

Book One
THE KING HIDDEN
Chapter Six
THE MAGI

Stephen H. Funck, January 6, 2016

THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM

The two magi hurried away from the palace. They were eager to put as much distance as possible between them and King Herod.

"I hope that fool boy hasn't wondered off with the camels," the fat one said.

"I'll beat him if he has. I should beat him anyway," the tall one replied.

The boy had been keeping close watch on the gate and saw them through the gate before they got to it. He roused the camels and started toward them. He was hoping they brought him something to eat. He was very hungry and thirsty.

"Fool boy. I told you to watch by the gate, disobedient cur," as he struck him. "We have to hurry. We have a long way to go."

The boy knew there wouldn't be anything to eat. They were in a worse mood than usual. They said they were told to take the road south to Bethlehem. It was almost two hours. The road turned to go past a large pool and his donkey bolted for it. It was very thirsty too. He couldn't hold it back from the water. They started to hit him again but realized it was not his fault. The boy drank along with the donkey. The beasts had eaten some grass so they weren't starved. Two hours to go, the boy knew it would be dark long before that.

After a long time they caught up to a group. Strange, they were almost all women. There was a junction there. The two started to follow them, but the boy thought to ask which was the road to Bethlehem. It was the other one. The women were going to a place called Herodium. He expected it was either very close or they could find it in the dark. Fortunately there was some moon so they could see the road. The two were arguing as usual. The boy learned why they were in such a foul mood. The king was evil and they were supposed to find the child and report back to the king. Now they had more to argue about.

The boy was looking ahead to see if he could find a village. A star caught his eye. There were lots of stars. He had learned them from the Magi. He didn't remember a star in that position. The next time he looked it wasn't there. Had it moved? It was now a little south east. He tried to watch the star and his feet at the same time. He was sure it was moving. He waited and watched until he was positive.

"Masters."

"Be silent fool."

"Masters."

"Silence."

They were arguing about how to find where they were to go. They didn't see the village and were going past it.

"Masters, there is a star moving."

“Silence! Can’t you see we are trying to find our way.”

“Masters, there is a new star in the square and it is moving.”

“Silence! There is no star in the square.”

“Look masters, there in the square. Watch it. It is moving.”

“Look, see the boy is right. There in the square.”¹

“Masters, I have been watching it. It is moving south and a little east.”

“Stars don’t go that way. They go from the east to the west.”

“Not this one. Watch.”

The star was moving toward the village. They found the road. As they were getting closer to the hill the village was on, the star kept going further east to the far edge of town. They went off the road to follow the star. It looked like it was getting lower and lower. They felt it was trying to lead them. “That is no ordinary star. All the stars are messengers of god. That looks like it has been sent for us.”

“I hope it leads us to the baby. Going around the village and asking did not sound like anything I want to do.”

“It is going past the edge of the village. There wouldn’t be any houses there.”

As they scrambled up the slope in the dark, they lost sight of the star. When they got over the top, there it was. It looked like it was sitting on top of a little shack. “Is this the place where the gods say the new king of this great nation has been born?”

“Impossible. There has to be some mistake.” They walked around the shack. The star stayed over it from every direction. “Stars don’t do that.” They were feeling frightened instead of honored. This was getting too close to unknown great power.

THE HOUSE

A man came to the door. “What do you want? We hear you out here. It is dark.” He asked in Aramaic which they did not understand.

“Kind sir. We do not mean to harm you.” The tall one answered in his best Greek.

“Foreigners! What are you doing here?” His Greek was no better, maybe they understood each other better because both were trying to talk Greek out of a Semitic background.

“We are from Babylon. We saw a star in the east that told us a new king was born in this nation. The star led us here to this house.”

“You saw a star in Babylon and you followed it to this house?”

“No, we went to Jerusalem and they told us to come to Bethlehem. The star appeared again as we were approaching. It is right over the top of this house.” They looked up but it was gone.

“Oh, we came to the wrong house,” the fat one said.

“The star is gone,” the tall answered.

They began to argue with each other in Babylonian. The man went inside. The boy followed him. He saw there was a woman and a small baby. He knelt down and put his forehead on the ground. When he looked up they were smiling at him, even the baby was smiling. He thought the lady was very pretty. She looked kind. The man said, “Welcome. The Lord has led you to this house. Welcome in the Name of the Most High.”

The boy understood the Greek better than his masters did. He answered. “The Most High be praised forever.” He realized the men were still arguing outside and went to get them.

“Masters. Masters. This is the right house. The baby is here inside.”

¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pegasus_\(constellation\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pegasus_(constellation))

“It is a shack. This is no place for a king to be born.”

“Masters. The star led us to this house. It sat right over the house. The baby is inside. Come see.”

The man again said, “The Lord has led you to this house. Welcome in the Name of the Most High.”

The men saw the boy put his forehead on the ground and thought they should too. The man and woman did not seem disturbed or shocked. They thought maybe this was the right house. They asked hesitantly, “Is this baby born to be the king?”

The man and woman smiled as to say he was. The man said, “The ways of the Lord are not like the ways of men. You are not the first He has chosen to reveal this to.” As they talked, it was strange but they seemed to understand each other better and better. Far better than what their language should allow. It was as if there was a spirit of understanding between them. The two relaxed. They felt welcome, comfortable. It had been such a hard day. There was peace in this place. They introduced themselves. The couple said their names were Mary and Joseph, the child Yeshua. Joseph asked the boy his name. The boy said, “Amahl.”

“The boy’s name is Amahl,” the pair said to each other.

The man asked them to tell how they came to come. They were amazed to hear about the conjunctions. They also did not seem to think that the stars controlled events on earth. God does, and the stars are messengers of His greatness and glory. Pray to God for His guidance, study and obey His torah, statutes, commandments and ordinances. The words of the prophets and stories of the histories reveal His will. The Magi thought everyone sought the will of the gods in omens and signs.

Mary prepared food for them. She noticed Amahl was ravenous as he ate. She asked and learned he had not eaten since the morning. She kept encouraging him to eat as much as he wanted. She was very kind. The masters usually gave him as little as possible to eat. It was already after bedtime. They were to leave for Nazareth in the morning. Mary and Joseph both realized without talking to each other that God had sent these Magi to them. They could not just send them off in the morning. They would be staying a little longer.

Joseph said how wonderful it was that God sent them, but it was late and they needed to sleep. They would talk more in the morning. Joseph and Mary prayed the Shema as usual. They covered their eyes with their right hands and said.²

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart. You shall teach them thoroughly to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for a reminder between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

And it will be, if you will diligently obey My commandments which I enjoin upon you this day, to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, I will give rain for your land at the proper time, the early rain and the late rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine and your oil. And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be sated. Take care lest your heart be lured away, and you turn astray and worship alien gods and bow down to them. For then the Lord’s wrath will flare up against you, and He will close the heavens so that there will be no rain and the earth will not yield its produce, and you will swiftly perish from the good land which the Lord gives you. Therefore, place these words of Mine upon your heart and upon your soul, and bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for a

² The Shema is normally said mornings and evenings in Jewish homes. It is much more common than “Now I lay me down to sleep” has ever been in Protestant homes. http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/706162/jewish/Translation.htm <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shema>

reminder between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, to speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. And you shall inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates - so that your days and the days of your children may be prolonged on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them for as long as the heavens are above the earth.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to attach a thread of blue on the fringe of each corner. They shall be to you as tassels, and you shall look upon them and remember all the commandments of the Lord and fulfill them, and you will not follow after your heart and after your eyes by which you go astray - so that you may remember and fulfill all My commandments and be holy to your God. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God; I, the Lord, am your God. Amen."

Amahl asked if they could say it in Greek so he could learn what it said. It took twice as long. The Magi were amazed. They had never heard any prayer like it. No one prayed those things.

THE NEXT DAY

The Magi slept on the floor in the little house. There was barely enough room for them all to lay down. Amahl slept with the beasts. They were tied below the edge of the hill with the donkey Joseph had purchased for the trip to Nazareth. The Magi did not stir when the baby woke in the middle of the night. In the morning after Joseph and Mary prayed the Shema again, the men sat outside and talked while Mary prepared breakfast. She was singing to the baby. Amahl helped her. She had bread and other items prepared for the trip to Nazareth. She used that to serve the visitors. She needed to replace that and prepare something appropriate for the next meal. Amahl asked if he could make the fire and grind grain. She smiled and nodded. It had been years since he had seen his mother. It felt so good to be near the lady and watch the baby. He asked what she was singing.

"Amahl, they are songs God gave us to sing."

"Lady. What are they about?"

"Many things, some praise God for His majesty and everlasting kindness, some ask His help. Amahl, some lament our sorrows, some ask His forgiveness for our sins."

"Lady. I know about good and bad. Sins are doing bad things?"

"It is more than that. God is holy. His will is for us to be holy, perfect, righteous. We all fall short. It is not just bad things. Amahl, we are not able to be perfect. We always need His forgiveness."

"We have holy things that belong to the gods. Our priests say the gods will hurt us if we take them. What is righteous?" The lady called him by his name. It had been so long since he had heard his name. She said it so soft and kind.

"What do you think it might mean, Amahl?"

"Never doing anything wrong?"

"Could it mean more than just not doing wrong?"

"I don't? Lady, what could be more?"

"What if it meant always doing everything perfect?"

"Lady. That would be a lot harder than just not doing wrong."

"What does it mean Amahl, to say 'The Lord God is righteous'?"

"He always does everything perfect?"

"Would the true God do any less, Amahl?" He shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

Mary told Amahl to wait while she went with the baby to the well for water. Amahl wanted to go for her but she insisted he stay. She did not want people in the town to notice anything. He thought that was very strange and noticed Joseph and his masters were on the side of the house away from the village.

When Mary returned, she continued to talk with Amahl. She was preparing more to eat. He was very interested in seeing and holding the baby. He was delighted when the baby looked at him and smiled. Holding a baby makes all the troubles in the world go away. He could not remember ever feeling so good, so safe, so cared for. Mary looked at him and smiled. She sang, he asked her to translate. "Happy is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by streams of water, that bringeth forth its fruit in its season, and whose leaf doth not wither; and in whatsoever he doeth he shall prosper. Not so the wicked; but they are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD regardeth the way of the righteous; but the way of the wicked shall perish."³

"Trees planted by water live well."

"God would like you to be blessed, Amahl, safe, at peace. Shalom, but it means so much more than not fighting. It is the peace of those who love each other. God wants shalom for you and with you. That you would love Him as He loves you. Do you know God loves you?"

"If he loves me, why has my life seen so much evil? If He is a good wise God, why is there so much suffering? The rich, the powerful, the evil rule and grow more evil and greater. The best, the most precious are destroyed."

"Yes, I know all too well what you mean. My dear friend, a wonderful woman died slowly, leaving her precious children. Life is full of evil. Do we have any hope except God?"

"So there is no hope."

"Oh, do not give up. Those who die in the Lord will be raised and praise Him in the heavenly courts. Seek Him now in the land of the living."

"Go to the place of the dead, be a shadow forever, nothing in emptiness."

"Amahl. We will not be shades in Sheol,⁴ 'I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.'⁵ That is in one of His songs." My friend died trusting in the Lord, for herself and her children."

"So everyone ends up blessed forever?"

"Do you think that would be fair?"

"I would hate to see that."

"Remember, "Wicked people are like husks that the wind blows away. That is why wicked people will not be able to stand in the judgment and sinners will not be able to stand where righteous people gather."

"So the good are blessed and the evil punished."

"Do you think it is easy to separate them?"

"Lady. I know who I don't want to see blessed and who ought to be."

"Yes, we are like that. How can we see as God sees, judge as He judges? Do you understand the mind of God?"

"The gods I have heard of are worse than men."

³ Psalm 1 JPS

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheol>

⁵ Psalm 23:6 JPS

"So what do you do about them?"

"Treat them, I guess like I treat those two."

"What do you mean?"

"I do what I have to. I can't run away I'd just end up made someone else's slave."

"You think it would be worse?"

"When I am bigger I can get away."

"How do they treat the gods of Babylon?"

"Sometimes they take me to the temples when they meet with other astrologers or look for clients. They make up stories of the future for them from the stars. They might pray for the gods to send them clients or say thanks and toss in a share of the earnings on a good day."

"And what about you?"

"I've prayed. Nothing, It just gets worse. I watch the people and priests. They want, so they ask the priests. The priests sound so helpful. They earn their money. The gods listen to the priests. We need them to speak for us. For a price, the more the money, the better the prayers, the better the gods treat you. Nothing for the poor. If the gods make you nothing, no one should interfere. If I get rich, the gods will listen and bless me."

"Does that sound right to you, Amahl?"

"Lady, who am I? I am nothing, I know nothing. That is all I will be. I will take care of myself."

"Amahl. The Lord is Almighty, all knowing, all wise. He rules and judges the whole world."

"Babylon has her gods. The Parthians or Romans have their own gods. Your god rules the whole world?"

"God made a covenant with our father Abraham and his descendants forever. He had gone to Egypt because of a famine and we became many. The Egyptians made us slaves. God saved us from the land of slavery. He is our God and we are His people. Someday the whole world will worship Him."

"Lady. Why would other people worship your god?"

"The whole world, everyone, is unrighteous, sinful, slaves to evil. The promised one will put to an end all that, and bring God's righteousness to all. He will save all people from all oppression, even from death. More glorious than when He saved us from Egypt."

"How will he do that?"

"I do not know, Amahl. This baby has something to do with it."

"We saw His star in the east. He led us to you by a star. The gods are doing something here."

"The night the baby was born shepherds saw angels singing in the sky and were told to come here. He led others to us as well."

If your god is almighty and all wise, why would he pick those two to see the star in Babylon? Why would he pick someone unimportant to be his? This is his newborn king?"

"You are right, Amahl. Who am I that the Lord of all should notice me? God chose slaves of Egypt to be His people. God chose the youngest son to be King. He chooses the unimportant and lifts them up to show that it is the Lord God who rules. He makes some great and cuts them down. He has no regard for the strength of a man or of an army."

"He has no regard for Amahl."

"Amahl. Do you think people earn His favor by being powerful?"

Mary was mashing chickpeas and mixing them with olive oil and garlic to serve with the bread, while she was boiling some dried mutton with onions and greens.

Amahl had been baking the bread as they talked.

"No god cares about me."

“The Great God has compassion on all He has made. He has special regard for the widow and orphan, the lame and blind, even the prisoner and the foreigner.”

“Your god would care about me?”

“Of course. He created you, Amahl. He wants you to know Him as your Father in Heaven. To rescue you from all evil. He is what we call ‘Chesed’⁶ like eternal love - merciful, only it means much more than that.”

“He would rescue me from those two?”

“Seek Him, pray to Him, tell Him your complaints, He wants you to love Him and worship Him forever. Maybe that is why He sent His savior as this baby, to prove His love for you, for all who are cast down.”

Amahl said, “That is the last of the bread to bake, so everything is ready to eat.”

Meanwhile the Magi asked Joseph about the Shema. “Why would people pray like that?”

Joseph explained. “The words we pray are from God, His instruction for us. They remind us who we are, His people and who He is, our God, our savior. He tells us what He expects of us.”

“Bagoas talked about your god when he was showing us around the Temple. He is not like any other god we know,” the tall one said.

The other added, “He is very demanding. All of those sacrifices and a tithe of all you have. Unheard of.”

“Our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.”⁷

“Bagoas said your god would make this the greatest nation in the world, richer, more powerful than Rome.”

“The prophet said, “The time cometh, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and shall see My glory.”⁸

“Your god frightens me. I don’t think I would be comfortable with him.”

““The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; but the foolish despise wisdom and discipline.”⁹ Any god who cannot harm you can not help you! He desires all people to come to Him, serve Him, praise Him as their redeemer.”

“Your god demands everything.”

The Lord God almighty, created everything in heaven and earth. He is the ruler of all nations, the righteous judge of everyone. He feeds the cattle on a thousand hills, the ravens of the air, even the great fish of the sea. There is only one God. He is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him; and showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Him and keep His commandments.”

“Bagoas said those same words.”

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesed>

⁷ Psalm 115:3-8 JPS

⁸ Isaiah 66:18 JPS

⁹ Proverbs 1:7 JPS

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.¹⁰”

“Your god is jealous? He binds you to him alone.”

“Every husband is jealous. They want the loyalty of the one they marry. It is part of real love. The Lord God calls Himself, husband of His people. He is married to us. We are His bride. ‘Love the Lord your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul’. It is the demand of a husband.”

Joseph and the Magi were sitting on the east side of the cottage, where they could not be seen from Bethlehem. They asked Joseph what he did and how he came to know so much about the history and teachings of His nation and god. Joseph explained he was just a common laborer. He worked in wood. While he was here at Bethlehem, he had been working on the king’s tomb at the Herodium, near by.

“Oh we saw a large group of women going there last evening. We started to follow them but they showed us the road here.”

“Herod invites the powerful. There is a large palace at the foot of the fortress with an enormous swimming pool. I’ve been told there is another palace at the top inside the fortress. You can see it from here. See that flat topped hill? I’ve been told the women hardly clothed do shameful things in the pool and theater. Many of the great ones, even priests of the Temple, go there to sin.”

They did not let Joseph know they had been entertained by some of those women. They were beginning to understand that some of these people had a strange idea about what men were to do. They nodded their heads as if to say they agreed with Joseph.

“As I said, I am a laborer. I am good at what I do. I know the Lord God has commandments and statutes that are not like those of other peoples. At times some of our people have disobeyed God and followed after other gods. That is how so many of us got to be in Babylon. God kept sending prophets to warn them to repent, when they did not, He destroyed the nation, His own city and Temple and sent them into exile. In Babylon they repented. They studied His Word. They prayed and worshipped as best they could. Finally He brought them back here as He promised He would. He gave Babylon to Cyrus, his cup bearer was Nehemiah, one of our great prophets. We were changed. It has not all been good since. There have always been enough of us to keep alive, to pass on, to keep the covenant.”

“But how do you know all this? This is what the priest do.”

“It was the priests, the rulers who led us astray. The people know we can not depend on them. God’s prophets had the harshest words for those who misled God’s people. In Babylon there was no temple. All the people could do was gather in groups and listen to God’s Words, pray, sing. Where we came back, we continued. So all over the nation, in all the towns and villages on the sabbath we gather and listen to the holy words. The leaders explain what they mean and what we are to do. It is what the boys learn. My James has learned almost all of God’s words. He could be a scholar someday. Mary’s father would be considered a scholar, but he doesn’t go around teaching. He had her study with the teacher. She is his only child. I suspect she knows more than any of us. When work is over, the men gather and talk about God’s message.”

“We get together with other astrologers and talk about astrology. I don’t know anyone who would think about studying the stories of the gods. That would be for the priests. You say that all over this nation everyone is talking about your god?”

“I wish that was so. The high and mighty, the king, and I am afraid many of the priests, many people do not seem to care. Our priests are descendants of Aaron, Moses’ brother. Many of them seem to think that is enough. They make a living off the Temple. At home, we invite scholars to teach us for a gift. We are small so we

¹⁰ Psalm 119:105 JPS

can not get the great scholars, just their disciples. All the scholars want to be famous, founding, leading new “correct” paths. It leads to argument, rivalry.”

“When we were in the Temple we saw many groups of teachers and students. Some had loud arguments.”

“I used to listen and followed the ones I thought right. The House of Hillel¹¹, the school of Shemmei, The Temple Priesthood, the separated ones¹². I’ve given that up. Men pretending they are great, that they alone know the mind of God.”

“So you have given up of your God and religion?”

“No, not at all. The Lord has given us His commandments, statutes. He has sent us Prophets. His word is a light unto our path and sweeter than honey. God commands us to meditate day and night on all His instructions. It is men who want to be great that are the problem, just like kings.”

“So you are a rebel?”

“No, not at all. God gives us leaders, we need them. One of His commandments is that we obey those He has set over us. He will judge them according to their evil, as He will judge us. He makes us as we are and places us where He wants us. We are to do our best to serve Him. It is in trying to be what He has not made us to be, to force our way into being great that brings evil. Those who think they know perfectly the mind, the will of God are the greatest fools. We need to be very careful. The truth of God is in the middle of all the arguments, simple common truth.”

“So you are the wise man.”

“I just try to live in peace. God is a god of Peace, Shalom.”

Question This is the question in my mind that I attempted to answer as I was writing.

The Magi are pagans and would know little or nothing about Jewish beliefs. What would they talk about with Mary and Joseph?

The Gospels record the events of Jesus life. They do not include the background information everyone knew at the time they were written. The following includes that background faithful to what is known about the history and culture. I hope this provokes-in a good way-the reader to think deeply about the Scriptural account. Go to my web site for more. <http://thesignofconcord.com> . They are in the section titled “King of Kings”. There is also a section titled “King of Kings Supplements” with additional information.

If you do not think this reflects the culture and historic situation, how would you tell the story?

Many thanks to my patient wife Lynne for repeatedly proofreading.

Scriptures are from Jewish Publication Society of America 1917 Version. The New Testament quotes are ESV.

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hillel_and_Shammai

¹² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharisees>