

R12.2 January 2023 Blog

Joseph, the Earthly Father of Jesus

What do we know about Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, and what can we learn from him? Luke and Matthew both give accounts of Jesus's birth. Luke's focus is the time leading up to the birth of Jesus, and of course, His birth. Most of Luke's account deals with Mary. Matthew, on the other hand, focuses more on Joseph in Matthew 1:18-2:23.

Matthew 1:19 says that Joseph was a righteous man. What else does Matthew tell us about Joseph? He had the option of showing mercy to Mary (put her away quietly) or having her stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). Joseph chose mercy and intended to put her away quietly. He was a mercy guy in a law world.

What else does Matthew tell us about Joseph? Matthew 1:20 says that when Joseph had considered putting Mary away, he had a dream in which an angel of the Lord appeared telling him to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife. The angel says the child conceived in Mary is of the Holy Spirit and that he was to name the child Jesus.

Verse 24 continues the story. Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, taking Mary as his wife despite his own misgivings. He obeyed a difficult command. If we only obey commands that are easy, then are we really committed to obedience? Consider this quote: "...obedience without struggle reveals little of your true submission to Christ. Only when you don't want to do it (be obedient), but do it anyway, do you find your commitment (to God) confirmed."¹ The consequences of being obedient did not end on the day he married Mary. I would surmise that Joseph frequently heard that Jesus was an "illegitimate child" throughout his lifetime. I would also imagine that Mary was spoken of with scorn on a frequent basis. Joseph had to know what was going to happen when he agreed to wed Mary, but he chose to believe the angel and trust the God who sent the angel despite obvious negative consequences. Men and women will always be there to criticize and question us on our choices and the resulting consequences. Remember, they do so on lack of evidence. They know only what they see and hear. In the end, all that matters is obedience to God and that was Joseph's choice.

Another example of Joseph's obedience is in Matthew 2:13. After the visit of the wise men, an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph (again in a dream) and tells Joseph to go to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath. What was Joseph's response? In verse 14 we see that Joseph got up, took the Child and his mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. Immediate obedience. Leaving at night was not easy. Any parent can tell you about hurried packing for an unplanned trip with an infant. Joseph did as God's messenger commanded.

¹ Thoughts from the Diary of a Desperate Man: A Daily Devotional. Walt Henrichsen. June 3 Devotion.

After Herod's death, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 2:19-21). He told Joseph that Herod had died and it was now safe to go into Israel. Joseph moves into the land of Israel. The angel tells Joseph what to do and what is Joseph's response? Obedience.

Joseph was apparently planning to go to Judea (southern part of Israel) but he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod. Joseph was afraid to go there. He was warned by God in a dream, and he leaves for Galilee and chooses to settle in Nazareth. God speaks. Joseph obeys. Obedience. Are you seeing a trend?

Fourthly, Luke 2:51 says that Jesus continued in subjection to Joseph and Mary. Have you ever considered that Jesus as a child, teenager, etc. lived in subjection to the very people (sinners) that He created? How hard would it be to raise the Son of God when He was perfect, and you were not? I don't know how it worked but Jesus made it work. Knowing this helps me in raising my daughter. I'm a sinner and her mother is a sinner, and our daughter is a sinner. We need large doses of grace and truth and love and forgiveness in our home. Jesus obeyed His earthly parents.

Finally, number five is short and to the point. After the angel told Joseph that Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit, a census was ordered. It meant that Joseph would have to take Mary (who was close to giving birth) on an uncomfortable journey to Bethlehem. The numbers I've seen seem to agree it was a four-to-five-day journey (90 miles) and a difficult trip at best. Can you imagine Mary's discomfort and Joseph's concern for his wife? But Joseph obeyed earthly authorities and did what he was supposed to do.

In summary, Joseph was:

- A. Righteous
- B. A mercy guy in a law world
- C. Obedient to God
- D. Tasked with being the father of a perfect child
- E. Submitted to (obeyed) earthly authority

Applications:

- 1) Be righteous in concert with biblical truth
- 2) Extend mercy
- 3) Be obedient
- 4) Live a life full of grace and truth (John 1:14)
- 5) Submit to earthly authority (unless it is contrary to biblical truth)