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My husband and best friend, Rick, has been thinking about the Christmas Star since 1969 when he began working at Griffith Park Observatory in Los Angeles. After several years of ushering and later lecturing the standard holiday planetarium show “What Was The Christmas Star?”, he has been looking for an explanation that answers all the attributes of the Star gleaned from reading Matthew chapter 2. Forty-five years later, he has settled on this explanation. I pray that you will appreciate even more the awesomeness of God as you read...

### **The First Noel Was A Christmas to Remember!**

*[20] Daniel said,*

*“Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever,*

*For wisdom and power belong to Him.*

*[21] “It is He who changes the times and the epochs;*

*He removes kings and establishes kings;*

*He gives wisdom to wise men*

*And knowledge to men of understanding.*

Daniel 2:20-21 (NASB)

The birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, was so well planned that the Magi knew what to look for since they told Herod that they saw “His star in the east...” (Matthew 2:2). How did they know that what

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they saw was *His star*? And why did Herod ask them "...the exact time the star appeared."? He apparently did not see the star himself. But God knew the exact time of His birth as Galatians 4:4-5 tells us

*[4] But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, [5] so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Galatians 4:4-5 (NASB)*

The Magi, wise men, were given a special early celestial invitation, in 537 B.C. written in the sky, and planned before the "foundation of the world..." as this passage from 1 Peter states:

*[20] For He [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you [21] who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:20-21 (NASB)*

The word "time" in verse 4 and "times" in verse 20 means to **perceive time quantitatively as a period measured by the succession of objects and events and denotes the passing of moments.**

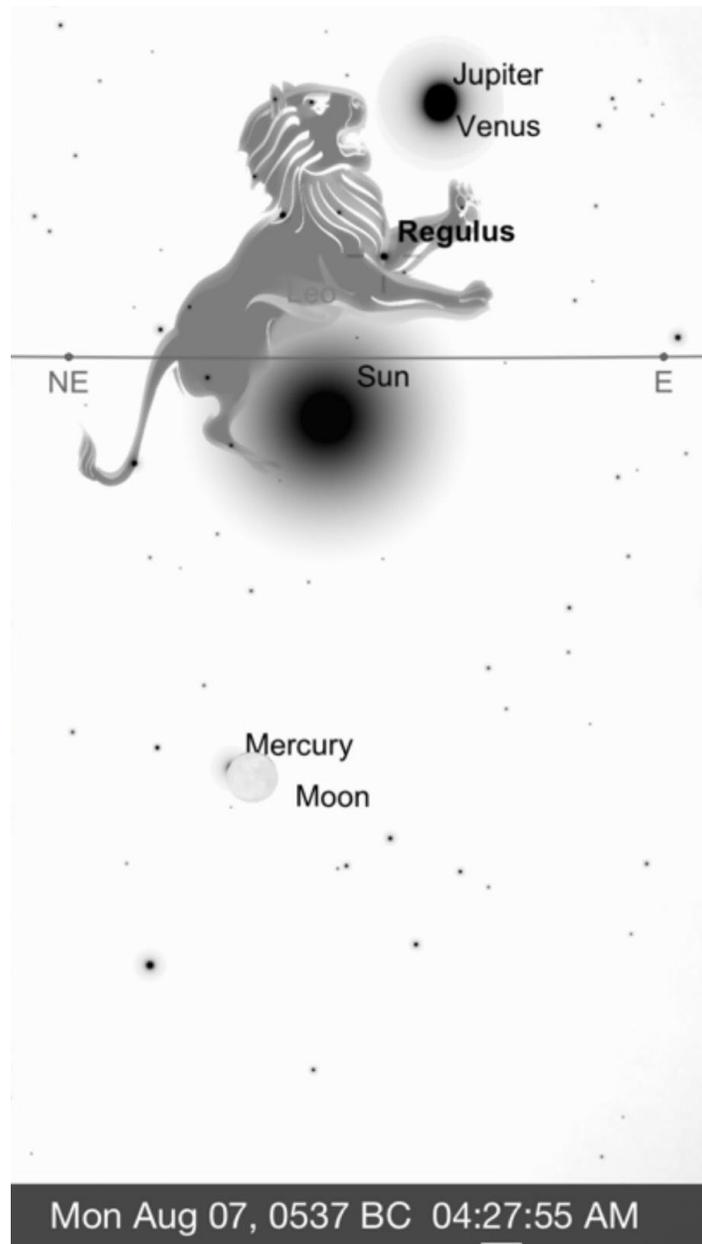
Using astronomy software we can actually see what the Magi saw, what God planned before the foundation of the world. In fact when God created the heavens and the earth He placed the planets in their orbits exactly where they needed to be to make the grandest Birthday announcement in all history, providing reasonable explanations for all the attributes of the Star recorded in Matthew chapter 2.

### **The Announcement That Told The Magi What to Expect**

The Magi were astrologers defined as "... someone who predicts the future by the positions of the planets and sun and Moon". Perhaps they descended from those who lived in Babylon around 500BC when Daniel was given this message by the angel Gabriel:

*[25] "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. (Daniel 9:25 (NASB)*

And the decree was likely given by Cyrus, King Of Persia in 537BC. By using astronomical software, we discover that on August 7 of 537BC, Jupiter and Venus were very close together in the constellation of Leo, rising in the east about 45 minutes before sunrise as shown here. Their combined light made this very bright in the sky.

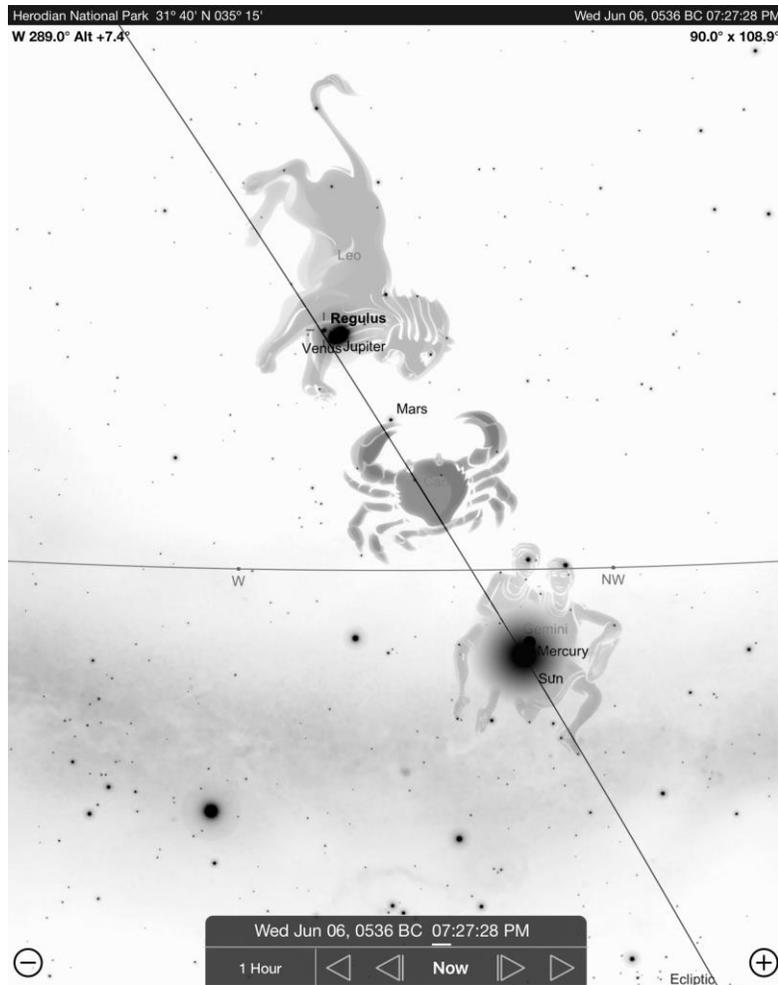


Then Jupiter stops its forward motion on November 4 of 537BC, right next to the star Regulus but stops shy of passing Regulus, then backs up until March 4 of 536BC, and finally resumes its forward motion passing Regulus on June 14 of 536BC. Notice that Jupiter passes Regulus only once. A second conjunction

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of Jupiter and Venus occurs on June 6 of 536BC. Click on the 537-536BC video at the bottom of this post to see the sky in motion centered on Regulus during this time.

The second conjunction was visible in the western sky between 6:30 - 9:30PM as shown here.

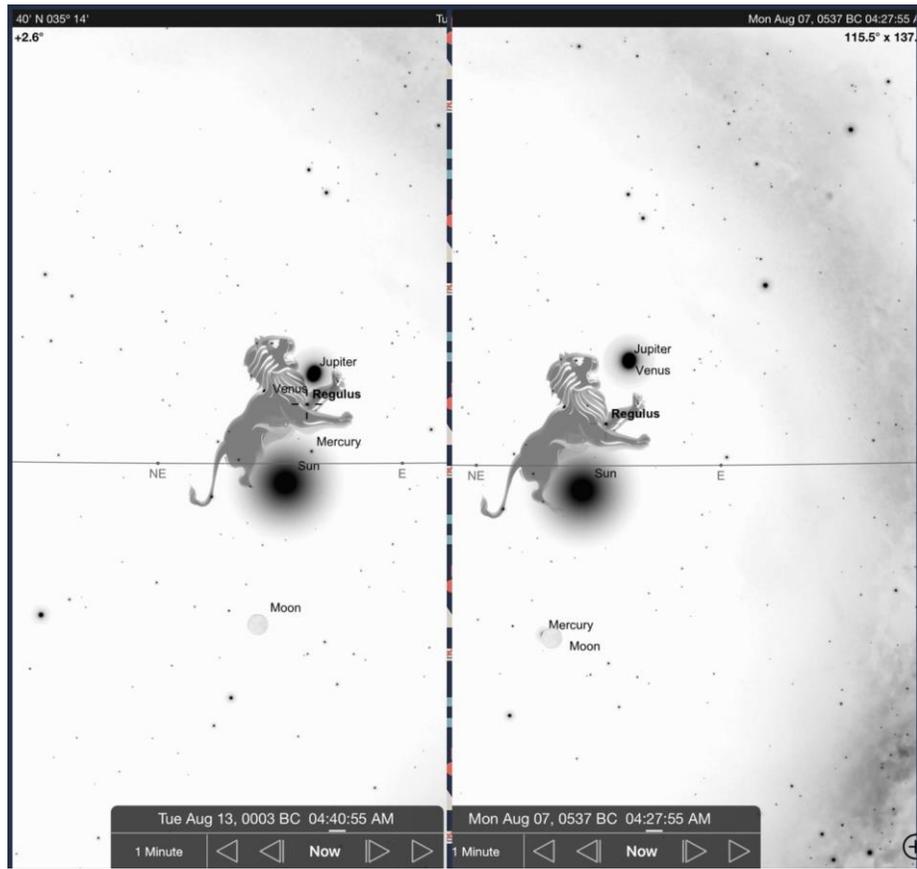


This sequence of events repeats again 534 years later; the Magi's descendants now know what to look for in the sky when the Messiah is born.

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## The Star of Bethlehem in 3-2BC

On August 13 of 3BC a conjunction of Jupiter and Venus rose about one hour before the Sun. Notice how



similar this “morning star” is to the 'August 7, 537BC one.

And again Jupiter backs up in the sky but this time passes Regulus three times, as the 3BC-2BC video at the end of this post shows. Click on it to view the sky in Leo at this time, also centered on Regulus like the first video.

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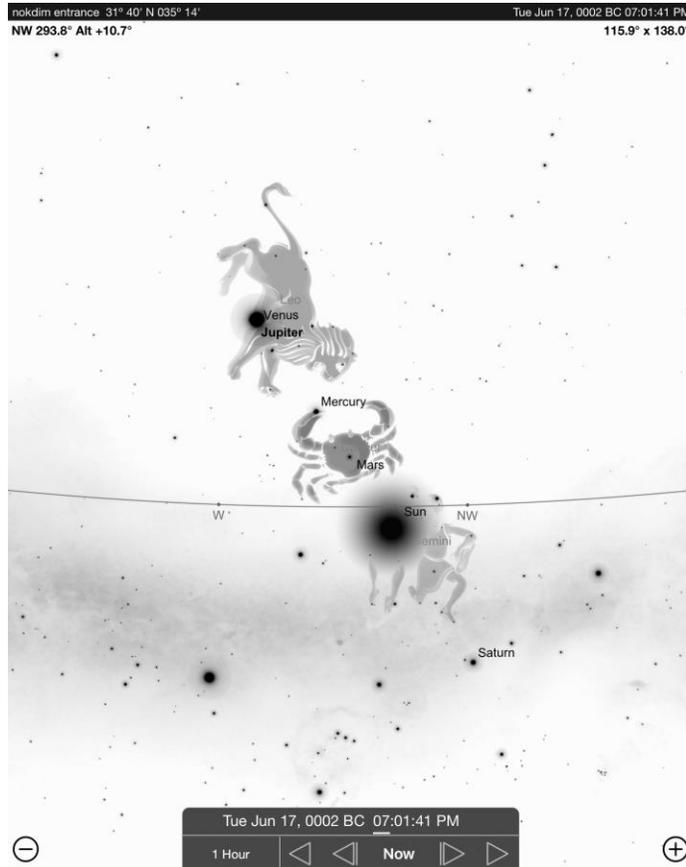
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Notice this quote from from *Babylonian Star-Lore, An Illustrated Guide to the Star-lore and constellations of Ancient Babylon*, 2008, by Gavin White, p. 139:

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“If Jupiter retrogrades in the vicinity of the King Star [Regulus] and thus passes it twice, it is as if the stars are sending a very specific message to the king – “*someone will rise up, kill the king and seize the thrown*”. This prognostication is clearly derived from the planet’s behavior, which by approaching the King Star twice over indicates the usurpation of one king by another”.

And again there is a second Jupiter/Venus conjunction on June 17 of 2BC visible after sunset, setting at about 9:30PM. Notice the bearing (direction) in the upper left corner of 293.8 degrees +/- 5 degrees. This is the Star that lead the Magi to Bethlehem.



Reading the account of the Star in Matthew 2:1-11, every attribute of the Star can be explained:

[2:1] *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying,*

- It was seen while Herod was alive, and his death has been taken from the writings of Josephus as 4BC for some years. However, we will extend this date to 1BC for the following reason:

“Herod's death is mentioned in the works of Flavius Josephus, who wrote some 100 years after the event. Josephus stated that Herod died soon after a lunar eclipse, and he wrote in great detail about Herod's funeral. The only lunar eclipse that is consistent with all these details happened on Jan. 10, 1 B.C. According to Josephus, a lunar eclipse in 4 B.C. was the one that

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preceded Herod's death, and this is why most scholars have assumed that Herod died in 4 B.C. However, copies of Josephus' writings prior to 1552 list 1 B.C. as the year of Herod's death. It is possible that some scribe, toiling by candlelight late at night in 1552, copied the date incorrectly". From <http://sciastro.net/portia/articles/thestar.htm>

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- The Greek term "magi" here describes a class of wise men and priests who were astrologers. Astrologers are defined as "... someone who predicts the future by the positions of the planets and sun and Moon". Most likely Persian, descendants from Babylonian Astrologers of Daniels time. "from the east" is consistent with the direction of Persia from Jerusalem.

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

- They knew it was His star because of the prophecy in Daniel 9, having a record of both Jupiter/Venus conjunctions, the first one "rising in the east" 534 years before. In fact they knew where to go - Jerusalem - to inquire about the missing piece of the puzzle: where He will be born. There was no need for the first Star to lead them to Jerusalem since they already knew where to go to find that missing piece of information. Matthew makes it clear that it was the second Star that led them to Bethlehem. There is no mention of the first Star leading them anywhere.
- Notice that everything takes place in the constellation of Leo; the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah, also a lion.

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- “...saw His star in the east” means “in its rising” consistent with the first conjunction of Jupiter/Venus in August of 3BC.

[2:3] *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

- The news of a new King was a surprise to Herod and all Jerusalem because they did not know of the Babylonian prophecy that when Jupiter passes Regulus several times this means a change in kingship. Herod was Edomite, not Jew or Babylonian.

[2:4-6] *Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. [5] They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:*

*[6] ‘AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,  
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;  
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER  
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.’”*

- This apparently was the big missing piece for the Magi since they had to ask where He would be born.

[2:7] *Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared.*

- Herod probably did not meet with the Magi at Herod’s palace in Jerusalem since that would not be private. Herod probably met with them in a place more private than

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Jerusalem but still close to Bethlehem, perhaps at his hill-top palace built in 23-20BC



located about 3 miles as the crow flies (closer to 5 miles by the winding road) east of Bethlehem, called the Herodium.

- Again we see that Herod did not see the star for himself, he had to ask the Magi when it was visible.

[2:8-9] *And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him.”*  
[9] *After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.*

The distance of 5 miles to Bethlehem by road from the Herodium and travel by camel at a speed of between 3 – 5 miles-per-hour are reasonable to arrive in Bethlehem if the started shortly after sunset (6:30PM) and arrived by 9:30PM.

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- **Notice they saw the same Star again but this time it lead them to Bethlehem.** Recall that both Stars were Jupiter and Venus so close together that they appeared as one bright star; they were both the same thing, one in the morning sky, disappearing as the sun rose, and the later one visible from sunset to about 9:30PM in the evening sky leading them northwestward on a bearing of roughly 297 degrees (a bearing of 270 degrees being due west and due north being 360 degrees measured clockwise from due north) where it set over Bethlehem as they approached Bethlehem from the Herodium (from the southeast).
  - Also notice that the Star “stopped above the place where the child was”. The traditional location is the Church Of Nativity located on Star Street, which happens to be the oldest street in Bethlehem. The word “stopped” can mean to stop, such as to no longer be seen. When the Star, Jupiter/Venus, set below the horizon in the northwest (bearing of 298 -288 degrees it would no longer be seen).

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- In the Google Earth photo below, Star Street is yellow. If the Magi were at the green dot at 9:39PM on June 17, 2BC, they would have seen Jupiter/Venus set over the Church of Nativity



along the 297 degree bearing (dashed red line).

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- Also notice that if they left for Bethlehem from Jerusalem following the 297 degree bearing, they would not end up anywhere near Bethlehem.
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[2:10] *When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.*

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- The Magi rejoiced because the answer to their question of “where will He be born?” – Bethlehem – is right where the second conjunction led them that evening and where it disappeared over the horizon. In other words, the star’s leading coincided with Bethlehem, the newly acquired piece to their puzzle. This is only possible if they were traveling from the Herodium toward Bethlehem and not possible if they were traveling from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.
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[2:11] *After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

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- Assuming the first planetary conjunction coincided with the beginning of Mary’s pregnancy and also assuming she delivered at 40 weeks, then when the Magi arrived in Bethlehem at 44 weeks and 1day after conception, Jesus would have been about 4 weeks old, leaving a 12 day window before Mary and Joseph left Bethlehem for her purification at the Jerusalem Temple. Similarly, the shepherds must have visited Jesus before they left. Also, the June time frame makes sense since Shepard’s watch their flock closely when the lambs are born in the spring. So Jesus was not a toddler as some believe but was most likely less than 40 days old when the Magi arrived

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because Joseph and Mary left Bethlehem and went to the Temple in Jerusalem for Mary's purification and sacrifice required to be done in the temple no earlier than 40 days after His birth (Lev 12:2-4). Luke 2:39 States that from the temple they went to Nazareth without any reference of returning to Bethlehem for the Magi's visit. If this is so, He must have received the Magi's gifts before going to the temple. Joseph's modest sacrifice is not a problem because he was truly poor; the gifts belonged to Jesus, not to Joseph.

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[12] *And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.*

[16] *Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi.*

If the meeting between Herod and the Magi occurred on June 17 of 2BC, they would have replied to Herod's question in Matthew 2:7 that they saw "His star" about 10 months earlier on August 13 of 3BC. So, Herod would choose an age of young boys to slaughter that would be more than the length of ten months to be sure. One year is cutting it close, so perhaps he chose two years old to be sure.

## **Conclusion**

Computer programs do not consider miracles; they place the position of stars based upon their current location and correct for their proper motion which they show when comparing photos taken decades apart. But proper motion over a few thousand years is too small to make a noticeable difference in constellations. In other words, Leo looks the same now as it did to the Magi. But the Sun, Moon and planets move in the sky much more than the stars. As the earth orbits the Sun, we see the Sun move through all 12 of the Zodiacal constellations during a year, one of those constellations being Leo. Since all the planets orbit around the Sun in almost the same plane, they also move from constellation to constellation within the group of 12 Zodiacal constellations as seen from earth. Therefore, this plausible scenario can only take place if the 3 planets involved (Earth, Jupiter and Venus) were initially placed in

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their orbits around the Sun so that they would be at the correct places and times in the sky relative to the Sun and also the Star Regulus in Leo for this sequence of celestial events to exist! Looking back before 537BC in the software reveals many other Jupiter/Venus conjunctions and many times when Jupiter reverses direction, but **no other instances where it backs up to pass Regulus and also passes closely to Venus twice!** The same is true when examining time after 2BC. In other words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” with exact precision and uniqueness to serve as a “countdown timer” to the birth of Jesus Christ. This gives us additional insight into this passage from Psalms

*[19:1] The heavens are telling of the glory of God;*

*And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.*

*[2] Day to day pours forth speech,*

*And night to night reveals*

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