

A Pastor's Perspective: "The Great Christ Comet"

We view Christmas as a season of great mystery, beauty, and promise. Even in a post-Christian world, images of angel choirs, bands of shepherds, and wandering wise men have an iconic place in our songs, cards, and lawn decorations. One of the classic symbols of Christmas, the Star of David, received scholarly treatment in *The Great Christ Comet: Revealing the True Star of Bethlehem* (2015) by Colin R. Nicholl. Pastor Lee Compson, board member of Let's Know the Bible Conference, reviewed Nicholl's book for the CCBS website. The following excerpts come from his interview.

When asked what inspired him to read the book, Lee recounts a conversation with his wife, driving home after a visit with extended family. A radio spot had provoked his thinking on "myths of Christmas that even good, believing Christians have bought into." His wife began taking notes. One of the big questions they asked was "What was the star of David?" A year later, someone referred Nicholl's book to him.

Compson describes The Great Christ Comet as a highly technical work (sometimes too technical), blending biblical scholarship, history, and various fields of science (e.g. physics, astronomy). The author works through various explanations of the star, ruling out a planet, meteor shower, supernova, Halley's Comet, or supernatural event; he describes the Star as a divinely appointed comet.

"What the Great Christ Comet did in 7-6 BC was extraordinary and merits wide telling," Compson reads. "People of all disciplines, astronomers, theologians, historians, artists, must come to grips with its story. In a narrow way, science is often viewed as an enemy to religion; the Christ Comet suggests science may be the best friend of religion. Could there be a clearer example of God's mastery over the cosmos than the celestial events that marked the birth of Christ?"

When asked about the most insightful part of the book, Compson replies, "For me it is the evidence... scientifically and biblically... that God was orchestrating all of history to announce Christ's birth. But even the lengths He went to tell the entire world what was going on through the comet. Not just one little town or shepherds, but the whole world."

Compson views the book as a helpful companion to the pastor who shares the Christmas story year after year. "Even if ... science, physics, and astronomy don't appeal to you at all, as a pastor this will help you study and tell the story of the birth of Christ in a better... more tangible way for your audience. You can describe ... with very much confidence, with a lot of biblical evidence... who [the wise men] were and what they did to journey to visit Christ to celebrate the birth of this mysterious king they weren't sure about."

In our post-Christian world, the journey of the wise men appropriately captures the spirit of the age. All about us, people wander, uncertain but searching, chasing stars and mysteries. At least the Christmas story gives us a star worth chasing and a mystery work revealing. "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin shall be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' – which means, 'God with us.'" (Matt. 1:22-23, NIV)

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