

Matthew 1:18–25 “Joseph’s Dilemma”

Here’s the very first narrative in the GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

- Interesting that the Gospel message must begin with a scandalous story
- A husband humiliated by his wife to be.
- Similar scandals to those of the women and men in the genealogies of Jesus
- Why involve Joseph?
 - Wouldn’t it have been easier if Mary bore the shame of her pregnancy alone?

The Genesis, the Problem:

18 Now the **birth** (genesis) of Jesus Christ was as follows:

- **“It is in fact the word Genesis.** The evangelist is about to describe, not the genesis of the heaven and the earth, but the genesis of Him who made the heaven and the earth, and who will yet make a new heaven and a new earth” (Morison). ¹

After His mother Mary was **betrothed** to Joseph,

- **What is a “betrothal”?**
 - Betrothal with the Jews was a serious matter, not lightly entered into and not lightly broken. The man who betrothed a maiden was legally husband (Gen. 29:21; Deut. 22:23f.) and “an informal cancelling of betrothal was impossible.” ²
 - Espousals were often made very early in life, though marriage did not take place until the bride reached **twelve years of age** or had experienced her first menstrual cycle. ³
 - Typically lasted 1 year
 - Though not living together, adultery would be charged if either was found to be unfaithful.
 - Joseph is simply called her husband in verse 19.

¹ Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Mt 1:18). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

² Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Mt 1:18). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

³ Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. (1998). *Manners & customs of the Bible* (Rev. ed.) (397). North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers.

before they came together ⁴, she was **found with child** (Heurisko: "Eureka!" ⁵) of the Holy Spirit.

Joseph's dilemma:

- Believe the rumors
- Believe Mary
- Believe the Holy Spirit

Mary: "found with child"

Elizabeth: "conceived"

Luke 1:24

24 Now after these days, his wife **Elizabeth conceived**, and she kept herself in seclusion for five months,

- **23.49 συλλαμβάνω^b; καταβολή σπέρματος** (an idiom, **literally 'sowing of seed'**)—'to conceive, to become pregnant.'

συλλαμβάνω^b: συνέλαβεν Ἐλισάβετ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ 'Elizabeth his wife became pregnant' Lk 1:24. The phrases ἐν γαστρὶ (Lk 1:31) and ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ (Lk 2:21), meaning 'in the womb,' may be added to συλλαμβάνω without significant alteration of its meaning. ⁶

- **In many languages the process of becoming pregnant is expressed in different ways: 'to begin to become large,' 'to receive sperm,' 'to let a child enter,' or 'to stop bleeding' (a reference to the cessation of menstrual periods).** ⁷

Mary: "found with child"

- **23.50 ἔγκυος, ον; κοίτην ἔχω** (an idiom, **literally 'to have bed,'** though in combination with ἔχω, κοίτη early acquired the metonymic meaning of sexual relations); **ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχω** (an idiom, **literally 'to have in the womb'**): to be in a state of pregnancy—'pregnant, to be pregnant.'

These expressions contrast with the meaning of συλλαμβάνω^b, 23.49, in that they seem to focus more upon the state of pregnancy rather than the event of conception. ⁸

⁴ **Came together** (4905) (**sunerchomai** from **sun** = with, together + **erchomai** = to come) means to get together for a specific purpose and here is used euphemistically referring to sexual intercourse. **This verb is used in 32 times in the NT and one passage is especially interesting as it is used in the context of another "conception" (so to speak) by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost at the birth of the Church, the Bride of Christ, Luke recording "And when this sound occurred (Acts 2:1-4+), the crowd came together (sunerchomai), and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language." (Acts 2:6+).** (<https://www.preceptaustin.org/matthew-1-commentary>)

⁵ 27.1 **εὐρίσκω^b**: to learn something previously not known, frequently involving an element of surprise—"to learn, to find out, to discover.' (Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 324.)

⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 255.

⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 255.

⁸ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 255.

19 Then Joseph her husband, **being a just man,** and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away **secretly.**

- **Joseph loved Mary – obvious in how he treated her**
 - Imagine how appalled he was to find out his betrothed (committed) love had been unfaithful!
 - **Love conquered all here**, a special grace to Joseph from the Father God:
 - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. NLT**
 - 4** Love is patient and kind.
Love is not jealous or boastful or proud
 - 5** or rude.
It does not demand its own way.
It is not irritable,
and it keeps no record of being wronged.
 - 6** It does not rejoice about injustice
but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.
 - 7** Love never gives up,
never loses faith,
is always hopeful,
and endures through every circumstance.
 - 8** Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages
and special knowledge will become useless.
But love will last forever! 9

Joseph has 3 options:

- **The Legal Man:** Have her convicted of adultery, condemned and stoned to death publicly ¹⁰
- **The Legal and somewhat Graceful man: Give her a Bill of**

⁹ Tyndale House Publishers, *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), 1 Co 13:4–8.

¹⁰ **Deuteronomy 22:23–29**

23 “If it happens that a young woman, a virgin, is engaged to a man, and a man finds her in the town and lies with her,
24 then you shall bring out both of them to the gate of that city, **and you shall stone them with stones so that they shall die**, the young woman because she did not cry out in the town, and the man because he violated his neighbor’s wife; and so you shall purge the evil from your midst.

25 “But if the man finds the young engaged woman in the field and the man overpowers her and he has sex with her, then the man only must die who lay with her.

26 But you shall not do anything to the young woman, for there is not reckoned against the young woman a sin deserving death; it is similar to when a man rises up against his neighbor and murders him, a fellow human being, just so is this case,

27 for he found her in the field, the engaged young woman cried out, but there was no rescuer to help her.

28 “If a man finds a young woman, a virgin who is not engaged, and he seizes her and he has sex with her and they are caught,
29 then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall become his wife because he violated her, and he is not allowed to divorce her during his lifetime.

Divorcement

- **He could give her a bill of divorcement** (ἀπολυσαι [apolusai]), the γητ [gēt] laid down in the Mishna, without a public trial. He had to give her the writ (γητ [gēt]) and pay the fine (Deut. 24:1). So he proposed to do this privately (λαθραι [lathrai]) to avoid all the scandal possible. ¹¹
- **The Humble and Graceful Man:** Have her quietly put away so that he wouldn't have to deal with her and his public humiliation.
 - **Be a just man**
 - What does it take to be a just husband?
 1. **Listen to your wife** – I don't mean just agree with her – **listen to her.**
 - Ask questions that clarify but don't judge as yet.
 - Make sure you understand what she's saying – clarify again.
 2. **Listen to the LORD'S council** from His Word and His Spirit.
 3. **Pray**
 - **Never make her a public spectacle**
 - **Never seek to humiliate your wife.**
 - Never criticize her publicly
 - Seek reconciliation and remediation in private with her.
 4. **Seek Forgiveness and full justification**

20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,
“Joseph, son of David, **do not be afraid** to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

- **“Don't be afraid!”**
 - **Joseph had much reason to be afraid.**
 - Mary was the subject of plenty of gossip in Nazareth
 - Their marriage was doomed before it even started!
 - **Who would believe it was the “Holy Spirit”?**
 - What would you think if your daughter told you

¹¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Mt 1:19.

that?

- What would you think if your fiancé told you that?
- **Personally, our getting engaged, and then married was very scary**
 - Lucy told me she would be unable to bear children for us.
 - I told my Mother I was planning on getting engaged to Lucy Engle – a girl I just met a couple of months before!
 - She said don't do that, my Mother insisted that I marry someone that could give her grandchildren.
 - **I KNEW that Lucy was God's only choice for me.**
 - Our excitement to get married was only exceeded by my wife saying two years later, **"I'm pregnant!"**
 - **Scared me to death**
 - What do I do now?
 - Where can I get help?



The Angel is still speaking with Joseph here:

21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name **JEHOSHUA**, for He will save His people from their sins."

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:

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.”**

- **Jesus**

- **Yehoshua** – probably one of the most common names in Israel, then and now.

Numbers 13:16 These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. **And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua.**

- **3091 יהושע** [*Yâhowshuwa* ‘, *Yâhowshu* ‘a /yeh·ho·shoo·ah/] n pr m. From 3068 and 3467; GK 3397; 218 occurrences; AV translates as “Joshua” 218 times.

Additional Information: **Joshua or Jehoshua = “Jehovah is salvation”.**¹²

- **Immanuel:**

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the **virgin** shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name **Immanuel**.

24 Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep,
did as the angel of the Lord commanded him
and took to him his wife,

- Joseph responded to the Lord’s message through the Angel because he was a faithful man.
 - **Sometimes obedience makes no sense** until we see the fruit of that obedience much later.
 - **Sometimes you have to swim against the tide, up the river of people’s opinion.**
 - Some of the worst council I have ever heard came from “Christian” friends who thought they knew better than the Lord.
 - **Bill Gothard** was once asked:

¹² Strong, J. (1996). *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

“How can I know it is God’s will?”

His answer:

“Think of what your flesh would want to do, and do the very opposite – you’ll be close to God’s will.”

- **I’m asked, “Can you recommend a Professional Counselor for our Marriage?”**

- My response – “Who is more Professional than the LORD God Almighty?”

Isaiah 9:6–7

6 For a child has been born for us;
a son has been given to us.

And the dominion will be on his shoulder,

and his name is called Wonderful Counselor,

Mighty God,

Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace.

Men think;

- I’ll take us on a vacation, just the two of us
- I’ll buy her flowers and chocolate
- I’ll get that watch at Costco she likes
- I’ll buy a Motorhome or travel trailer – that will fix our marriage
- Now, all of these things are good in the proper context
- BUT – they won’t fix your marriage!
- What will?

- LOVE alone!

- Here’s LOVE:

Ephesians 5:1–18

1 Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do,
because you are his dear children.

2 Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.
He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us,
a pleasing aroma to God.

3 Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you.
Such sins have no place among God’s people.

4 Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes —

these are not for you.

Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.

5 You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.

6 Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him.

7 Don't participate in the things these people do.

8 For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord.

So live as people of light!

9 For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.

10 Carefully determine what pleases the Lord.

11 Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them.

12 It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret.

13 But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them,

14 for the light makes everything visible.

This is why it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

15 So be careful how you live.

Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise.

16 Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days.

17 Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do.

18 Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit,

19 singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts.

20 And **give thanks for everything** to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

21 And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

22 For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

23 For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church.

24 As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.

25 For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her

26 to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word.

27 He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

25 and Joseph **did not know her**
till she had brought forth her firstborn Son.

And he called His name **JEHOSHUA.**

- The language indicates that Mary and Joseph entered into normal marital relations following the birth of Jesus. ¹³
 - Mary was NOT a perpetual virgin or sinless human being
 - She has done nothing to redeem you nor can she do anything to redeem you!
 - She died a sinner saved by God's grace and was buried in the ground like all human beings!
 - NOTHING in Scripture supports that!
Mark 6:3 Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon?
And are not **His sisters** here with us?"
So they were offended at Him.

Jehovah wants to save your marriage

- He wants to make an example of the depth and quality of His forgiving love through your marriage
- He just wants you to do what the WORD tells you to do.

Go and do that men!

¹³ Spirit filled life study Bible. 1997 (electronic ed.) (Mt 1:25). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.