

**Views of the Theologians: Celestial Objects: Joseph A. Seiss: History of Astronomy Goes Back to Adam, Seth, & Enoch; Exceptional Life Span Provided Time for the Lord to Communicate Doctrine and Use the Stars as Visual Aids; Mention of “His Star” by the Magi in Matt 2:2 Provides Entrée to Study Biblical Astronomy**

**Joseph A. Seiss** (1823–1904) wrote over a dozen books; his most popular titles are: *The Apocalypse*, *The Gospel in Leviticus*, and *The Gospel in the Stars*. Though a respected scholar in the Lutheran church, Seiss met much opposition for his millennial views. Seiss writes, “There is a widespread prejudice against the study of the Apocalypse.” He added, “there are religious guides, sworn to teach ‘the whole counsel of God,’ who make a merit of not understanding [Revelation], and of not wishing to occupy themselves with it.”

The key to Revelation, according to Seiss, is that the Apocalypse does not mean a communicated message, “but the coming, appearing, manifestation, uncovering, presentation, of Jesus Christ in person.” He adds it is “His own personal manifestation and unveiling in the scenes and administrations of the great Day of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

Seiss’s *The Gospel in the Stars* is an exhaustive examination of the Mazzaroth, i.e., the Carousel, and how its images prophetically outlined the appeal trial of Satan with emphasis on the life and times of Jesus the Messiah.

The ways by which the ancient astronomers were informed of the arrival of the predicted Jewish King, Lord, and Deliverer were by means of their studied understanding of the starry array that broadcast to them the details of the divine mystery made clear by the teachings of Adam, Seth, and Enoch and passed down over the millennia and preserved in the archives of the astronomers who were known in Parthia as Magi.

Seiss credits Adam, Seth, and Enoch with the origin of astronomy. These men’s extended life spans enabled them to not only observe the repetition of the starry testimony but also to record, teach, and preserve its message:

**Kissaeus, an Arabian writer, gives it as among the teachings of his people that Abraham had in his possession certain sacred writings of Adam, Seth, and Enoch, in which were “laws and promises, threatening from God, and predictions of many events”: and it is affirmed of Abraham that he taught astronomy to the Egyptian priests at Heliopolis \hē-lē-ā'-pa-lis\.** (p. 394)

**From Adam sprang Seth, who, according to Josephus and more ancient records, followed his father in the pursuit of wisdom, as did also his own descendents. It is said in so many words that “they were the inventors of that peculiar sort of wisdom which is concerned with the heavenly bodies and their condition and indications.** (pp. 394–95)

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<sup>1</sup> Mal Couch, “Seiss, Joseph A.,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 394.



Enoch is also specially credited with special wisdom and writing, particularly as related to astronomy and prophecy. [Samuel] Bochart \baw-shar\ writes: "I cannot but add what is found concerning the same Enoch in Eusebius. He says that Abraham, when he taught astrology [astronomy] and other sciences at Heliopolis, affirmed that the Babylonians attributed the invention of the same to Enoch. The Jews call him the Great Scribe, and say that he wrote books on astronomy. That he did record certain prophecies is attested by the Epistle of Jude, which gives a quotation from him [vv. 14–15]. Origin also tells us that it was asserted in the book of Enoch that in the time of that patriarch the constellations were already named and divided. (pp. 395–96)

It was the remark of Gale on these and such-like traditions and fragments: "We need no way doubt but that Noah had been fully instructed by Church-tradition from his godly predecessors, Methuselah, Enoch, and Seth, touching the creation of the world by God, and particularly touching the excellent fabric of the heavens, the nature of those celestial bodies, their harmonious motion and order. (p. 396)

This science, springing partly from the first origin of men, has been devolved through the ages unto posterity. The most true supputation<sup>2</sup> of times proves that Methuselah lived and might converse with Adam, as Noah with Methuselah. Therefore, Noah saw and heard things before the Flood. Moreover, before Noah died Abraham was fifty years old. Neither may we conceive that this most pious man and his holy seed would conceal things of so great moment and so worthy to be known and remembered. (pp. 397–98)

According to the Scriptures, Adam lived about seven hundred years contemporaneously with his son Seth, and about three hundred years contemporaneously with Enoch, and died only about one hundred years before Noah was born. All these were holy prophets. (p. 398)

Adam from the first was in perfect fellowship with the Divine Intelligence, and knew all things that came before him by an intuitive divine insight into their whole nature and intention. (p. 399)

It is also a matter of inspired record that God gave to Adam special revelations. After his fall Jehovah made known to him His purposes concerning the Serpent and its seed and the woman and her Seed. The whole Gospel revelation and promise was therein included, and was given to him, not for himself alone, but to be made known to all his posterity as the great and only hope of man. (p. 400)

What Adam knew, Seth would thus also know, and so would Enoch. And living contemporaneously together for more than two, three, or five ordinary lifetimes, there was the sublimest opportunity for them to observe, construct, and mature just such a system as astronomy presents, inwoven as it is with all the great facts, features, and hopes embraced in the promised redemption by the Seed of the woman.

The Bible tells us especially of Enoch's preeminent intimacy and life-communion with God, and recites certain of his predictions which run on the precise theme we have been reading from the constellations.<sup>3</sup> (p. 401)

It is from this base of belief that Seiss constructed his dissertation on the gospel in the stars. Once a premise is established then the writer may go forward with his analysis. Without the testimony of Scripture there would be no basis from which to proceed. With biblical facts as a foundation, research into isagogics adds details that broaden ones understanding of the subject.

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<sup>2</sup> "Supputate, to compute. Supputation, a reckoning; account; computation" (*Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language*, 2d ed., s.v.: "supputate; supputations.")

<sup>3</sup> Joseph A. Seiss, *The Gospel in the Stars: Primeval Astronomy* (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1884), 394–401.



In our study, we have drawn heavily on isagogical testimony that history provides during the time of the Lord's birth. We took a great deal of time developing a portfolio on the Magi introduced to us by Matthew in the second chapter of his Gospel. We established that they were Jewish and Gentile astronomers from Parthia and members of the upper house of the Parthian Senate and possessors of great power and influence over the Empire's government and society.

In the context of Matthew 2:1–12 we learned the reason for their visit to Jerusalem and their presence at Herod's palace—to learn the location of the recently born "King of the Jews," information that came to them by the observance of "His star" which rose "in the east." This testimony provided us a divinely approved entrée into the study of biblical astronomy.

Dr. Seiss seized upon this same invitation and, among the writers we have consulted, is the most widely respected and best qualified. However, he, too, makes the assumption that the heavenly body that tipped off the Magi was a "new star," i.e., a nova.

