

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 1:18 - 1:25



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg explores the end portion of Matthew chapter 1, beginning with the genealogy of Joseph, Jesus' legal father. Joseph's relationship with Mary is also examined, along with the circumstances surrounding her pregnancy. The discussion highlights the significance of Jesus' name, which means Jehovah salvation, and how it relates to the gospel message of eternal life as a result of God's intervention in human history. Finally, Gregg notes that although Joseph and Mary were married and had children, their union was not typical, as Mary remained a virgin until the birth of Jesus.

### Transcript

Today, let's look at Matthew chapter 1 and begin at the end of the portion where Matthew is given the genealogy or the biological background of Joseph, who is Jesus' legal father. It's interesting that Matthew does this because Jesus was not, and Matthew makes this very clear, Jesus was not biologically related to Joseph, and yet Matthew gives the genealogical information about Joseph as if it's relevant to Christ. Well, it is relevant to Christ because although Jesus was not the natural son of Joseph, he was certainly brought up by Joseph in Joseph's home.

We could call Joseph Jesus' stepfather or foster father or something like that. Joseph was his adopted father, and therefore whatever status Joseph had in the community, genealogically, would be attributed to Jesus as his legal son. But once Matthew has given us that genealogical information in the first 17 verses, in chapter 1, verse 18, we begin to read of the actual story of how the birth of Jesus came about.

And that's exactly how it starts. In Matthew chapter 1, in verse 18, it says, Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. After his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they were come together, that is, before they slept together, she was found to be with child, or pregnant, of the Holy Spirit.

Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. 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. As she will bring forth a son, and you should call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which is translated God with us. Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took to him his wife. And he did not know her, that means they did not have sexual relations, until she had brought forth her firstborn son, and he called his name Jesus.

Now, here we have the story from Joseph's side. If we were reading Luke's gospel, we would see the story from Mary's side. Because in Luke's gospel, we find that Mary's relatives, first of all, have a visit from an angel, and he tells them that they are going to be the parents of a prophet who became John the Baptist.

And then we have an angel appearing to Mary, and telling her about her own role as the mother of the Messiah. And then we have Mary traveling and so forth in Luke's gospel. But in Matthew, we don't have anything of Mary's side.

We have a total concentration on Joseph's side. We don't read of an angel appearing to Mary, we read of the angel appearing to Joseph. Of course, both stories are true.

It's just that each writer, Matthew and Luke, selected different material to include. Now, Joseph is a person who is much less known to us than Mary. Mary is seen again and again throughout the gospels as someone who, from time to time, interacts with Jesus, and is even found in the book of Acts, in chapter 1, as one of those who is in the upper room.

When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. But Joseph is not found in any of those contexts. Joseph is recorded only in the birth stories, which are in the first two chapters of Matthew, and the first two chapters of Luke.

And as far as chronologically, the latest of these stories is found in Luke chapter 2, where Jesus, at age 12, gets sort of misplaced by his parents, and they come back and find him in the temple teaching, or asking and answering questions more properly. And there is the last time in the gospels we read of Joseph. But this is the first time we read of him.

We have his genealogical information given in the earlier verses, and now we read some things about him. He was betrothed to Mary, we are told in verse 18. This is how the birth of Jesus took place.

There was a betrothal. Now, what is betrothal? That's not really something we know much about in our society, although there is a rediscovery of this by many people. Many Christians are rediscovering betrothal as a model for young people, finding their mate

and getting together with their spouse, rather than the normal custom of dating.

Now, this was a custom not only of the Jews, but it was fairly common among most ancient people, that single men and single women did not simply date around, did not experiment with a series of recreational romances, and then finally choose one of those people to marry. In biblical times, and this was true not only in the Bible, but in many secular societies, probably most, when a young man and a young woman became marriageable age, rather than playing the field, as is so common in our own society, they would set their sights on one person that they felt would be a suitable match for them and a mate for them. Now, of course, they would presumably know this person somewhat, although that would not always be the case.

In some cases, we read of people having their marriages arranged by their parents before the young people had even met each other. But that is not necessarily always the case. Certainly, that was the case when Abraham found a wife for his son Isaac, but Isaac's son Jacob didn't follow that procedure.

Jacob found his own bride and chose the woman he wanted to marry. But again, it was not through dating. It was through a betrothal process.

Now, what is betrothal? Nowadays, we hear a lot of talk about courtship in some Christian circles as an alternative to dating, because there are a lot of Christian teachers who have recognized how much emotional harm and moral harm can be done through the modern practice of dating. A lot of Christians are now advocating something called courtship, which really is a little bit more serious form of dating, and that is that two people date one another with the mind that they might get married, even if they want to get married. They are actively pursuing marriage.

And yet, courtship is such, as it is so spoken of, that it is not really as binding as marriage. It is still something you can get out of. Right up until the day of the wedding, the couple that are courting can decide to call it off.

And therefore, courtship isn't really any guarantee that the couple will have only one romantic relationship, any more than dating is, because they might have a very strong romantic relationship with somebody they're courting and then call it off and later court somebody else. The model of betrothal was very different. In the Bible, betrothal meant that a young man and a young woman made an agreement to marry.

This was before they ever became romantically involved with each other. It was without having dated, and it didn't include dating. They would get to know each other in other settings.

They might not know each other very well at all at first when they make the decision, but they would have time after they became betrothed to get to know each other, because

they would usually have about a year in Jewish society from the time they were betrothed until the time they actually married. But even before the betrothal, I am quite convinced, most couples probably got to know each other somewhat without dating, without romance. They got to know each other in society.

They got to see each other in town. They got to see each other perhaps in their parents' homes. They got to know what each other were like.

In our own time, they could get to know each other at church or in other social settings. But they did not date in the way that we normally do now. They instead would make an intelligent decision based on rational reasons, which would include physical attraction, I'm sure, but not on raging hormones that are aroused by going out with somebody and sitting in a car at night and being all alone and so forth.

Those kinds of things that are so normal for us were not normal to them. They felt like that would be immoral to get emotionally and spiritually and romantically involved with someone to whom they did not know they were going to marry. So, betrothal was really a commitment to marry.

In fact, the word betrothal comes from the old English word troth, which means pledge or promise. And to be betrothed means you were promised. You had promised to marry.

And when a person was betrothed, they were as committed to the person to whom they were betrothed as they were as if they had married them. The only difference was that they did not yet live together and they did not have sexual relations together. From the time they were betrothed until the time they married was a time for them to prepare to be married, for them to prepare to leave their parents' home and enter into a new home life together.

It was no doubt a time for them to begin to cultivate romantic feelings for one another so that they wouldn't be just strangers when they got married. But they had usually a whole year for this. But during that year, they could not break it off.

They were committed to marriage. They were promised to it. And once they, of course, it was given in those days when you make a promise, you keep your promise, just like marriage is a promise.

And so, if a person was betrothed, they could not get out of betrothal unless there was some reason for a divorce. You see, a betrothal could be ended just like a marriage could be if there were grounds for divorce. Now, the relationship between Mary and Joseph, when Mary was found to be pregnant, was a relationship of betrothal.

Probably this happened within a space of a year from the time that Joseph betrothed himself or Mary to himself and the time they actually would have married. But during that time, Mary was found to be pregnant. Now, of course, Joseph didn't know what to

think when he first heard that.

Although most people would know what to think, I'm sure that he thought initially probably very much what most people would think, namely, that she must have slept with a man and he knew it wasn't him. And therefore, of course, he felt that she, or he could feel, we don't know exactly what he felt because we just read that he contemplated it, but we know that he would have very good reason to suspect that she had committed adultery and that he had grounds for divorce. In fact, we read that he was contemplating just that, divorce, because you can't end a betrothal except by divorce.

But under Jewish law, certainly under most law, adultery is grounds for divorce. So, Joseph was contemplating that and we're told he was a just and a righteous man. To contemplate a divorce on the basis of unfaithfulness is not unrighteous because unfaithfulness of a sexual sort is grounds for divorce and Joseph contemplated divorce, though we're told he was a righteous man.

Now, the interesting thing is that he didn't rush to this conclusion. It says he was a just man in verse 19 and he did not want to make her a public example and he was minded to put her away secretly, that is, he was minded to divorce her secretly. Now, this is an interesting thing.

He was planning to divorce her, which suggests that he was calling off the relationship and yet he had no bitterness, it would feel. He didn't want to expose her to public shame and ridicule, so he was going to try to as quietly as possible call off the betrothal and divorce her in a private manner so that she would not have to be exposed to much shame. Well, why should he not want her to bear the reproach for her own actions? Well, you might say he was just a really kind-hearted guy, but I actually have a different theory.

We read in Luke's Gospel that Mary herself was visited by an angel and that angel told her, because she had questioned how she could become the mother of the baby when in fact she hadn't ever had relations with a man, the angel told her she'd have a miraculous conception and told her that a similar thing, not identical but similar, had happened to a cousin of hers named Elizabeth who was very old and had gotten pregnant in her old age, past menopause, another miraculous conception. And by telling her of this, the angel helped her to believe that this could happen to her too. Now, Mary did believe it.

Now, I believe that when Mary turned up pregnant, she certainly would have communicated with Joseph, if not directly, at least through messengers, that she had indeed not been unfaithful to him. It seems unthinkable that he would hear of her pregnancy without also hearing her protestations that she had in fact not been unfaithful, as it might seem she had been. Now, Joseph, I think, knew Mary somewhat, probably reasonably well.

And from what we know of Mary, we know that she was not at all the kind of girl to go out and be unfaithful to her spouse. And Joseph must have known this too. I mean, I believe that her godly character would have been transparent.

I believe that it's very clear she was a godly woman. And not even all ungodly women commit adultery, and godly women generally don't at all. And for that reason, I think that Joseph was not sure that she had been unfaithful.

Now, the evidence was there that she had been, but there was her own story as well to consider. And she, no doubt, had communicated that she had become pregnant by supernatural means, that God himself had become the father of her baby, and her baby was going to be the son of God. That's exactly what the angel told her in Luke chapter 2. And that is no doubt what was communicated to Joseph by Mary or by someone representing her.

Now, I suspect that Joseph believed her. But you might say, well, then why would he want to put her away? Why would he not want to marry her if he believed her? You know, it says he sought to put her away, but it doesn't say he believed that she was unfaithful. I think there's another possibility, and that is that if he believed her story, then he recognized that God had selected her to be God's mate, as it were, in terms of bringing forth the child.

Not that God had had sexual relations with her. Of course, the Bible doesn't teach anything like that. But that in bringing a son into the world, God had chosen this woman to be the means through whom he would bring children into the world.

That put her in a special class. Her son was certainly unique. And for that reason, Joseph may well have wondered, hey, this is a sacred territory.

I better not intrude here. I better call off this wedding. Now, I'm suspicious that that is the case because when the angel appeared to Joseph, it's interesting what it says.

Because it says in verse 20, 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 you, marry your wife. Now, he said, don't be afraid to take her as a wife. If he thought she was unfaithful, and he was going to put her away because of that, it doesn't seem like fear would be the main motivation.

It would be rather anger or distrust or something else like that. The angel doesn't say, Joseph, don't distrust her. Don't disbelieve her report.

The angel says, don't be afraid to take her. Now, that may suggest that that was exactly what Joseph was wrestling with. He was afraid to take as his wife a woman that God had selected to be the mother of the Son of God.

He might feel like he's kind of intruding on God. I mean, any man might have that suspicion. Might say, well, this changes things completely.

I thought I was going to marry her, but it looks like God picked her for himself. And I better release her. I'd better just let her go.

And, you know, it seems that he was afraid to take her as his wife, not resentful or angry or distrustful. And therefore, I suspect that Joseph was not so much disbelieving her story as he was believing it and taking it very seriously and felt like it would be inappropriate for him to proceed with the marriage's plan. That is my suspicion based on what the angel said to her.

Now, the angel said to her that that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. That means the Holy Spirit and not any man had brought about the conception. And he says, the angel says to Joseph in verse 21, And she will bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Now, the name Jesus was not an original name at this point in time. It was simply the Greek form of a very commonly used Hebrew name in the Old Testament, Joshua. Of course, you have Joshua, the famous man who replaced Moses after Moses' death and took the children of Israel into the land of Canaan, after whom the book of Joshua is named.

And there were other Joshuas in the Old Testament. There was a high priest named Joshua in the time of the return of the exiles from Babylon. Joshua simply was a name, it was a composite name from two parts, Jehovah and Shua.

It means literally Jehovah, the Lord, is salvation or saves. So, the Lord saves or the Lord is salvation is what Joshua means. Now, this same name was common in biblical times because Joshua had been a great hero.

Many mothers named their sons after him. And Jesus is just the same name but in Greek. And so, Jesus was named, a name that meant Jehovah is salvation.

And the reason he was named that is because he was going to be a savior, he was going to be salvation. His name should be called Jesus, the angel said, because he will save his people from their sins. Now, the Jews at that time knew they wanted to be saved.

But they didn't necessarily want to be saved from their sins. They wanted to be saved from the Romans who oppressed them and charged them tribute and treated them badly and oppressed them and deprived them of their independence. They were looking very much for a Messiah who would come and save them from their political foes, from the Romans.

The angel tells Joseph, however, that the Savior, Jesus, will indeed save his people, but

not necessarily from political oppression. That is not the salvation that Jesus came to bring. Quite contrary to the modern liberation theology, which is so popular among liberals and Roman Catholics down in Latin America, which believes that the gospel actually is a message of political liberation.

That is not the case at all. The angel said, no, he's going to save his people, not from political oppression. Christians who have been saved by Christ have often had to suffer political oppression, but he saves them from their sins, which suggests that people, prior to being saved, are not free.

They need to be saved from oppression, and that oppression is the oppression of sin itself. Because we have sinned, we are alienated from God, and we are actually quite in bondage to sin. We cannot set ourselves free from our sins.

Just try to stop sinning and never sin again. This cannot be done by man. That is why God sent Jesus, to save us from our sins, because our sins are the thing that alienate us from God, and it is alienation from God that prevents us from having eternal life.

So, to have eternal life, we need to be related to God. We need to be restored to God and reconciled to God. But this must be done through the removal of the problem of sin, which not only imposes guilt upon us for our past deeds, but also is a governor of our lives every day.

It's a feature of our character that we are sinners, and we cannot simply stop sinning by deciding that we want to stop sinning. We have to be saved, and that's what Jesus came to do. We read elsewhere in the Gospel that Jesus died on the cross and rose again, and the Bible tells us that this was as a sacrifice to cover the guilt of our sins.

But more than that, he came to live within us, to set us free from our actual sin bondage, so that we don't have to live a life of sin. In fact, we're not supposed to. We're not allowed to.

Living a life of sin is not for the Christian, because Jesus saves us from our sins, not only the penalty, but also the sins themselves. Now, Matthew tells us this was done, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet. And this prophet he quotes is Isaiah.

He's quoted from Isaiah 7, 14. He says, Now, this prophecy of Isaiah actually had its first fulfillment earlier on in another child. If you read Isaiah chapters 7 and 8, you'll find that the prophecy was given to Isaiah, and then fulfilled in the next chapter, in the birth of Maharshal El-Hashbaz, Isaiah's own son.

But it had a secondary fulfillment, as Matthew here tells us. It was fulfilled in the fact that Jesus was born of a virgin, and he truly is God with us. The term Immanuel could be translated, God is with us, or God with us.



Here it's translated, God with us, because Jesus is indeed God in human form. Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took to him his wife. And he did not know her, that is, they didn't have sexual relations, until she had brought forth her firstborn son, and he called his name Jesus.

This certainly implies that after she brought forth her son, they did have sexual relations. They had a normal marriage, and they had other children. There are at least six other children in the marriage known to us from the Gospels, as we'll see later on in Matthew chapter 13.

Four brothers and an unknown number of sisters, plus Jesus. So Mary and Joseph had other children. Jesus is here referred to as her firstborn son, and we're simply told that she and Joseph didn't have regular marital relations until the time that Jesus was born.

After that, of course, they apparently did. More detail about the birth of Jesus, or the events that happened immediately after, will follow in Matthew chapter 2. But for now, we're out of time, so we'll come back to that in our next session. I hope you'll be able to join us.