

Would you continue to search for a child that could change you and your world—forever?

Lana Christian's engaging debut takes you on a journey of discovery with the Magi. Through intrigue, danger, and the quest for truth, Akilah and his fellow Wise Men risk everything to prove a star and a Savior are real. With the blending of biblical narrative and true historical events, Christian crafts a compelling story.

— Barbara M. Britton, Author of the *Tribes of Israel* series and *Daughters of Zelophehad* series

As a reader who's generally cynical about any Christian fiction, I was pleasantly surprised that I loved reading this book. Lana Christian writes with clarity about a pivotal point in historical events. Her ability to show how Magi culture motivated the book's characters helps create believable characters whom you care about. Ms. Christian takes you beyond what you think you know to what you need to know about the Magi's story. As a pastor who has been immersed in Christian ministry for 45 years and is passionate about remaining true to biblical truths, I can assure you that I have learned a great deal from her book while enjoying a good story.

— Woody Roland, Missionary to South America for 30 years, recently retired pastor

Accolades to Lana Christian for the hours of research she undertook to write *New Star*. The book is an intelligent look at who the Wise Men may have been yet was creative and entertaining at the same time. I enjoyed every word of it, from the Magi society in Persia to the suspense of their enemies within, to the lovely, vivid descriptions of a land and people lost to us. One chapter was so beautiful that I cried (and I don't like crying when I read books).

— Ora Smith, Author of heritage fiction,
including *The Pulse of His Soul* and *White Oak River*

With vivid detail and meticulous research, Lana Christian's *New Star* transports readers to the ancient Persian world, where three Magi discover a new star. As they tread a fine line between science and religion, they must report their findings to the Lower Council, which controls their research—and their resources. Akilah, head of the Wise Men's quest, realizes their study hinges on one sighting, a few sentences from the Hebrews' Books of Moses, and his skills of persuasion. In the past, those would have been enough. So why is the Council now blocking them at each step? Despite the risks and perils, Akilah is driven to pursue his goal and learn everything he can about the new star and what it portends. Readers will be swept along by Ms. Christian's portrayal of ancient astronomers, political intrigues, and the dangers faced along the journey that follows.

— Dana McNeely, Christy and Carol Award
double-finalist, Author of *Whispers in the Wind*
series

Much of what we “know” about the Magi rests more on tradition than fact. Let yourself be drawn into Lana Christian’s telling of the Magi and the powerful society they represented. Ms. Christian brings to life a well-crafted and researched biblical fiction novel rich within the culture and history of Persia and the Parthian Empire at the time of the birth of Jesus. Experience its sights, smells, and intrigue. Prepare to be drawn in as a fellow traveler in the Magi’s quest for truth, with all its implications for then and now.

For some characters, their passion for discovering the mystery contained in ancient Hebrew scrolls will drive them to risk everything, while others will protect Persia’s religion at all costs. May this book stir your imagination and soul as it did mine.

— Karl Bunch, Bible study leader, Biblical Studies and Ancient History enthusiast

BOOK ONE OF THE MAGI'S ENCOUNTERS

NEW STAR

LANA CHRISTIAN



Scrivenings
PRESS

Quench your thirst for story.

www.ScriveningsPress.com

Copyright © 2024 by Lana Christian

Published by Scrivenings Press LLC

15 Lucky Lane

Morrilton, Arkansas 72110

<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, or recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-397-3

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-398-0

Editors: Suzie Waltner and Linda Fulkerson

Cover by Linda Fulkerson, www.bookmarketinggraphics.com

Original artwork (map and ornamental break images) by Bree Cook, Illustrator and Graphic Designer

All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either factual or historical, is purely coincidental.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the NASB® (New American Standard Bible®), copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

NO AI TRAINING: Without in any way limiting the author's [and publisher's] exclusive rights under copyright, any use of this publication to "train" generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to generate text is expressly prohibited. The author reserves all rights to license uses of this work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models.

*To everyone at Shadow Mountain Community Church
who made its 2017 live Nativity possible*

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given ...
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.*

*Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end ...
to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from
this time forth and forevermore.*

Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV)

*You know the Wise Men's part in the Christmas story.
But do you know the Wise Men's story?*

Note from the Author

Writing biblical fiction is a privilege as well as a responsibility. First and foremost, the story must remain true to the biblical account. Where those details end, extensive research draws upon historical records to help create a plausible, compelling story.

Incomplete accounts, calendar differences, and other variables divide scholars on the dates of some events. This book reflects realistic time frames based on best available evidence for key dates.

New Star respectfully depicts cultures, governments, religions, inventions, people, and events that, in many cases, have all but been lost to history. I pray those moments of discovery will deepen your immersive experience with this book.

With gratitude and thanks for your patronage,
Lana

Introduction

As the world pivots on a point that forever divides time as B.C. or A.D., the Roman and Parthian empires dominate as world superpowers. Rome's centralized rule is iron-fisted, while Parthia's decentralized rule grants more local freedoms. Rome worships a pantheon of gods but is intolerant of any religion that refuses to embrace Roman gods. Parthia maintains an official religion but tolerates the practice of many. Religion and politics fuel conquests for both empires.

For the past fifty years, Rome and Parthia have warred against each other. Herod the Great alternates his support of Rome and Parthia in a complex political dance. On the southeastern border of Herod's kingdom lies the next-largest neighboring empire, that of the mysterious Nabateans. It does not ally itself to anyone—although it occasionally fights for or against a country or people group if doing so suits their purposes.

Second only to royalty in influence and standing, Magi society flourishes in Persia, the heart of the Parthian Empire. Magi society's priest-scholar division, the Lower Council, produces great thinkers and inventors. The Lower Council also

Introduction

upholds the religious fabric of the empire. Magi society's elite governmental division, the Upper Council, wields great executive influence, including selecting Parthia's king.

Near the end of Herod's reign, a few Magi from the Lower Council note a star like no other. They risk their reputations, careers, and even their lives, to follow their convictions. Life will never be the same for them—or for the world.

Roman and Parthian Empires

at the time of Christ



Parthian Empire



Boundaries of key countries





Chapter 1

This Could Change Everything

Persia, the second week of March, 4 BC

Akilah pored over the last scroll in his stack. Again, nothing.

At the opposite end of his reading table, his younger colleague remained hunched over a codex. Akilah tapped the table. “Anything?”

“No.” Rashidi shut the codex with a sigh.

Akilah rose and paced the length of the room. “Then we keep looking.”

“Where?” Rashidi leapt from his seat and double-timed his steps to match Akilah’s long-legged strides. “I think the head librarian suspects something.”

“There’s nothing suspect about doing research.”

“He suspects we haven’t found anything.” Rashidi plucked Akilah’s sleeve. “He questioned me on how all the volumes we’ve pulled on history, world cultures, and religion pertained to an astronomy project. Somehow he knows I went to Nineveh’s library for three weeks. And yesterday, the head of

the Lower Council almost smirked when he asked me how our research was progressing.”

“That’s Sassanak’s way. He was baiting you. Only the lead researcher of any study can report its results.” Akilah dismissed Rashidi’s concern with a hand wave, but his brow furrowed. What Akilah’s superior knew—or thought he knew—about this study could influence the Council at large.

Rashidi stepped in front of Akilah so abruptly that the two collided, Rashidi’s nose getting the brunt of Akilah’s chest.

“Your progress report to the Council is due in a week. We have no progress to report.” Rashidi’s voice rose like water coming to a boil. “How can that not concern you?” Eyebrows raised, he stabbed a finger toward the tumble of scrolls on the floor next to Akilah’s reading table.

Lack of progress concerned Akilah greatly, but he wouldn’t admit it. Everyone esteemed him as a wise man, yet his current study defied logic. Neither his thirty years of service to Magi society nor his previous astronomical discoveries would be enough to secure the Council’s continuing support to pursue an elusive star he had seen—once.

“Sassanak is the head of the Lower Council. He is bound by duty to evaluate all Magi’s scholarly studies impartially,” Akilah said. He reassuringly clapped his hand on Rashidi’s shoulder, but it stiffened.

Akilah’s gut lurched. If he were head of the Lower Council, would he continue to fund his work? His entire study hinged on a single sighting, a few sentences from the Hebrews’ Books of Moses, and his skills of persuasion. The Lower Council would need more substantiation than that.

Akilah had rehearsed how he would counter the Council’s arguments and persuade them to keep funding his study, but he still hoped Tallis, their third colleague in this endeavor, would return with irrefutable information that would win the Council’s undisputed approval. Tallis had a knack for uncovering

resources that initially seemed to have no apparent connection with the topic at hand but ultimately yielded invaluable particulars. Yet, after so many months of searching, he wasn't sure what that perfect piece of information might be.

While Rashidi had exhausted two libraries' holdings, Akilah had scoured every star chart and parapegmata at his disposal. Every arcane record of astronomical and meteorological events in the Magi's library. Even hemerologies and shadowy astrology volumes.

For the past year, Akilah had sat in the observatory through cold and heat, scanning the sky from dusk to dawn, hoping to catch another glimpse of the star. A star that didn't look or act like any other he had ever seen.

The late afternoon sun cast a glow on Akilah's spacious study, turning the gold threads in his wall tapestry into shimmering points of light against its red-orange-indigo motif of stars and orbs. The commissioned piece, his most cherished rug, embodied all he held dear and dominated a wall otherwise occupied by shelves of scrolls and memorabilia.

This was Akilah's sanctuary, his most sacred place to read and meditate. His carefully appointed collection of beauty and knowledge never failed to bring him order, peace, and solutions. Science and scholarship comforted him. Made him feel in control. What he didn't know, he could learn, if he persisted.

Except now.

Akilah motioned for Rashidi to join him on his matching reclining couches. Perhaps a softer seat would do them both good.

But Rashidi didn't seem concerned with comfort. He scooted to the edge of his couch. "What will you say about the star?"

"You're frustrated." Akilah sank deeper into his couch's plush, kilim-covered cushions.

"I—we've been at this so long. It's like searching through the city's trash heap for treasure."

“Research is mostly sifting. Heightens the excitement when we finally uncover something, yes?” Akilah’s philosophica didn’t erase the discontent etched into Rashidi’s face. “You must admit, what we have brought to light is compelling. Unusually specific.”

Akilah reached behind him to a shelf that contained his silver lockbox containing his field notes. Cradling it in his lap, he brushed his fingers across the lid’s bas-relief stars. “Rashidi, the star didn’t move.”

“How could I forget? You woke me up and dragged me to the observatory to see it.”

Akilah knit his eyebrows in feigned disapproval.

“And I am grateful you did,” Rashidi added hastily.

“Curiosity moves us to find the undiscovered.” Akilah traced the largest star on the silver lid. “Persistence moves us to understand what we discover.” He gripped his lockbox to contain his excitement. “We’re on the cusp of claiming discovery of a new star. Not just an unmapped star—but a new *kind* of star! One that doesn’t behave like anything previously described. Until now.”

Akilah poked Rashidi’s chest. “And you, my friend, started us on this path.”

Six seasons ago, while studying other cultures’ religions, Rashidi had found an oracle of Balaam, a Babylonian precursor of the Magi. Those words from a Book of Moses foretold a star’s appearance. And, strangely, linked the star to a king.

At first, the words had intrigued Akilah. Then they haunted him. *I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star shall come forth from Jacob. A scepter shall rise from Israel.*¹

Akilah had considered those words an academic curiosity until twelve full moons ago when he saw a new star. A star

1. Numbers 24:17 (ESV)

hanging so low and bright in the predawn sky that it seemed to touch the earth.

How many times since then had he wrestled Balaam's oracle to wring all its meaning from it?

Studying a star was one thing. Studying one that heralded a scepter—a king—was quite another. Wouldn't that strengthen their proposal to the Council? One would hope. Yet the same glaring problem remained. He hadn't seen the star in a year.

"Akilah."

"Hmm?"

"What if we don't see the star again?"

If only he knew.

Persia's annals credited Akilah with a dozen significant astronomical findings. He had never failed to complete a study, and he certainly would not concede this one. "We—"

Tallis burst into the room, almost toppling an ornate, metal-and-marble three-legged stand and the *orbitus* on it. He lunged to steady the wobbling astronomy device while protectively clutching a trampled, mud-splattered object. "You won't believe what this is."

"A dirty pouch?"

"No. What's in it."

Amid dried mud and gravelly dust, golden shavings glinted. Electrum. A diplomat's chariot must have run over the pouch. As Tallis hastily wiped its flap, grit fluttered onto the cypress-patterned rug beneath his feet. Akilah pursed his lips. His colleague was usually more thoughtful than that.

"I've been looking for information to authenticate what we found in the Books of Moses. And I just received this." Carefully extracting a flattened, torn scroll that had suffered but somehow survived the travails of travel, Tallis gingerly turned the broken spool. The papyrus unrolled unevenly at Akilah's feet.

The middle third was all but unreadable. But the rest showed uncommonly precise penmanship.

Akilah squinted at the perfect letterforms. They were practically art. “And this is ...?”

“A message from a Hebrew scribe who lives in Adiabene.” Despite the cool evening, Tallis’s brow beaded with sweat. “He’s a direct descendent of a scribe who lived in Babylonian captivity six hundred years ago.”

“How did you find someone like that?”

“Long story.”

“We have time.” Akilah settled deeper into his cushion. *This should be good.*

“I’ve been tracing my Mesopotamian roots.”

Akilah shifted on his cushion. “Yes, well. But what about the scribe?”

“Hebrew scribes do more than copy holy texts. They memorize them. When the Hebrews were exiled in Babylonia, their scribes kept Israel’s culture and religion alive, even though they were ordered to not write the words. I wanted to get as close to that source as possible. And here it is.” He gently patted the edge of the crinkled, torn scroll.

Rashidi scowled. “Whatever you have there, how can you be sure it’s valid? Six-hundred-year-old history—that’s twenty-one generations ago.”

“A scribe’s work must be so precise that if one stroke or line of a holy text doesn’t match the source they copy from, they destroy their work and start over.

“But here’s what’s most important.” Tallis stabbed a finger at four lines near the bottom of the message. “Words from the Hebrew prophet Isaiah two hundred years before the captivity. Copied directly from a scroll my contact’s ancestor salvaged and hid while captive. It says the king we’re looking for is a child who will rule—”

Rashidi grunted. “Every king starts out as a child.”

“Keep reading.”

Akilah drew a sharp breath. This evidence was immeasurably

more than he could have hoped for. It more than supported their case. It catapulted their quest to a new level. “My friends, this could be the greatest purpose we have ever aspired to attain. We must find this child.”

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given. And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” His voice shook as he read. *“Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end ... to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.”*² His voice shook as he read.

Four radical lines.

A child and *everlasting* king?

This could change everything.

2. Isaiah 9:6-7 (ESV)