question, the Christmas Star, its appearance did not answer the other critical questions Larson failed to answer like, "What then was the star the wise men saw in the east and was it a Venus Jupiter conjunction?" and, "How could the wise men follow the star from Jerusalem to Bethlehem in daylight to fulfill Scripture?"

Once I became convinced that the 2 BC conjunction was the Christmas Star, it became clear that: **The wise men had to be in Jerusalem on the day of Jesus' birth in order for Scripture to be fulfilled.** When I committed to this premise, the entire nativity story came together.

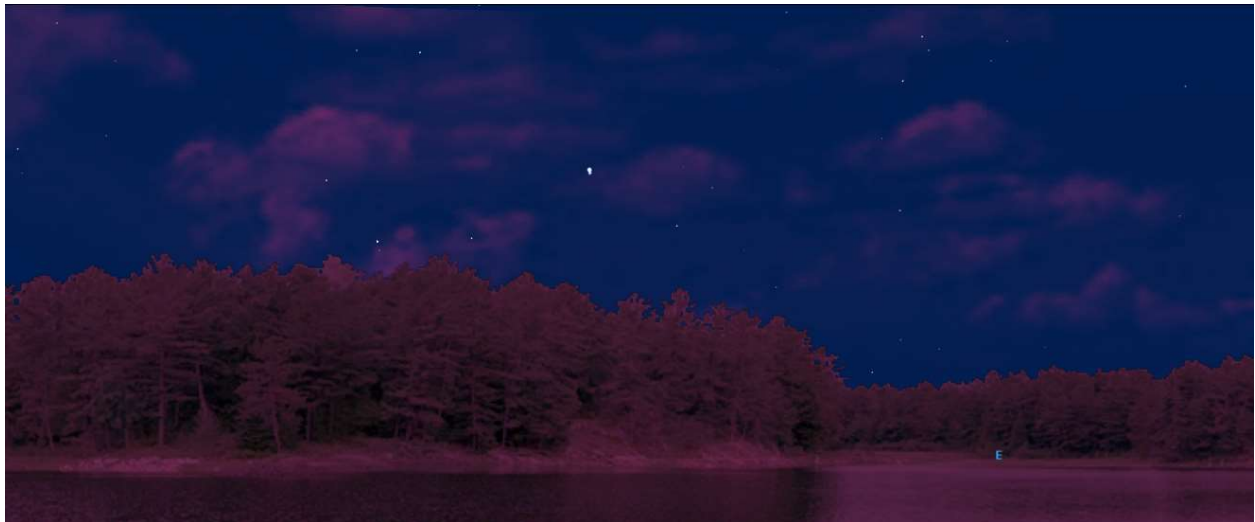
The Heads Up Sign

In 2013, I came across an online document written by Dr. Robert C. Newman, Emeritus Professor of New Testament and Christian Evidence, Biblical Seminary PA. In the article, he suggested that a separate Venus Jupiter conjunction (12 Aug 3 BC), appearing ten months before the Christmas Star conjunction, may have been the star the wise men saw in the east. The article also postulates that a triple

conjunction between Jupiter and Regulus, the King star in the constellation Leo, may have contributed to the wise men's decision to depart their home in the east and head out for Israel in time to be in Jerusalem on the day of Jesus' birth. Dr. Newman's paper finally provided the clues to the Christmas Star mystery I earnestly sought.

I analyzed the 12 August 3 BC Venus Jupiter conjunction on my Starry Night Pro and discovered that it was, indeed, a major conjunction (less than one tenth of a degree separation between planets) and it would have appeared to the naked eye as a single star. Incredibly, it appeared as a morning star conjunction (star in the east- fits with Scripture) and was visible as a single star over Israel. I had not developed reference B or categorized conjunctions before this, but this conjunction motivated that analysis in order to learn as much about major conjunctions as possible. In reviewing the data in reference A, I discovered that only about 25 major Venus Jupiter conjunctions have occurred in the past 6,000 years, hence only about .004% of all Venus Jupiter conjunctions are classified as Major conjunctions. The last major conjunction to appear over the Middle East and Israel before 3 BC was in July 134 BC. That morning star was only 18 degrees from the sun and it was still converging (about 0.2 degrees separation) when it could have been observed in Israel. The last major conjunction before that was in 395 BC. These rare appearances confirm that no one alive at the time of the 3 BC conjunction had ever observed a major Venus Jupiter conjunction that appeared as a single star to the naked eye.

The image below shows the 12 August 3 BC conjunction when it appeared over Jerusalem as the "star the wise men saw in the east".



Venus –Jupiter conjunction 08-12-03 BC 05:30 AM 0.08 degree separation, Elongation - 19.3 degrees
Jerusalem, Israel 50x20 FOV Brightness magnitude -3.92
The star the wise men saw in the East 10 months before Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:2)

The next computer image shows the timing of the appearances of the 3 BC Heads up and the Christmas Star 2 BC conjunctions in Leo as observed by astronomers and the wise men. The arrow points to the place on Leo's left forearm where the 12 August 3 BC conjunction occurred. The space between the two conjunctions represents the distance Jupiter traveled (including its retrograde motion) during the time Venus made a complete orbit around the Sun during the ten months between August 3 BC and June

2BC. The star on Leo's left forearm, halfway between the two conjunctions is Regulus.

The Christmas Star conjunction, June 17, 2 BC in the constellation Leo



Location of 12 Aug 3 BC Venus Jupiter heads up conj.

The Christmas Star: Venus-Jupiter conjunction over Jerusalem, 17 June 2 BC, Constellation – Leo, 0.007 degrees separation between planets, 45 degrees elongation from the Sun, visible for more than 3 hours in 3+ time zones

The Scriptural case for the 12 August 3 BC Venus Jupiter conjunction being the “star the wise men saw in the east’ and the 17 June 2 BC Venus Jupiter conjunction being the Christmas Star will be made in the next lesson.