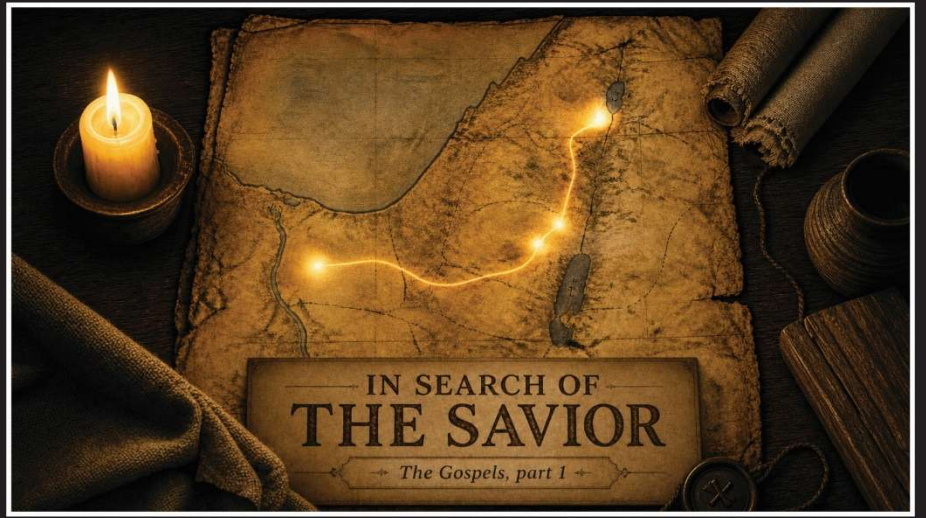


Midweek Study

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When God Guides *Matthew 1:18-25*

In Joseph's story, there was:

1) A **Dilemma** to Face (v.18-20)

- "she was found with child of the Holy Spirit" [Gk. *She found herself to be...*].
- Joseph was a "just man." In Greek, the word is *dikaios*. It refers to a man who is morally upright, who walks in righteousness according to God's standards.
- There were three steps in a Jewish marriage: **First**, the two families agreed to the union. **Second**, a public announcement was made. At this point, the couple was "pledged." This was similar to engagement today except that their relationship could be broken only through death or divorce (even though sexual relations were not yet permitted). **Third**, the couple was married and began living together. Because Mary and Joseph were engaged, Mary's apparent unfaithfulness carried a severe social stigma. According to Jewish civil law, Joseph had a right to divorce her, and the Jewish authorities could have had her stoned to death (*Deuteronomy 22:23,24*). [Life Application Study Bible.]

2) A **Direction** to Receive (v.20)

- God can sometimes use dreams to guide you. Some verses on dreams in the Bible: *Numbers 12:6; Jeremiah 23:28; Joel 2:28; Genesis 37:5; Genesis 40:5; Matthew 2:12; Matthew 27:19*

3) A **Discernment** to Exercise (v.21-23)

The angel revealed to Joseph the *cause* of Mary's conception and the *character* of the child she was carrying.

- A) The **cause**: "*For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*" (*Matthew 1:20, NKJV*). The conception was a sovereign act of God through the Third Person of the Trinity. This was not an ordinary birth. It never could have been. The child in Mary's womb was different from every other child who had ever lived.
- B) The **character** described in two names:
- The first name was **Jesus**. In Hebrew, the name is *Yeshua*, which means "God saves" or "the Lord is salvation." The angel explained the name: "*For He will save His people from their sins.*" (1:21).
 - The second name was **Immanuel**. The angel pointed Joseph to *Isaiah 7:14*, which Matthew quotes in verse 23: "*Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us.'*"

NOTE: The Hebrew word in *Isaiah 7:14* is *almah*, which can refer to a young woman of marriageable age, but which in its primary sense points toward a girl who has never been with a man. Around 250 BC (before the birth of Christ),

the scholars of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, translated *almah* with the Greek word *parthenos*, which specifically and unambiguously means **a virgin who has never had sexual relations**. When God spoke that word through Isaiah (745-727 BC), He was not merely saying that a young woman would conceive in the next year or two as a sign to King Ahaz. Ahaz was concerned about an invasion from Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, who marched against Jerusalem. (Isa 7:1-2) God looked far beyond Ahaz to show He had an ultimate plan for deliverance from sin and death.

4) A **Decision** to Make (v.24)

Perhaps Joseph thought he had only two options: divorce Mary quietly, or have her stoned. But God had a third option — marry her (Mat 1:20-23). In view of the circumstances, this had not occurred to Joseph. But God often shows us that there are more options available than we think. Although Joseph seemed to be doing the right thing by breaking the engagement, only God's guidance helped him make the best decision. When our decisions affect the lives of others, we must always seek God's wisdom. Joseph chose to obey the angel's command to marry her. His action revealed four admirable qualities: (1) righteousness (Mat 1:19), (2) discretion and sensitivity (Mat 1:19), (3) responsiveness to God (Mat 1:24), and (4) self-discipline (Mat 1:25). [Life Application Study Bible.]

5) A **Devotion** to Maintain (v.24-25)¹

Joseph's obedience was not a one-time emotional moment of surrender. It was a lifetime commitment to God.

A) He Stood by Mary

1. Joseph was espoused to Mary in a sacred and binding relationship (Matthew 1:18).
2. Joseph chose not to make Mary a public example (Matthew 1:19).
3. Joseph obeyed God and took Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:20, 24).
4. Joseph gave Mary the protection of a husband (Matthew 1:24).
5. Joseph remained morally pure until after the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:25).
6. Joseph stood by Mary through the reproach surrounding Jesus' birth (Luke 2:1-7).

B) He Took Care of Jesus

1. Joseph protected Jesus from King Herod (Matthew 2:13-14).
2. Joseph brought the offering of the poor at Jesus' dedication (Luke 2:22-24).
3. Joseph taught Jesus a trade and the value of work (Mark 6:3).
4. Joseph led Jesus in worship (Luke 2:41-42).
5. Joseph taught Jesus the Holy Scriptures (Luke 2:40, 46-47).
6. Joseph taught Jesus the obligation of obedience (Luke 2:51).

C) He Obeyed God

1. Joseph took Mary as his wife in obedience to God (Matthew 1:20, 24-25).
2. Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem in obedience to God (Luke 2:1-5).
3. Joseph fled into Egypt in obedience to God (Matthew 2:13-14).
4. Joseph returned to the land of Israel in obedience to God (Matthew 2:19-21).
5. Joseph helped give Jesus spiritual and moral upbringing in obedience to God (Luke 2:41-42, 51-52).

APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY:

- 1) **Don't Make Rash Decisions, Especially When Other People Are Involved.** Joseph took time to make this tough decision. One man said, "I'd rather be two steps behind God than one step ahead of Him."
- 2) **Be Discerning About Dreams.** Though God can give you a dream, He primarily speaks through His Word today. The Bible should be your primary source for direction. Listen to God by reading His Word. Don't seek dreams.

¹ Subpoint list from Bill Bennett, "The Forgotten Man at Christmas", unpublished material.