

Joseph: Jesus' guardian

Matthew 1:18-25

1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother **Mary** was espoused to **Joseph**, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. **1:19** Then **Joseph** her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. **1:20** But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, **Joseph**, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee **Mary** thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. **1:21** And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

1:22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, **1:23** Behold, **a virgin** shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. **1:24** Then **Joseph** being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him **his wife**: **1:25** And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

2:13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to **Joseph** in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and **his mother**, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. **2:14** When he arose, he took the young child and **his mother** by night, and departed into Egypt: **2:15** And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

2:19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to **Joseph** in Egypt, **2:20** Saying, Arise, and take the young child and **his mother**, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. **2:21** And he arose, and took the young child and **his mother**, and came into the land of Israel. **2:22** But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: **2:23** And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Joseph: an overlooked leader

Mary is far more prominent than Joseph in Luke's lengthy Gospel. So even though Joseph is mentioned far more in Matthew's shorter account, Joseph is somewhat overlooked.

In Matthew chapter one, God changed Joseph's mind about accepted Mary as his wife. Then in chapter two, the Father used Joseph to protect Jesus and Mary. Joseph was the leader in his family.

negatives

Joseph is fairly well known. Afterfall, he is named seven times in the first two chapters of Matthew alone. Even so, he is not named again after 2:19 and more people focus on Mary (and Jesus) in Luke' Gospel at Christmas time than on Joseph in the Gospel of Matthew Gospel. Thus Joseph fits well in this neglected people series.

A few worksheet lines below speculate about things that Joseph may have done wrong. Was it right for him to think about rejecting Mary (A-3)? What about his fear of Herod (A-5)? And perhaps Joseph should have understood God's plan better (A-1).

Moreover, was Joseph's fear of Herod sinful? According to Pro. 29:25, the fear of man brings a snare. Is there any evidence that Joseph's fear led to a wrong decision about moving to Nazareth (Mat. 2:22)? Or was Joseph like Noah who was motivated by godly fear when the patriarch built the ark and saved his family (Heb. 11:7)?

Perhaps it is unfair to expect Joseph to be heroic, but it is proper to look closely at what he said and did. Some of his thinking is mentioned (1:19-20, 2:22), but what about his words? Is it possible for someone to truly do great things without saying anything?

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() Joseph was not perfect.
A-1	() He did not understand God's plan (1:18-21, Lk. 2:48-49).
A-2	() By himself, Joseph did not know what to do.
A-3	() He thought about rejecting Mary (1:19-20).
A-4	() He was overly cautious (1:19-20, 2:22).
A-5	() He was afraid of Herod (2:13, 22).
A-6	() He was afraid of Mary (1:20).
B	() Joseph did not say or do great things.
B-1	() He was not a prophet or a teacher.
B-2	() He was not Jesus' father (1:18, 24-25).
B-3	() Nothing Joseph said is recorded (1:19-20).
B-4	() Nothing Joseph did is recorded (1:24, 2:14, 23).
B-5	() God the Father was the One who truly protected Jesus.
B-6	() Joseph was more a dreamer (1:20, 2:13, 19) than a doer.
B-7	() Joseph's life work is little known, much like Matthew's (9:9-11).

positives

Opposition and danger are stressed in Matthew's Gospel from the beginning to the end. Herod tried to kill Jesus in chapter two, and in the final chapters the Jewish and Roman leaders joined forces against Jesus and his disciples. So divine protection is a recurring theme in Matthew.

Joseph helped protect Jesus, of course, but some object to the idea that God needs help. The Father could have protected Jesus himself without using Joseph, if he had chosen to do so. Yet, since God chose to use Joseph as Jesus' guardian, it is ok for us to think about how Joseph was useful to God.

God shows through Joseph (and the wise men) that divine leading is an indispensable part of divine protection. So many of the worksheet lines focus on the way the Father led Joseph in all that he did. (Similar points could easily be made through Noah and Genesis chapters six, seven, and eight as well.)

One of the most important lines below is the one about Joseph being the leader in his family (D-6). It would seem that he was in charge, since God told Joseph rather than Mary that they should flee to Egypt (Mat. 2:13-14). Yet, Mary seemed to take the lead in Luke 2:48 as she spoke instead of Joseph.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	() Joseph was useful to God.
C-1	() He was righteous (1:19).
C-2	() He protected Mary and baby Jesus.
C-3	() Joseph was a descendant of David (1:17, 20).
C-4	() Joseph was as useful to God as Mary (Gal. 4:4).
C-5	() Joseph's silence helps draw attention to his obedience.
C-6	() Like Noah (Heb. 11:7), Joseph did what God told him to do.
D	() Joseph was led by God.
D-1	() Joseph was willing to move (2:13, 19, 22-23).
D-2	() He did not need to think about what to do (1:19-21, 2:22).
D-3	() He did not depend on his own understanding (2:22, Prov. 3:5).
D-4	() God caused Joseph to change his mind (1:19-21, 24, 2:22).
D-5	() Mat. 1:22-25 shows that Joseph understood Isaiah 7:14.
D-6	() Joseph was the leader in his family (2:13-14, Lk. 2:48).
D-7	() God often uses dreams to guide believers today.

conclusions

worksheet answers

It is silly to compare a human being, even a righteous man like Joseph (C-1), to God (B-5). Everything that Joseph did was directed and enabled by the Lord (A-2, D), and that above all is why Joseph was useful (C).

It is wrong to say that Joseph was just a dreamer (B-6). Four times God spoke to him in a dream, and each time Joseph took appropriate action (C-6). The Lord told the prophets what to say, but he told Joseph what to do. Thus, Joseph was not a prophet (B-1, B-3), but he helped fulfill prophecies (Mat. 1:23-25, 2:15, 23).

Joseph became Jesus' legal father (B-2, B-5) even though he may not have fully understood Isa. 7:14. (Line D-5 is partly correct.) Matthew 1:22-25 makes it very clear to us, however, that Jesus' conception and his virgin birth fulfilled Isaiah's prophesy.

Finally, Joseph was not overly cautious (A-4); there was good reason for him to fear Herod (A-5). Therefore it was wise for Joseph to think about what to do (A-3, D-2), though in the end he depended on the Lord (D-3). In Matthew chapter one, God guided Joseph as he thought about what to do, but in chapter two the Lord's leading may have been more sudden and unexpected.

Lines A-4, A-6, B-4, B-6, D-2, and D-7 are all false. Lines B-7, D-4, and D-5 are partly correct.

So what?

Through Joseph we see God using a righteous person who was obedient, though he was not a public speaker. (The same can be seen through Noah as well.) Sadly, because of our love for good speakers this is often overlooked.

In Matthew, Jesus is the great Bible Teacher. He showed this most clearly in the Sermon on the Mount, but there are other famous discourses as well. Without a doubt, teaching and preaching are very important. Nevertheless Matthew's Gospel shows that God used Joseph without Joseph saying anything. *

This leads to questions about what leaders do. Joseph was not a speaker, but he was a thinker. (Some of his thoughts are found in 1:19-20.) Likewise, Matthew may not have been a great speaker, but he was a writer. We have his Gospel, but there is no record of anything he said.

Above all, Joseph shows that a godly leader hears what God says and acts accordingly. Joseph was physically able to speak, of course, but his silence in the written record helps draw attention to his obedience (C-5) and to God's special guidance. Good leaders are good at following God. Sometimes this involves an abrupt change of plans, as seen with both Joseph and the wise men.

* To be fair, notice that nothing that Mary may have said is recorded in Matthew either.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.
