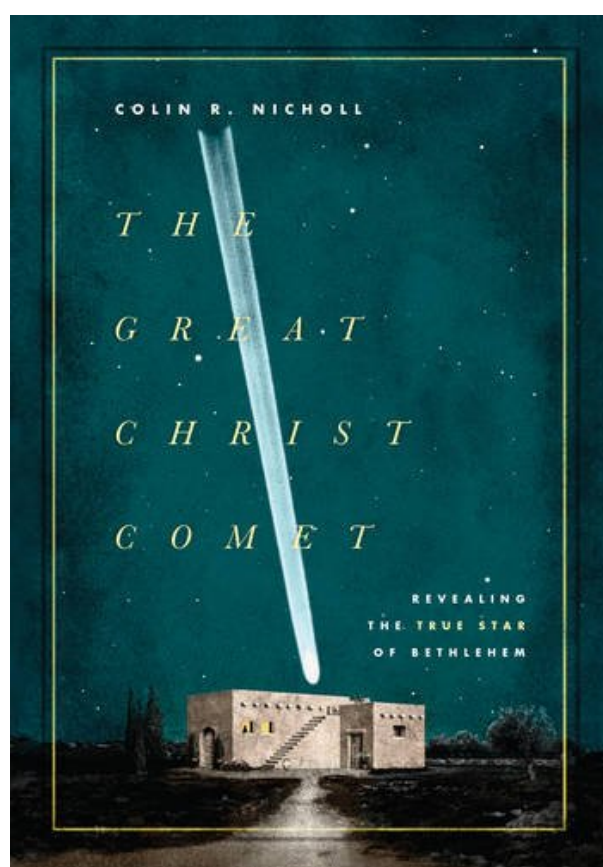
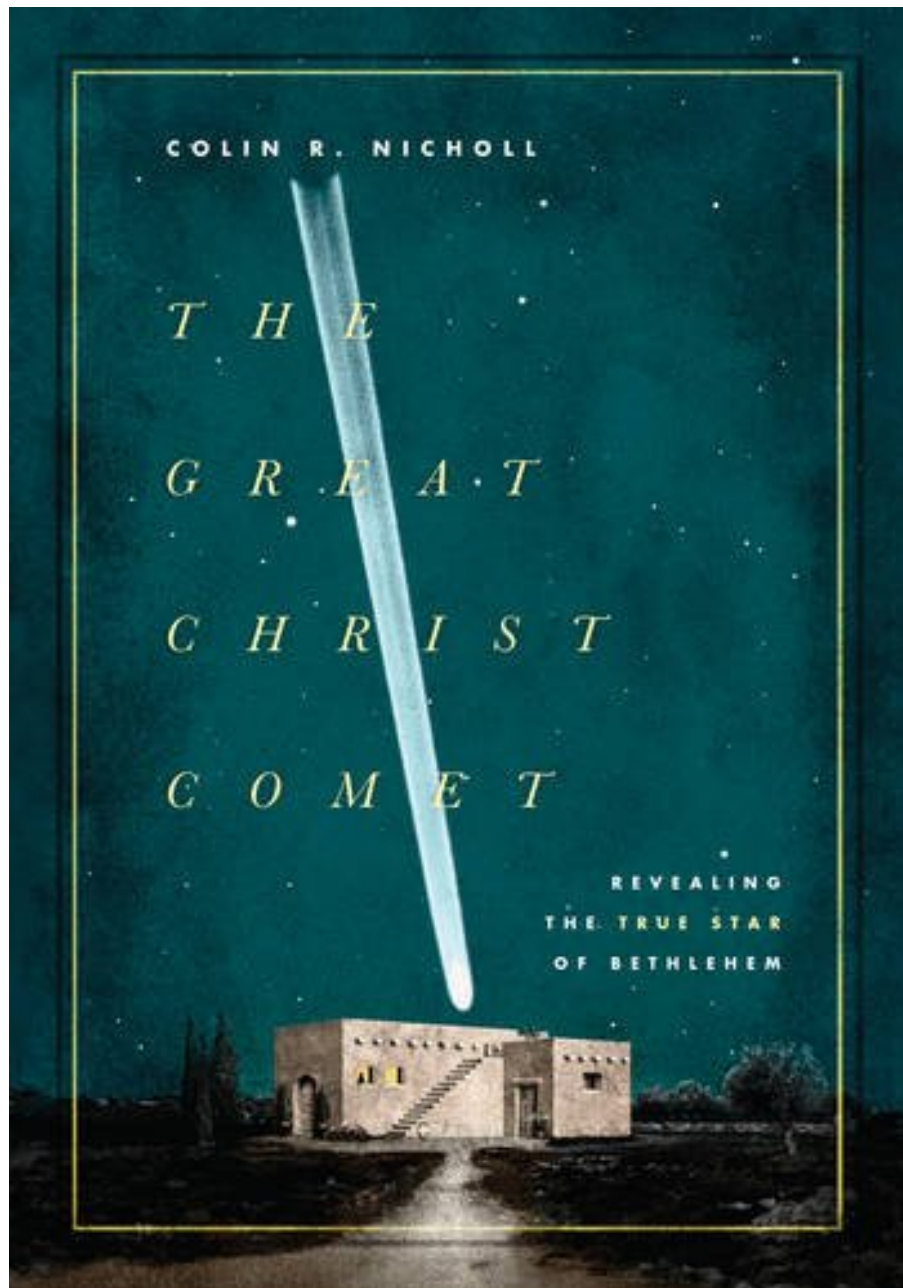


# THE GREAT CHRIST COMET: REVEALING THE TRUE STAR OF BETHLEHEM BY COLIN R. NICHOLL



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## Review

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“In every respect this volume is a remarkable achievement. I regard it as the most important book ever published on the Star of Bethlehem and enthusiastically commend it.”

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Eric Metaxas, New York Times best-selling author, Bonhoeffer

The Star of Bethlehem is one of the greatest mysteries in astronomy and in the Bible. What was it? How did it prompt the Magi to set out on a long journey to Judea? How did it lead them to Jesus?

In this groundbreaking book, Colin R. Nicholl makes the compelling case that the Star of Bethlehem could only have been a great comet. Taking a fresh look at the biblical text and drawing on the latest astronomical research, this beautifully illustrated volume will introduce readers to the Bethlehem Star in all of its glory.

- Sales Rank: #420905 in Books
- Brand: Crossway Books
- Published on: 2015-09-30
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.00" h x 1.10" w x 7.00" l, .55 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 368 pages

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Compelling

By Tim Challies

What do we do about that pesky star? Inseparable from the narrative of Jesus' birth is the "star of wonder, star of night / Star with royal beauty bright" that we sing about in our Christmas carols (and, of course, read about in the book of Matthew). What was that star? Where did it come from? If it was so unusual and magnificent that it could lead wise men from the East all the way to Bethlehem, why don't we read about it in other sources? That star is the subject of Colin Nicholl's new book *The Great Christ Comet*. And, as you may surmise from the title, he does not believe it was a star at all.

Before I discuss the content of the book, let me say a few words about the volume itself. *The Great Christ Comet* is a beautiful work. It is a slightly oversized hardcover that is well-illustrated, holds all kinds of fascinating charts and drawings, and is a joy to read. It will prove a popular choice for a Christmas gift this year, I am sure, and deservedly so.

Over the years, the star of Bethlehem has been the subject of endless speculation. The most prevalent views have been that the star was the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces; that it was Jupiter; that it was a nova or supernova; or that it was a miraculous star created by God for the purpose. Colin Nicholl, a Bible scholar, determined that he would get to the bottom of this star, and found all of those options unsatisfying.

"As a Biblical scholar with a high regard for the historical credentials of the Scripture text, I have felt constrained to leave my comfort zone and wade into the field of astronomy in order to follow up Biblical leads concerning the Star. Doing so has been stretching and uncomfortable at times, but has also been incredibly rewarding and invigorating. In this book I present the fruits of my research—what I believe is a decisive breakthrough in the quest for the historical Star of Bethlehem."

His desire to solve the mystery of the star led him deeper and deeper into the field of astronomy until he was able to satisfactorily reconcile it with the biblical account. "In this book I offer what I am convinced is the solution to the age-old mystery of the Star of Bethlehem. What I propose is rooted in careful consideration of the relevant Biblical material and is, I believe, able to explain everything said about the Star in a natural and compelling way and in harmony with current astronomical knowledge."

His conclusion is that the Star of Bethlehem was actually a comet. The Bible allows such a position, as the word for "star" is wide enough to account for a comet; astronomy demands such a position, as there is no other satisfactory way to account for the phenomena the Bible describes. This conclusion comes only with painstaking work in both Bible scholarship and astronomy. Nicholl slowly and methodically makes his case, beginning with the biblical evidence, and then looking to the heavens. He describes what comets are, shows how ancient people interpreted them, gives examples of great comets through history, and tells how and why they are sometimes visible from earth. He ultimately shows how a comet could have been a sign to Babylonian wise men, how it could have alerted them to the birth of a Messiah, and how it could have led them first to the city of Jerusalem and then to a single home in Bethlehem. But he goes further than that. He

also ties in passages like Numbers 24:17, Isaiah 7:14 and 9:2, and Revelation 12:1–5 to show how they may just have predicted this very phenomenon.

Speaking personally, I found Nicholl's evidence and conclusions quite compelling. He makes a strong case and provides abundant evidence. He makes it clear that he is not a mere enthusiast in either of his fields of expertise, but someone who has dedicated his life to careful research.

Yet I also came away with a slight sense of caution. I have only the most rudimentary knowledge of astronomy (I can find the moon on a clear night, but not much more than that) and am under-equipped to pass judgment on his conclusions. However, because he so carefully charts his journey and the evidence he has collected, I know it will not be long before others take up the challenge. I will be interested to see how his work is interpreted by those with more knowledge in the field.

With all that said, I found *The Great Christ Comet* a unique and uniquely interesting book. I am glad I read it, and freely recommend it to you.

20 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Nicholl's latest work *The Great Christ Comet*

By Shelf-Esteem

It's been more than 10 years since I last sat in a college classroom. However, as I began reading Colin R. Nicholl's latest work *The Great Christ Comet*, I easily fell back into the role of a student. Drawing from his training as a Bible scholar and his belief in the inerrant truth of scripture, the author established, from the outset, that the Bible would be the foundation for his argument. That is to say, the Word of God was the plumb line by which all subsequent theories and conclusions would be vetted. I found this approach to be incredibly refreshing and faith building!

Evidence to indicate the Bethlehem Star was actually a comet is presented methodical, exhaustively, and with supportive historicity. As mentioned, scripture was the launch point for this book. Nicholl opened with careful examination of Matthew 2:1-18 (the Magi's Messianic visit) in order to establish a timeline of events and to validate the reliability of the recorded account. He then expands the scope of supportive data to include Old and New Testament Prophecy, a brief history of astrology in the ancient world, and pertinent details from Jewish and Babylonian history. When the astronomical details are presented, I felt indebted to Nicholl for sharing the wonder of his findings in an approachable fashion. To this end, the inclusion of numerous charts, diagrams, and graphic overlays made it easier for a layman, like myself, to understand the scientific vernacular. In conclusion, *The Great Christ Comet* was far more than an academic text, it was also is a worship-inducing unveiling of biblical mysteries.

I received this book from Crossway for my honest review. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

Stellar

By Flower Darby, MA

For centuries humankind has tried to explain what the Star of Bethlehem actually was. Colin Nicholl definitively provides the answer.

This stunningly illustrated work proves that the Star is a scientifically explainable phenomenon. Leading astronomers around the world worked with Nicholl on this groundbreaking scholarship and have endorsed

his conclusion. Proving that this legend, this iconic image recognized and acknowledged by cultures throughout the globe, has a basis in scientific fact, that it actually happened and we can now explain how -- this is a very proof of the existence of God. Staggering. Breathtaking. I can't pile up enough hyperbole to emphasize the significance of this new work.

Buy this book. Engage in the debate. Give it to everyone you know. The tome itself is a work of art--you rarely see books these days that are, in themselves, so aesthetically pleasing. It's worth getting--and giving--for its beauty alone. But then open the cover and explore Nicholl's rock-solid new research. You won't regret it.

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“In this erudite, engrossing, and compelling book, Colin R. Nicholl painstakingly develops a new solution for the enduring mystery of the Star of Bethlehem, bringing together the biblical story and ancient descriptions of the sky with modern understandings of astronomy. Nicholl's argument—that the celestial visitor was actually a phenomenal comet that passed perilously close by Earth in 6 BC—is certain to be discussed and debated for years to come.”

—Duncan Steel, Visiting Astronomer, Armagh Observatory; Visiting Professor, University of Buckingham; author, *Eclipse and Marking Time*

“This is an amazing study. It reads like an absorbing detective story. Nicholl starts with a detailed reading of Matthew’s account of the visit of the Magi. He makes the case, based on ancient and modern astronomy, that the star of Bethlehem was a great comet whose behavior in the sky would have been interpreted by ancient astrologers as announcing the birth of a Jewish Messiah. The depth and breadth of learning that Nicholl displays is prodigious and persuasive, and all future studies will have to take its proposals most seriously.”

—Gordon Wenham, Tutor in Old Testament, Trinity College, Bristol

“This is an outstanding book, quite breathtaking in the range of its scholarship, yet a page-turner in terms of its accessibility. Colin R. Nicholl is eminently followable, using detective skills to assess the biblical, historical, and astronomical evidence that lead him to conclude that the ‘star’ of Bethlehem was a comet. A real tour de force that I recommend unreservedly to a broad readership.”

—John C. Lennox, Professor of Mathematics, University of Oxford

“Colin R. Nicholl brilliantly tackles a subject that has been debated for centuries. The Great Christ Comet is a captivating book on the Star of Bethlehem. You will not be able to put this book down!”

—Louie Giglio, Pastor, Passion City Church, Atlanta; Founder, Passion Conferences

“Readers of this book will learn a lot of astronomy, history, and theology. Nicholl has produced a remarkable and fascinating book that combines the best of recent scientific scholarship with the best biblical scholarship. The Great Christ Comet is a model of the integration of science and Scripture, and presents a tightly reasoned and highly plausible argument that the Star was a comet. A terrific read!”

—Donald A. Hagner, George Eldon Ladd Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary; author, Matthew (Word Biblical Commentary)

“Nicholl breaks important new ground in the quest for the historical Star of Bethlehem. Not only does he develop a formidable case for identifying the Star as a great comet; he also proposes a fresh explanation as to what it may have done to so impress the Magi. Nicholl has a clear understanding of the relevant areas of modern astronomy, and especially of the nature, evolution, and orbital dynamics of comets as currently understood. This work will be of great interest to astronomers, theologians, historians of science, and the general public, and will hopefully stimulate important new lines of scientific enquiry.”

—Mark E. Bailey MBE, Director, Armagh Observatory; coauthor, *The Origin of Comets*

“Colin R. Nicholl’s magnum opus, which interprets Matthew’s Nativity ‘star’ as a spectacular comet, is fascinating and illuminating. He supports his thesis by appealing to Babylonian, classical, and patristic texts as well as modern astronomical data on comets. His comprehensive mastery of the data enables him to present a detailed scenario of the Magi’s initial sighting, subsequent observations, journey, and visit to the house in Bethlehem to view the newborn Christ child.”

—Edwin M. Yamauchi, Professor Emeritus of History, Miami University

“This is the only book I know of by a biblical scholar on the Star of Bethlehem. It is rooted in a detailed analysis of the biblical text and offers a comprehensive scientific explanation for the Star of Bethlehem. Nicholl makes a compelling case that the Star was a comet, supporting this conclusion with a mass of evidence from a variety of sources. I strongly recommend his work on one of the most fascinating biblical mysteries.”

—Sir Colin Humphreys, Professor and Director of Research, Department of Materials Science and Metallurgy, University of Cambridge; author, *The Miracles of Exodus*

“This rigorous and compelling book sets a new standard for the study of the Star of Bethlehem. No prior investigation of this mystery has brought the disciplines of biblical studies and astronomy together in such a clear, thoroughly researched, and decisive way. Nicholl lets us observe the skies with the Magi and walk

with them all the way to the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. This richly illustrated and pleasantly accessible work is a must-read for everyone even vaguely interested in the Magi's Star. I enthusiastically recommend this eye-opening book!"

—John J. Hartmann, former Assistant Lecturer of Greek, University of Cambridge; Pastor, New Reformation Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"Colin R. Nicholl offers an impressive case for understanding the Magi's star as a comet. He has produced a readable and beautifully illustrated introduction to relevant fields of astronomy, and has laid out pertinent historical data with proportion, care, and integrity. Based on detailed biblical study and current astronomical knowledge, Nicholl develops a fascinating reconstruction of the unprecedented events relating to the Star and the Magi."

—John Nolland, Tutor in New Testament, Trinity College, Bristol; Visiting Professor, University of Bristol; author, *The Gospel of Matthew* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary)

"The Great Christ Comet is a significant new contribution to the long-running debate over the nature of the Star of Bethlehem. One of the book's many strengths is its critique of earlier, widely discussed hypotheses proposed to explain the Star. The book also explains the relevant astronomy very clearly at a level the general reader should have no trouble following. The case Nicholl makes for the Star being a great comet is certainly worthy of serious consideration."

—Martin Gaskell, Department of Astronomy, University of California at Santa Cruz

"Fascinating reading. Clearly the author has not only done his homework but has meticulously mined both quarries, theological and astronomical."

—Paul L. Maier, Professor of Ancient History, Western Michigan University; author, *In the Fullness of Time*

"It is a real pleasure to commend *The Great Christ Comet* to everyone who has ever wondered what could possibly account for the appearance of the Star of Bethlehem. Few have expended as much earnest research, or written as clearly, on the astronomical basis for this special event as has Colin R. Nicholl. When you're reading this book, the pages turn rapidly—similar to the way the pages fly when you're engrossed in a mystery novel. All readers will be richly rewarded!"

—Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Colman M. Mockler Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Old Testament and President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

#### About the Author

Colin R. Nicholl (PhD, University of Cambridge) taught at the University of Cambridge and was a professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary before devoting himself to biblical research. His book *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica* was published by Cambridge University Press, and his articles have appeared in publications such as *The Journal of Theological Studies* and *The Times* (London).

Gary W. Kronk is a consultant of the American Meteor Society, the author of *Cometography*, and the webmaster of [cometography.com](http://cometography.com) and [meteorshowersonline.com](http://meteorshowersonline.com).

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