



The Foundry Church Devotions

Good News



*Marriage in Biblical Times/ **Matthew Writes/ Another Joseph who Dreams?***

MATTHEW



The first book in the New Testament is Matthew. Although it may have not been written first, its beginning placement is fitting. The main purpose of this first Gospel is to expound on the pinnacle of the whole Bible, the story of the Messiah, Jesus. Either Levi or Matthew, the former tax collector turned disciple of Jesus, is credited with writing this book. It is a collection of firsthand stories and background explanations leading up to the Apostles coming to know that Jesus is the real deal. Matthew uses his personal experiences and emotions to tell the church at large that Jesus is truly the promised Messiah.

Matthew 1:18-24

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about; His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel.” 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.



MARRIAGE IN BIBLICAL TIMES

In Biblical times, marriages were formed much differently than they typically are in the Western world today. Often, marriages were arranged by the parents in order to protect or enhance their family lineage. For the unmarried couples, their parents' input, respect and decision were better received than would be in our modern culture.

After a decision and agreement to pursue marriage was reached between the two families involved, there would be a celebration between the two family units. The groom would bring to this gathering the agreed upon bride price to be presented to the bride's family as a gift. The couple would then enter into a period of "betrothal" or "pledging," as mentioned in verse Matthew 1:18.

After this gathering, the couple would be recognized as "married," even though they would each be returning to their parents' home. The bride would begin to wear a veil when she was in public as a visual sign of engagement, as well as begin to prepare herself for the upcoming marriage.



Preparation for marriage would have included mastering household tasks, such as grinding wheat, baking bread, butchering and preparing meat, and making clothes, as well as larger-scale, fruit-full management of her household (see Prov. 31). The groom would begin building a home and further his development of a productive career.

The length of "pledge," or in our modern day language, engagement, would last anywhere from six months to a year. If for some reason the marriage was to be called off, the groom would have to issue a formal notice of divorce and would have to face the repercussions of such a decision.

Deuteronomy 24 says there is only one reason for divorce: unfaithfulness. What was the penalty for unfaithfulness? Deuteronomy 22:23 says the punishment was stoning.

Having this picture of the cultural background in mind, can you see the dilemma that Joseph faced when he found out Mary was pregnant? Was Mary someone Joseph could count on? What does Joseph's faith in God tell him about forgiveness but also about punishment for sin?

The Bible doesn't contain many lengthy stories about who Jesus' earthly father Joseph was. So, it's a bit hard to know his character. One thing we do know, is that he was already in relationship with God. The Gospel of Matthew records several instances when an angel appeared to Joseph in dreams. His response was to immediately do what he was told. This leads us to believe his heart was soft, receptive, and willing to follow God's leading.



I can't help but wonder if Joseph may have recently heard a reading of Psalm 34 in his synagogue service, making the words below fresh in his mind:

Psalm 34:5-8

*⁵I turned to the Lord, and he answered me;
he saved me from all my fears.*

(Joseph must have had fears of "what now?" when he heard the news of Mary's pregnancy)

*⁶Those who look to Him are radiant;
their faces are never covered with shame.*

**** If this Child was from God, Joseph shouldn't feel shame****

⁷This poor man called, and the Lord heard him;

he saved him out of all his troubles.

⁸The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.

Because Joseph was obediently faithful in all circumstances, whether easy or life-changing, he played a part in raising the Child that would change the world forever. Psalm 34:19-21 wraps up with prophetic words that speak clearly to the hope that Jesus brings to those who are obedient:

*¹⁹ The Lord is close to the
brokenhearted;*

*those crushed in spirit He
delivers.*

*²⁰ Though the misfortunes of the
righteous be many,
the Lord will save him from them
all,*

*²¹ Keeping all his bones intact,
not one of them will be broken.*

