

1. What two things are you thankful for today about your church?

***I am thankful for all the wonderful people who are in it and are a part of my life. I am thankful that together we can make a difference for God that we can't do by ourselves.***

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (TNIV)<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always,<sup>17</sup> pray continually,<sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus**

### Commentary Material

**5:16 Rejoice always.**<sup>NKJV</sup> The next three verses give three simple ingredients that believers ought to daily mix into their lives: joy, prayer, and thanks. When these three qualities are present, believers will be vibrant witnesses to a needy world.

Joy seems to be distilled from a strange mixture of challenge, risk and hope.

*Keith Miller*

Paul counseled this persecuted church to *rejoice always*. Paul had learned the secret of being joyful, even in the middle of great trial and suffering (verses quoted from NIV):

- [Acts 16:25](#): "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them."
- [Romans 5:3](#): "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance."
- [2 Corinthians 6:4-10](#): "Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live

on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

- [2 Corinthians 12:10](#): "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."
- [Colossians 1:24](#): "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."

Paul had just commanded the believers to love one another and then to rejoice. Interestingly, when Jesus spoke to his disciples about loving one another, he also talked to them about joy:

- *As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ([John 15:9-13](#) NRSV, emphasis added)*

True joy transcends the rolling waves of circumstance. Joy comes from a consistent relationship with Jesus Christ. When believers' lives are intertwined with Christ, he will help them to walk through adversity without sinking into debilitating lows and to manage prosperity without moving into deceptive highs. The joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep believers rejoicing "always." They can rejoice because of their sure salvation and their future hope. Nothing that happens on this earth can compare with the glory that awaits God's people.

But believers are not required to conjure up this joy, for the ability to rejoice has been given to them as a gift—one fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy ([Galatians 5:22](#); see also [Romans 14:17](#)).

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### LIFE APPLICATION

#### REAL JOY

Our joy, prayers, and thankfulness should not fluctuate with our circumstances or feelings. Obeying these three commands—be joyful, pray continually, and give thanks—often goes against our natural inclinations. When we make a conscious decision to do what God says, however, we will begin to see people in a new perspective. When we do God's will, we will find it easier to be joyful and thankful.

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**5:17 Pray without ceasing.**<sup>NKJV</sup> Paul did not expect believers to spend all their time on their knees or with their eyes closed when he said they should *pray without ceasing*. In fact, he was quite adamant that everyone had work to do ([5:14](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, 11](#)). It is possible, however, for believers to have a prayerful attitude at all times. This attitude is built upon acknowledging dependence on God, realizing his presence within, and determining to obey him fully. Then it will be natural to pray frequent, spontaneous, short prayers. Prayer is not to be done by the church leader only, nor is it meant to be carried out only in worship services. Instead, prayer can be a part of every believer's daily walk, and Paul noted how important this would be for one's spiritual life ([Romans 12:12](#); [Ephesians 6:19](#)). Jesus told his disciples that "they should always pray and not give up" ([Luke 18:1](#) NIV).

Believers should pray together in worship, spend time alone with God in prayer, and also pray to God throughout each day as the desire to rejoice or the need for help arises.

Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan.

*John Bunyan*

**5:18 In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**<sup>NKJV</sup>

Notice that Paul did not say "for" everything give thanks, but *in* everything. Evil will happen to believers, and it does not come from God, so they should not thank him for it. But when evil strikes, they can still be thankful for God's presence and for the good he will accomplish through the distress. Paul had learned that "God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" ([Romans 8:28](#) NLT). Usually God uses difficult times to build people's character and strengthen their faith. It is easy to give thanks for the blessings; it is more difficult to give thanks for the blessings in disguise. By far the most difficult task is to give thanks in *everything*—even the situations that make no sense or are extremely painful. Yet this difficult task has been

assigned to all believers *for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*.

Learning to give thanks in everything means learning to trust God completely, knowing that he is in charge, and understanding that all that happens is part of a larger picture that believers may not see. When a believer can give thanks so willingly, he or she has trusted that God is completely in control of all situations and is working out his will.

For three things I thank God every day of my life: thanks that he has vouchsafed me knowledge of his works; deep thanks that he has set in my darkness the lamp of faith; deep, deepest thanks that I have another life to look forward to a life joyous with light and flowers and heavenly song.

*Helen Keller*

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## LIFE APPLICATION

### WITHOUT STOPPING

Have you ever grown tired of praying for something or someone? Paul said that believers should pray without ceasing. A Christian's persistence is an expression of faith that God answers prayer. Faith shouldn't die if the answers come slowly, for the delay may be God's way of working his will. When you feel tired of praying, know that God is present, always listening, always answering—maybe not in ways you had hoped but in ways that he knows are best.

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Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

2. How does a person go about ‘rejoicing always’ without looking fake or phony?

**Rejoicing always is the ability to have a positive attitude in the midst of life without having to worry about the circumstances. It doesn't mean one never gets down or depressed. It means one still has hope even in the midst of it, and one chooses to go forward as though the hope had become reality. Rejoicing always should not be confused with always having a smile on one's face. It is more of an attitude in life than an expression upon one's face. As the apostle Paul says in Philippians 4:11-15 Today's New International Version (TNIV)<sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength. It is okay for others to know that we have struggles in life. What makes us different is the grace that God provides for us in the struggles. That's why we can rejoice always.**

3. If we are to pray continually, what does that look like, and how should it shape our view of prayer in the church as oppose to prayer outside the church?

Prayer is something that should become a part of us no matter what we are doing. Brother Lawrence from practicing the presence of God wrote the following: That the most excellent method he had found of going to GOD, was that of doing our common

business without any view of pleasing men, [Gal. 1:10; Eph. 6:5-6.] and (as far as we are capable) purely for the love of GOD. That it was a great delusion to think that the times of prayer ought to differ from other times. that we are as strictly obliged to adhere to GOD by action in the time of action, as by prayer in its season. That his prayer was nothing else but a sense of the presence of GOD, his soul being at that time insensible to everything but Divine love: and that when the appointed times of prayer were past, he found no difference, because he still continued with GOD, praising and blessing Him with all his might, so that he passed his life in continual joy; yet hoped that GOD would give him somewhat to suffer, when he should grow stronger.

When we begin to recognize that God is just as eager and willing to hear our prayers and answer them on Thursday at the grocery store as God is on Sundays in church, we would recognize that we carry a divine power around with us. We simply have to tap into it.

4. What's the difference between being thankful for all circumstances and being thankful in all circumstances?

To be thankful for all circumstances would be a failure to acknowledge what is good and what is evil. Not all circumstances glorify God and many circumstances destroy people's lives. We are not called to be thankful for the circumstances. We can be thankful for what God will bring out of the evil circumstances, if we are submitted to God in the midst of them. To be thankful in all circumstances is to acknowledge whether good or bad, God is at work in us to shape us more and more into God's glory.

Notice the slight difference in meaning one can get from reading the King James version of Romans 8:28 and NIV version of Romans 8:28. The NIV is a more literal translation of the Greek.

**Romans 8:28 (KJV)**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

**Romans 8:28 (NIV)**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

5. Is it ever God's will for a Christian to ever be unhappy?

It is God's will for a Christian to show the emotions that God created within him or her. There will certainly be times of sorrow for every believer we find in Romans 12:14 <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute <sup>£</sup>you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. We are called to share in each other's tears. Jesus knew what it was to be unhappy. We are not called to allow unhappiness to draw us into a state of self pity. The apostle's Paul's life was filled with a lot of unhappy moments. When we look at the book of psalms, we find a lot of unhappiness in their lives, but the authors kept their faith in God. Psalm 13 is a good example.

**Psalm 13** For the choir director: A psalm of David.

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way?

<sup>2</sup> How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand?

<sup>3</sup> Turn and answer me, O LORD my God! Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die.

<sup>4</sup> Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!" Don't let them rejoice at my downfall.

<sup>5</sup> But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me.

<sup>6</sup> I will sing to the LORD because he is good to me.

6. How does God use sorrow and heartache in our lives?

Sorrow can remind us of our frailty and heartache can remind us of our inability to control the circumstances surrounding our lives. God uses both of them to reveal our need for strength and guidance from God. There is nothing we can do to guarantee we will escape sorrow and heartache.

**Job 1:13-21 Today's New International Version (TNIV)**

**<sup>13</sup> One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, <sup>14</sup> a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, <sup>15</sup> and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"**

**<sup>16</sup> While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"**

**<sup>17</sup> While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"**

**<sup>18</sup> While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, <sup>19</sup> when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"**

**<sup>20</sup> At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship <sup>21</sup> and said:**

**"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. <sup>[a]</sup>**

**The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."**

7. One of the things often overlooked in the study of Job, is that in this chapter, Job's wife is suffering the same identical loss. How do you think she felt losing all of her children the same day?

**Job's wife must have been devastated. Her faith was being shaken to its core. She had no idea of what was going on. It would have been of little comfort to her**

**to know that she had lost her children because of a test that Job was going through in the conflict between God and Satan.**

8. If you would have been her, would you have found “comfort “or “coldness” in her husband’s words in verse 21? Why?

**I think I would have initially felt a coldness. How could he dismiss the loss of our children so lightly. It would have almost seemed as if he had not really cared about the loss. It would have also have seemed to have minimized my loss, because he used the words “I”. The loss of the children and the possession was not just his loss, but “our” loss.**

9. Why does it take some of us longer than others to be thankful in the circumstances we find ourselves in?

**Some of us are mature in Christ than others of us are. Some of us have a more positive spirit in life than others have. Some of us can spot a silver lining in circumstances quicker than others because that’s the way they see life. Some of us have more life experience than others do and we know how different things could have turned out. Some of us trust God more easily than others do.**

10. What do we lose out on if we are not honest with God about how we feel about our present circumstances.

**We lose the ability to pray and pour out our hearts to God. We lose out on receiving comfort from God. We lose out on the ability to grow in God. We lose out on the ability to be a light for others.**



11. Why should we continue to trust God when everything around us seems to be falling apart?

**Because God is still in control. The circumstances around us, do not determine the size of the God we serve. God may be wanting us to do something new.**

12. Is “God really good all the time” or is that a phrase we simply use to make God seem nice and loving? Why do you think so?

**God is good all the time because that’s the nature of God. That does not mean our lives are going to be good all the time. That’s fantasy. God is going to work in some painful points in our lives. Some of the pain will come as a direct result of choosing to be faithful to God.**

## Lifesharing Lesson 2 Jesus Is Coming For The Second Time Matthew 24:40-44 & 2 Thessalonians 2:8

1. What would you like to be doing, the moment that Jesus returns or the rapture takes place?

I would like to be doing whatever God was requiring of me for that day. I want to be doing it faithfully and with all my might.

**Matthew 24:40-44** Today's New International Version (TNIV)<sup>40</sup> Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>42</sup> "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. <sup>43</sup> But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

**2 Thessalonians 2:8** Today's New International Version (TNIV)<sup>8</sup> And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

### COMMENTARY

**24:30** "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory."<sup>NIV</sup> The *Son of Man* will return from *the sky*, just as he would leave. Although Jesus was still with them, the day would soon come when an angel would tell the disciples, "Men of Galilee . . . why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" ([Acts 1:11](#) NIV).

"All the nations of the earth" is an Old Testament metaphor for the universal impact of the Second Coming. *The nations of the earth will mourn* because unbelievers will suddenly realize that they have chosen the wrong side. (This phrase alludes to [Zechariah 12:10-12](#), which centers on the repentance of Jerusalem.) Here the scene centers on God's judgment of his enemies. Everything they have scoffed about will be happening, and it will be too late for them.

After the cosmic events recorded in [24:29](#), all the people on earth *will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds*. Jesus' return will be unmistakable; no one will wonder about his identity. The "clouds" are pictured as the Son of Man's royal chariot, bringing him from heaven to earth in the Second Coming (to the Jews, clouds signified divine presence; see, for example, [Exodus 13:21](#); [19:9](#); [Psalm 97:1-2](#); [Daniel 7:13](#)). Jesus' second coming will not be as a humble, human carpenter, but as the powerful, glorious, and divine Son of Man. He will arrive to defeat Satan and judge all people, and there will be no doubt as to his identity.

[24:31](#) "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."<sup>NKJV</sup> Upon his return to earth, Jesus will *send His angels out to gather together His elect from the four winds* (that is, from all across the world, see also [Psalm 50:3-5](#); [Isaiah 43:6](#); [66:18](#); [Jeremiah 32:37](#); [Ezekiel 34:13](#); [36:24](#); [37:9](#); [Daniel 7:2](#); [8:8](#); [11:4](#); [Zechariah 2:6](#)). This gathering of the chosen ones signifies the triumphant enthronement of the Son of Man, who will be revealed in all his power and glory. The manifestation of the angels and the gathering of the people will gloriously mark the end of Jesus' keeping his divine power and authority a secret. Jesus' second coming marks the core of the Christian hope. The imagery of the *great sound of a trumpet* would have reminded Matthew's readers of Isaiah's prophecy, "on that day a great trumpet will be blown" ([Isaiah 27:13](#) NRSV). The trumpet was used in ancient Israel to gather God's people for religious purposes, as well as to call them for battle. This final trumpet (see also [1 Corinthians 15:52](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#)) will signal the gathering of God's people. When he comes, the whole world will know that Jesus is Lord, and Christians' hope and faith will be vindicated.

As in [24:22](#), three main views of the Tribulation interpret this verse in different ways:

1. *Pretribulationists* would say that this "gathering of the elect" refers to the gathering of Jewish saints (also as in [24:22](#)), not the church. The "rapture" (taking believers to heaven) occurred before the Tribulation and concerned only the church.
2. *Midtribulationists* would say that this verse refers to the rapture and that it identifies both the church and the Jewish saints. This event will occur in the middle of the Tribulation, with the outpouring of God's wrath on the world occurring in the last half of that period.
3. *Posttribulationists* would say that the rapture and revelation are a single event, and this pictures the only return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation. There, as here, he will come to gather his saints (the "elect") and to judge unbelievers.

The phrase "from one end of heaven to the other" combines two Old Testament expressions, found in [Deuteronomy 13:7](#) and [30:4](#), "Whether near or far, from one end of

the land to the other, . . . even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back" (NIV). The wording gives special stress to the concept that none of the elect will be overlooked or forgotten. God won't lose track of anyone.

[24:32-33](#) "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door."<sup>NIV</sup> Using a parable, Jesus answered the disciples' question regarding when the events he spoke about would happen ([24:3](#)). The disciples, like anyone living in Palestine, knew when summer would come by observing the twigs and leaves of fig trees. The Mount of Olives was known for its fig trees, which were often twenty to thirty feet high. At Passover time, the budding would be just beginning. Jesus and his disciples were probably walking past many fig trees on their way out of Jerusalem as they crossed the Mount of Olives. Fig trees lose their leaves in winter (while most of the other trees in Palestine do not), and they bloom in late spring (many of the other plants bloom in early spring). Jesus chose the fig tree for this peculiarity; since its buds come late, it was a perfect example to picture the delay of the Second Coming. The dry, brittle twigs getting tender with rising sap and the leaves coming out were certain signs that summer was near. Inherent in this process is patient waiting. There is no hurrying the natural cycle of the fig tree. So all believers must patiently await the Second Coming.

In the same way that they could interpret the season by the leaves on trees, so the disciples could know when these significant events would occur. When they saw *all these things* (referring to the events described in previous verses), they would know that the destruction of Jerusalem would soon follow. Some scholars feel that the phrase "it is near" refers to the coming desecration of the temple. But this interpretation makes too abrupt an interjection in Jesus' thought. Because Jesus was reassuring the disciples, it makes more sense to interpret "it" as the Son's second coming. Therefore, this verse means that the second coming of Jesus is both certain and near. The fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy would assure the disciples that the other prophecies he had given regarding the end times would also come true.

[24:34](#) "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place."<sup>NRSV</sup> The solemn phrase "truly I tell you" introduces an important truth, an assurance like an oath. There are three views of the meaning of this verse: (1) It refers only to those alive at the time Jesus spoke who still would be alive at the destruction of Jerusalem; (2) it refers to the end times only; (3) it refers both to the destruction of Jerusalem and the end times, the destruction of Jerusalem containing within itself the elements of the final end times.

Jesus singled out *this generation* using the Greek word *genea*, which can refer both to those living at a given time as well as to race or lineage (therefore, he would be speaking of the Jewish race). That makes the third view above most likely. Jesus used "generation"

here to mean that the events of [24:1-28](#) would occur initially within the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries. Not that all the problems would stop at the end of their lifetimes, but that *all these things* would be under way, verifying what Jesus had said. Jesus explained that many of those alive at that time would witness the destruction of Jerusalem. In addition, the Jewish nation would be preserved and remain on earth, so Jews also would witness the end-time events (see also [16:28](#)).

[24:35](#) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."<sup>NIV</sup> There could be no doubt in the disciples' minds about the certainty of these prophecies. While *heaven and earth* as we know them would eventually come to an end, Jesus' *words* (including all his teachings during his time on earth) would *never pass away* into oblivion. They were true and would remain for all eternity.

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### *LIFE APPLICATION*

#### **THEY COME AND GO**

This chapter opened with the disciples admiring the durability and beauty of the temple. But Jesus countered with a different vision of durability: Only his words endure; only the truth of God survives.

History is the story of change, the rise and fall of empires, the coming and going of societies, which, for a time, happened upon some happiness, then floundered upon some folly. What survives all this change?

Not temples, not governments, and not even Christian saints (who get sick and die like everyone else). Only God's Word endures. On that alone we stake everything. God's promises endure forever, and all who belong to Jesus share in them. Take hope. Jesus alone leads through change to a bright and buoyant future, full of everything good.

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#### *JESUS TELLS ABOUT REMAINING WATCHFUL /[24:36-51](#) / [203](#)*

[24:36](#) "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."<sup>NIV</sup> While Jesus had given general "signs" to watch for regarding the coming of the end, he clearly explained to the disciples that the exact day or hour was not known by the angels or the Son (Jesus himself). When Jesus said that even he did not know the time of the end, he was affirming his limitations as a human (see [Philippians 2:5-8](#)). Of course, God the Father knows the time, and Jesus and the Father are one. But when Jesus became a man, he voluntarily gave up the unlimited use of his divine attributes. On

earth, Jesus laid aside his divine prerogatives and submitted to the Father's will. Thus, *only the Father* knows exactly when Jesus will return.

The emphasis of this verse is not on Jesus' lack of knowledge, but rather on the fact that *no one knows*.

It is God the Father's secret to be revealed when he wills. No one can predict by Scripture or science the exact day of the Second Coming. Jesus was teaching that preparation, not calculation, was needed.

Christ designed that the day of his coming should be hid from us, that being in suspense, we might be as it were upon the watch.

*Martin Luther*

It is good that we don't know exactly when Christ will return. If we knew the precise date, we might be tempted to be lazy in our work for Christ. Worse yet, we might plan to keep sinning and then turn to God right at the end. Heaven should not be our only goal; we have work to do here. And we must keep on doing it until death or until we see the unmistakable return of our Savior.

[24:37-39](#) "For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man."<sup>NRSV</sup> This verse carries on the theme initiated in [24:36](#) regarding the unexpected nature of the Second Coming and its connection with the need for vigilance. The first outpouring of God's judgment upon sinful people in *the days of Noah* has a natural connection with the final outpouring at the Lord's return. People will be going about their daily business, just as they were in Noah's time ([Genesis 7:17-24](#)). Just as the flood caught them unawares (and after it was too late) and swept them away in judgment, so it will be at *the coming of the Son of Man* (see also [1 Peter 3:20-21](#)).

[24:40-42](#) "Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming."<sup>NKJV</sup> To further illustrate the suddenness of his return, Jesus pictured "business as usual" in Palestine—the men out working in the field; the women doing domestic chores such as grinding grain. The Second Coming and the angels' accomplishment of their task of "gathering the elect" ([24:31](#)) will happen so suddenly that in the blink of an eye, one of those people may be taken and the other left. The reason? One was ready and one was not. Because no one except the Father knows when Christ will return (the "you" in "you do not know" points to every one of us), Jesus explained that believers must be on guard and alert, constantly ready for him to come at any time. Christ's second coming will be swift and sudden. There will be no time for last-minute repenting or bargaining. The choice that people have already made will determine their eternal destiny.



Jesus commanded his followers to *watch*. "Watch" is an Old Testament concept, arising out of the necessity of maintaining constant vigil on city walls against marauding bands. It also referred to the spiritual vigilance needed to keep people from wandering away from God. In the context of the Olivet discourse, it is active rather than passive. A person maintains vigilance not by passively waiting, but by engaging in good deeds and active discipleship.

**24:43-44** "But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."<sup>NRSV</sup> Jesus' purpose in telling about his return was not to stimulate predictions and calculations about the date, but to warn his people to be ready. In this simple parable, Jesus again pointed out the need for constant vigilance. A homeowner cannot know when a thief might come to break into his home, so he must be always prepared. So with the return of Christ. He will come *at an unexpected hour*.

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### *LIFE APPLICATION*

#### **WHEN JESUS RETURNS**

At the hour when zealous Christian teachers predict Jesus to return, you can be pretty sure it won't happen. Jesus' schedule is simply not available. No one knows. Yet the uncertainty of the time is no excuse for apathy.

- God's Good News must get everywhere. What role can you play in helping your neighbor, or people far away, come to faith in Jesus?
- God's church should be everywhere, helping people worship and building up their faith. What can you do to help?
- God's people should work everywhere, striving to advance God's interests in public justice, housing, health, environmental maintenance, recreation, etc. What are you doing about it?

This is Jesus' agenda. When he comes, we ought to be caught doing it.

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**24:45-47** "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions."<sup>NIV</sup> In ancient times it was a common practice for masters to put one servant in

| If God has given you more than your

charge of all the household business. The *servant* described as *faithful and wise* parallels the disciples, who were given unprecedented authority by Jesus, sharing in his very ministry. Yet it also describes those appointed to positions of leadership in the church who should be found faithfully carrying out

neighbors, dedicate it to Christ, and realize that you are only a steward of that which God has given you— some day you will have to give an account for every penny you spent.

*Billy Graham*

their duties when Jesus (*the master*) returns. Such activity explains how Jesus' followers can "watch" and "be ready." These servants will be given great rewards.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.

**2:6-7** And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.<sup>NIV</sup> In the present world—the world of the Thessalonians and the world today—two events are happening simultaneously. First, *the secret power of lawlessness is already at work* although it may not be clearly seen for what it is. The work that the Antichrist, the man of lawlessness, will do is already going on. "Secret" means something hidden, behind the scenes, but something God will reveal. "Lawlessness" is the hidden, subtle, underlying force from which all sin springs. Second, even though this power is working, so is the one who is restraining it. Civilization still has a modicum of decency through law enforcement, education, science, and reason. Although we are horrified by criminal acts, the world has yet to see the real horror of complete lawlessness. This will happen when *the one who now holds it back . . . is taken out of the way*.

Who "holds back" the man of lawlessness? It seems that the Thessalonians knew that answer (*now you know what is holding him back*) from Paul's previous teaching. So Paul referred to it here but did not repeat it. Commentators have considered three possibilities for the identity of this "restrainer": (1) government and law, which help to curb evil; (2) the ministry and activity of the church and the effects of the gospel; (3) the Holy Spirit. The Bible is not clear on the identity of this restrainer, only that he will not restrain forever. Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed and will do his evil work (as described in **2:3-4**). Why will God allow this evil man to act with unrestrained wickedness? To show people and nations their own sinfulness and to show them by bitter experience the true alternative to the lordship of Christ. People totally without God can act no better than vicious animals. Lawlessness, to a certain extent, is already going on,



but the man of lawlessness has not yet come; he will *be revealed at the proper time*—that is, in God's time. Believers should not fear this time when the restraint is removed—God is far stronger than the man of lawlessness, and he will save his people.

**2:8** Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.<sup>NLT</sup> After the one who restrains rampant evil is removed, *then the man of lawlessness will be revealed*. For a period of time, he will have great power and act with notorious evil (as noted in **2:2-4**). Just as this man of lawlessness will be revealed in God's timing, however, so he will also be destroyed. There will be an end to this man's evil. Indeed, when *the Lord Jesus* returns, he *will consume [the Antichrist] with the breath of his mouth*. This picture comes from **Isaiah 11:4**: "He will rule against the wicked and destroy them with the breath of his mouth" (NLT). The picture of Christ "consuming" this powerful evil man with a mere "breath" shows that between God and Satan there is no contest. No matter how powerful this evil man may become, he is no more than a flame to be blown out by the breath of the Lord.

A further picture is seen in the description that the man of lawlessness will be destroyed *by the splendor of [Christ's second] coming*. As a mere breath renders the Antichrist powerless, so the very appearance of Christ on the scene will ruin him. John describes this future appearance of Christ:

- *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (**Revelation 19:11-16** NIV)*

Christ's title in this passage in Revelation indicates God's sovereignty. Most of the world will be worshiping the beast, the Antichrist, whom they will believe has all power and authority. Then suddenly out of heaven will ride Christ—the King of kings and Lord of lords—and his army of angels. His entrance will signal the end of the false powers

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

## 2. What's the difference between the rapture and the second coming?

The rapture is the actual taking away of Christians out of the world. They do not experience God's wrath that is coming on the earth. Believers simply

disappear from the face of the earth. The second coming is when Jesus actually physically appears to the entire world and brings judgment against the Anti-Christ and his allies. There is difference of opinions as to whether the rapture and second coming happen at the same time or if they are separated by time and events.

***Pretribulationists* would say that this "gathering of the elect" refers to the gathering of Jewish saints (also as in [24:22](#)), not the church. The "rapture" (taking believers to heaven) occurred before the Tribulation and concerned only the church.**

***Midtribulationists* would say that this verse refers to the rapture and that it identifies both the church and the Jewish saints. This event will occur in the middle of the Tribulation, with the outpouring of God's wrath on the world occurring in the last half of that period.**

***Posttribulationists* would say that the rapture and revelation are a single event, and this pictures the only return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation. There, as here, he will come to gather his saints (the "elect") and to judge unbelievers.**

3. When Jesus says "the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him", what are the kind of circumstances do you think would cause us not to be expecting Jesus to show up.

It's possible that we could be enjoying life so well, that we put God on the back burner of our lives and begin to think we can make it alright without giving God our all. The everyday stresses and blessings of life could squeeze God out of our hearts. At the other extreme, things could be going so badly, that we may have lost hope that God is going to show up anymore.

4. What do you think Jesus means when he says "keep watch"?

Keep watch is Jesus way of saying for us to be active in our spiritual preparation as we wait to meet God. We're not going to a place and passively

wait for Jesus' return. We are to be busy actively expecting his return while doing the common everyday things of life.

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## **VIGILANCE**

**Jesus urged his followers to be ready and waiting for his return. Why is this spiritual preparation so important in each believer's life?**

*Spiritual preparation is commanded by God.* Jesus' purpose in telling about his return is not to stimulate predictions and calculations about the date, but to warn us to be prepared. Will you be ready? The only safe choice is to obey him today ([Matthew 24:46](#)).

*Spiritual preparation is active.* Jesus asks us to spend the time of waiting taking care of his people and doing his work here on earth, both within the church and outside it. This is the best way to prepare for Christ's return.

*Spiritual preparation is focused on Christ's coming.* Knowing that Christ's return will be sudden and unexpected should motivate us always to be prepared. We are not to live irresponsibly— sitting and waiting, doing nothing; seeking self-serving pleasure; using his tarrying as an excuse not to do God's work of building his kingdom; developing a false security based on precise calculations of events; or letting our curiosity about the end times divert us from doing God's work.

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5. If the rapture took place, and you were left behind, what type of feelings would go through your mind? Who would you go looking for?

**I would have great regret and sorrow. There would be feelings of failure, embarrassment and thoughts of suicide to keep from facing others. In my case, I'd be more wanting to hide from others who knew me, than to go actively seeking others out.**

6. What's the danger for the person who voluntarily chooses to backslide but continues to come to church?

The danger is that we can deceive ourselves and become comfortable with our sin while sitting in church. We can even think that God is pleased with us, after all we did confess the sin last night even though we plan to engage in the same sin the next day. We become convince that God makes an exception to our sin, because of our presence in worship or because of the service that we give.

We find this passage in Hebrews

### **Hebrews 6:4-6 (NIV)**

<sup>4</sup> It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age,

<sup>6</sup> if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

*It is impossible for people who have professed to be Christians and have experienced all of the beautiful gifts described in these verses, then have turned away from Christ to turn around and repent again since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. It is impossible because these people show contempt for Christ through their deliberate actions. It would be like personally crucifying Christ again. Many have argued whether someone who turns away from Christ can be restored to Christ. Some point to this passage to prove that a backslider cannot be restored. But "backsliders" are not the subject here. This passage refers to people who walk with Christ for a while and then deliberately turn around and walk the other direction, rejecting Christ. [Hebrews 10:26](#) says, "For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (NRSV). These people can never be restored because they will not want to be restored. They have chosen to harden their hearts against Christ. It is not impossible for God to forgive them; rather, it is impossible for them to be forgiven because they won't repent of their sins.*

*In the final analysis, having a debate about the meaning of these verses should not be a priority for churches today. What matters most is the warning against apostasy, and the warning must be taken seriously. The passage describes people in our churches who act like and seem to be Christians, but who have not truly believed. When those assumed to be believers turn away, the debate may take place afterward, "Were they originally believers or not?" But people reading these words must heed the warning, not just debate the issue. *Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Hebrews.**

The Bible also teaches that the more truth that we know, the more truth we are responsible for keeping. The backslider in church is constantly ignoring God's call for

repentance and is learning more truth that is not being applied. The more we know, the more we will be held accountable for at the judgment.

7. Do you think it would have been more helpful if God told us when the second coming would take place as oppose to giving us signs which indicates the second coming is near?

**Probably not. The temptation would be for people to wait until the final moments to forsake their sin and attempt to get right with God. There are many who follow Christ out of fear of hell, rather than our of love for God which produces joyful and willing obedience.**

## **Thessalonians 2 The Man of Lawlessness**

<sup>1</sup> Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, <sup>2</sup> not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. <sup>3</sup> Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness<sup>[a]</sup> is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. <sup>4</sup> He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

### **COMMENTARY**

#### ***PAUL PREDICTS THE COMING OF THE ANTICHRIST / [2:1-12](#)***

***When Paul first wrote to the Thessalonians, they were in danger of losing hope in the Second Coming. Then they shifted to the opposite extreme—some of them thought that Jesus would return at any minute. Paul tried to restore the balance by describing certain events that would occur before Christ's return.***

After the introductory prayer ([1:11-12](#)) is the main body of this letter. It seems that some of the Thessalonian believers had latched onto wrong teaching regarding Christ's second coming ([2:1-3](#)) and what would happen in the world before he returned. Paul had already taught them much when he was with them and had explained more in his first letter ([1 Thessalonians 4-5](#)). This letter tells of a time of great rebellion against God led by a man of lawlessness (the Antichrist). God will remove all the restraints on evil before he brings his final judgment.

[2:1-2](#) Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.<sup>NIV</sup> This introduces the main topic of this letter and Paul's reason for writing to these brothers in the faith in Thessalonica. He had already taught them concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him. Paul's first letter answered questions regarding the believers who had died, for there was concern that they had missed out on heaven. Another concern was that the expectation of Christ's return was causing some to stop working and just to wait. So Paul's first letter explained that Jesus would come suddenly ([1 Thessalonians 5:1-4](#)) and that believers who had already died would rise out of their graves to meet him while those on earth would be "caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" ([1 Thessalonians 4:17](#) NLT). In [2:1](#) Paul states that believers will be "gathered to him." Paul used episyntagogue, a word also used in [Hebrews 10:25](#), where it refers to an assembly "meeting" for worship. Jesus also expressed his desire to "gather" his people ([Matthew 23:37](#); [Luke 13:34](#)).

Apparently Paul had heard further questions from these believers, so he added more details about what would happen at Christ's second coming. Also, he knew that persecution was taking its toll on the believers, spiritually and physically (see [1 Thessalonians 1:6](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:4-7](#)).

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### LIFE APPLICATION

#### BE READY

Before Christ's second coming there will be great suffering and trouble. Evil will not prevail, however, because Christ will return to judge all people. The emphasis, like Jesus' teaching (see [Mark 13](#)), is the need for each person to prepare for Christ's return by living right day by day. If we are ready, we won't have to be concerned about the preceding

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**events or the timing of Christ's return because God controls all the events. If we are prepared, we can rest in God's control.**

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**Verse 2 describes a supposed prophecy, one of the false teachings about Christ's second coming. Some were saying that the day of the Lord has already come. "Day of the Lord," a common phrase in the Old Testament, refers to some extraordinary happening, whether a present event, an event in the near future, or the final period of history when God will defeat all the forces of evil (see, for example, [Isaiah 13:6, 9](#); [Ezekiel 30:3](#); [Amos 5:18, 20](#); [Obadiah 1:15](#); [Zephaniah 1:7, 14](#); [Zechariah 14:1](#); [Malachi 4:5](#)).**

**The description always pictures great suffering and punishment for sinners. In the book of Joel, for example, the phrase "day of the LORD" refers to a time of destruction to come upon the nation of Judah for its sin ([Joel 1:15](#); [2:1, 11, 31](#); [3:14](#)).**

**Loyalty to apostolic teaching, now permanently enshrined in the New Testament, is still the test of truth and the shield against error.**

**John Stott**

**Even when the "day of the Lord" refers to a present event, it always foreshadows the final Day of the Lord, to which this verse refers. This final event of history has two aspects to it: (1) the Last Judgment on all evil and sin; (2) the final reward for faithful believers. At that time God will intervene directly and dramatically in world affairs. Righteousness and truth will prevail, and Christ will judge sin and set up his eternal kingdom. First there will be much suffering, however, for evil will crescendo as the end draws near. Looking toward this final day, those who trust in the Lord should have hope because all who are faithful will be united forever with God.**

**False teachers were saying that Judgment Day had come. This caused many believers to wait expectantly for vindication and relief from suffering. These false teachers had claimed to have had some prophecy, report or letter from Paul and his companions apparently stating what the false teachers were teaching. Perhaps a letter, falsely attributed to Paul or his companions, had been sent or some prophecy or sermon had been given that taught that God's kingdom had already arrived. Some have even proposed that the Thessalonians had misunderstood a teaching in one of Paul's letters—a letter that no longer exists. Paul does not identify the source of this false teaching any further, so we do not know.**

**But when Christ didn't come, when suffering continued or intensified, the believers were becoming unsettled and alarmed. These words picture unsettled minds and a continuing state of anxiety. The believers certainly wondered if they**

*had somehow missed out or if they were not going to be saved. Paul assured them that they should not be worried by these false teachers and should listen to him instead. Paul's authority as an apostle and their relationship of trust with him should remind them that any teaching that contradicted what he had given them from the Lord would need to be questioned. Paul would not write a letter to a group of such teachers and tell them to spread the message—Paul had shown that he would answer the Thessalonians' questions directly himself or send one of his co-workers. (At the end of this letter, Paul would sign with his own hand to authenticate this document.)*

*Paul simply wrote that the Day of the Lord had not yet come; three other events would have to happen first: (1) The rebellion must occur ([2:3](#)); (2) the man of lawlessness must be revealed ([2:3](#)); (3) the restraint of lawlessness must be removed ([2:7](#)).*

**See Also:**

**[Chart: Trouble in the Church](#)**

**[2:3](#) Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.<sup>NIV</sup> The coming of the Lord will be "like a thief in the night" ([1 Thessalonians 5:2](#) NLT); even so, certain events will precede it. The final Day of the Lord will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed. This "rebellion" will be a massive revolt against God. It may begin among those who believe in God and spread through all people who refuse to accept Christ. Thus it will include Jews who abandon God and some members of the church whose faith is nominal. The word for "rebellion" (apostasia) can mean "departure." So some have interpreted this rebellion, or apostasy, to be the Rapture, but the Rapture is "being caught up" or "a gathering," not a departure. So the word refers to abandoning God or deserting one's faith in him. While rebellion against God seems widespread even today, as the coming of Christ nears, this apostasy and active opposition against God will intensify.**

**During the rebellion, a remarkable man will come into public view. He will have considerable power from Satan and will personify evil. Throughout history certain individuals have epitomized evil and been hostile to everything Christ stands for (see [1 John 2:18](#); [4:3](#); [2 John 1:7](#)). Certain Roman emperors fell into that category. The preface to the original King James Version of the Bible named the pope as the "Man of Sin." Hitler and Stalin have been named as well. These "antichrists" have lived in every generation, and others like them will continue to work their evil. Then, just before Christ's second coming, the man of lawlessness, a completely evil man, will arise. He will be Satan's tool, equipped**



with Satan's power ([2:9](#)). This man will oppose all law, both God's moral laws or absolutes as well as civil laws. Thus he will promote immorality and anarchy. Jesus warned, "And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold" ([Matthew 24:12](#) NRSV). This "lawless" man will be the Antichrist. He will be in the world, but then he will rise to power and notoriety, shown by the word "revealed." The book of Revelation speaks of a "beast," symbolizing the Antichrist. [Revelation 13:5-8](#) describes him:

- ***Then the beast was allowed to speak great blasphemies against God. And he was given authority to do what he wanted for forty-two months. And he spoke terrible words of blasphemy against God, slandering his name and all who live in heaven, who are his temple. And the beast was allowed to wage war against God's holy people and to overcome them. And he was given authority to rule over every tribe and people and language and nation. And all the people who belong to this world worshiped the beast. They are the ones whose names were not written in the Book of Life, which belongs to the Lamb who was killed before the world was made. (NLT)***

***The beast symbolizes the Antichrist—not Satan, but someone under Satan's power and control (see also [Revelation 16:13](#) and [19:20](#), where he is the second member of the false trinity). Satan's evil will culminate in a final Antichrist, a man who will focus all the powers of evil against Jesus Christ and his followers. Yet even this man, for all the power that he will attain, is ultimately doomed to destruction. (See [John 17:12](#), where Judas is called "the one headed for destruction.") [Revelation 20:10](#) describes it: "Then the Devil . . . was thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, joining the beast. . . . There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (NLT).***

***God still reigns, and his victory is certain. The evil man will be destroyed but not before God uses him. Although this man will be Satan's tool, God will still have everything under control, and events will proceed just as he has planned. During this time of great rebellion, the full extent of wickedness will be demonstrated and rebellion against God will be shown in all its horror and ugliness. Always, through all suffering throughout the ages, God is drawing people to himself, calling them to repent and turn to him. This will continue during those last days.***

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## LIFE APPLICATION

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## **GOD IS IN CONTROL**

***It is dangerous to label any person, group, or nation as the Antichrist or to try to predict the timing of Christ's return based on that assumption. Paul mentions the Antichrist not so we will try to identify that person specifically but so we might be ready for anything that threatens our faith or unity. If our faith is strong, we don't need to be afraid of what lies ahead because we know that this lawless person or being has already been defeated by God, no matter how powerful he becomes or how terrible our situation seems. God is in control, and he will be victorious over the Antichrist. Our task is to be prepared for Christ's return and to spread the gospel so that even more people will also be prepared.***

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**See Also:**

**[Chart: Great Rebellion](#)**

***2:4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.<sup>NIV</sup> As noted above, the book of Revelation prophesies that "all the people who belong to this world [will worship] the beast" ([Revelation 13:8](#) NLT). In order to be worshiped, this man of lawlessness will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped. This man will attempt, and even will seem to be able, to dethrone God and anything else that is worshiped (idols, nature, self) and then will demand worship and obedience to himself alone. The phrase "sets himself up in God's temple" should not be taken literally; instead, it pictures one who proclaims himself to be God and then takes God's place of residence and rule, claiming it for his own. Many have claimed such power throughout history (Roman rulers, various political leaders), and many have been pointed out by others as being the Antichrist, but this one human, yet to come, will be the final, decisive personification of lawlessness, evil, and rebellion against God. This one man will precede Christ's return.***

***This description of the man of lawlessness is similar to the description of Antiochus Epiphanes mentioned in [Daniel 11:36-37](#); he was responsible for the first "abomination of desolation." In 168 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificed a pig to Zeus on the sacred temple altar. This abominable act caused the temple to be abandoned (left desolate).***

***The second fulfillment occurred when Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple ([Mark 13:2](#)) came true. In A.D. 70, the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and desecrated the temple.***

***Some scholars say that a third fulfillment is yet to come. This "abomination of desolation" may look far forward to the end times and to the Antichrist. In the end times the Antichrist will commit the ultimate sacrilege by setting himself up in God's temple (perhaps having a statue erected) and ordering everyone to worship him. (See also [Revelation 13:14-15](#).)***

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8. Does the rapture have to take place before the Anti-Christ arrives on the scene? Why or why not?

**The answer to this question depends on which version of the rapture a person holds in answering the earlier question. One can make a biblical argument for each of the three views. If you focus in on this passage of Scripture it appears that the rise of the AntiChrist begins to take place before the rapture actually takes place**

9. What is God's purpose in telling us about the rapture and the second coming?

10. If someone said, "what can I do to truly be ready for the rapture, what would you tell them?"

## **Life-Sharing Lesson 3 “Jesus Comes With A Price Tag---The Price We Pay” Luke 1:26-39 Matthew 1:18-23**

### **1. What will Christmas cost you this year?**

It will cost extra money to serve as hosts for our family. It will cost some privacy, and probably some restless nights if I have to give up my bedroom. It will cost me changing my plans to get along with the others in the group.

### **Luke 1:26-39vToday's New International Version (TNIV) The Birth of Jesus Foretold**

**<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”**

**<sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”**

**<sup>34</sup> “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”**

**<sup>35</sup> The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called<sup>[a]</sup> the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail.”**

**<sup>38</sup> “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me according to your word.” Then the angel left her.**

### **COMMENTARY**

**1:26-27 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.<sup>NLT</sup> Six months after**

Gabriel delivered God's message to Zechariah ([1:11-20](#)), God sent the angel with another message, this time *to a virgin named Mary* who lived in *Nazareth, a village in Galilee*. The angel Gabriel had also appeared to the prophet Daniel more than five hundred years earlier ([Daniel 8:15-17](#); [9:21](#)). Each time Gabriel appeared, he brought important messages from God. This time was no exception.

Nazareth in Galilee, Joseph's and Mary's hometown, was a long way from Jerusalem, the center of Jewish life and worship. Located on a major trade route, Nazareth was frequently visited by Gentile merchants and Roman soldiers. Jesus was born in Bethlehem but grew up in Nazareth. Nevertheless, the people of Nazareth would reject him as the Messiah ([4:22-30](#)).

Mary was not a prophet or a priest; she was not in God's temple performing acts of service. Instead, she was simply a young woman who was living at home and planning her wedding, for *she was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph*. In ancient Jewish marriages, the word "engaged" (or "betrothed") had a different meaning than today. First, the two families would agree to the union and negotiate the betrothal, including a price for the bride that would be paid to the bride's father. Next, a public announcement would be made. At this point, the couple was "pledged." This is similar to engagement today, except that it was much more binding. At this point, even though the couple was not officially married, their relationship could be broken only through death or divorce. Sexual relations were not yet permitted. This second step lasted for a year. During that time, the couple would live separately, with their parents.

This waiting period would demonstrate the bride's purity. If she were found to be pregnant during that time, the marriage could be annulled. After this waiting time, the couple would be married and begin living together. What Mary was about to hear from the angel would have significant impact on her engagement.

In order that the body of Christ might be shown to be a real body, he was born of a woman; but in order that his Godhead might be made clear he was born of a virgin.

*Thomas Aquinas*

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### **LIFE APPLICATION**

#### **GOD'S CHOICES**

Mary was young, poor, female—all characteristics that, to the people of her day, would make her seem unusable by God for any major task.

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But God chose Mary for one of the most important acts of obedience he has ever demanded of anyone. You may feel that your ability, experience, or education makes you an unlikely candidate for God's service. Don't limit God's choices. He can use you if you trust him. Take him at his word.

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That Joseph was *a descendant of King David* is important for the movement of Joseph to Bethlehem ([2:1-4](#)) and for the fact that Jesus would be born into the royal line of David. (Although Joseph was not his father, Jesus would be considered in the royal line through the rights of adoption.)

[1:28-29](#) Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.<sup>NLT</sup> When Gabriel appeared to Mary, he called her a *favored woman*. She was favored because she would be a special recipient of God's grace. That the Lord was *with* Mary indicates that God would give her his help in the privilege and responsibility she was about to receive. While Zechariah had been terrified at Gabriel's very appearance ([1:12](#)), Mary was more fearful at the words Gabriel spoke. This young maiden from a small town was *confused and disturbed* as to why she was being greeted in such a way by this heavenly visitor.

[1:30-33](#) Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest."<sup>NKJV</sup> Gabriel repeated to Mary that she had *found favor with God* (see "favored woman" in previous verse). The words meant that Mary had become the recipient of favor bestowed on her by a superior—in this case, by God himself. It did not point out any special virtue in Mary—she was not sinless. Some have suggested that Mary was favored because of what she was in herself, that she had grace to bestow on others, and that she remained a virgin forever. However Scripture gives the opposite understanding. God chose Mary, blessed her, and she humbly accepted his call to be the mother of Jesus. Then she went on to have other children ([8:19](#); [Matthew 13:55-56](#); [Mark 6:3](#)).

The result of this favor came in God's choice of Mary to be the mother of Jesus. Gabriel explained that this child would grow in her womb, be born as all human children are born, and be named Jesus. This son *will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest*. The word "Son" was a designation of the Messiah. God would miraculously create a human child who would actually be *his* Son, the long-awaited Savior ([Genesis 49:10](#); [2 Samuel 7:9-16](#); [Psalm 2:7](#); [Isaiah 7:14](#); [9:1-7](#); [11:1-3](#)).



**Jesus**, a Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, was a common name meaning "Yahweh saves." Just as Joshua had led Israel into the Promised Land (see [Joshua 1:1-2](#)), so Jesus would lead his people into eternal life. The symbolism of Jesus' name was not lost on the people of his day, who took names seriously and saw them as a source of power. In Jesus' name people would be healed, demons would be banished, and sins would be forgiven.

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## **LIFE APPLICATION**

### **FAVOR WITH GOD**

God's favor does not automatically bring instant success or fame. His blessing on Mary, the honor of being the mother of the Messiah, would lead to much pain: her peers would ridicule her; her fiancé would consider leaving her; her son would be rejected and murdered. But through her son would come the world's only hope, and this is why Mary has been praised by countless generations as the young girl who "found favor with God." Mary's submission was part of God's plan to bring about salvation. If sorrow weighs you down and dims your hope, think of Mary and wait patiently for God to finish working out his plan.

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"And the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."<sup>NKJV</sup> Centuries earlier, God had promised David that his kingdom would last forever: "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" ([2 Samuel 7:16](#) NKJV). This promise was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, a direct descendant of David ([1:27](#)). "His father David" also means "his ancestor David." Jesus was born in the line of David and thus could be a king to *reign over the house of Jacob* (referring to God's people—initially understood to be the twelve tribes, but later revealed to be much more). His will be an eternal kingdom, a kingdom with *no end*. God had promised to continue the house (or dynasty) of David forever. David's earthly dynasty ended four centuries after his reign, but Jesus Christ, a direct descendant of David, was the ultimate fulfillment of this promise ([Acts 2:22-36](#)). Christ will reign for eternity—now in his spiritual kingdom and in heaven, and later, on earth, in the new Jerusalem ([Luke 1:30-33](#); [Revelation 21](#)).

[1:34](#) Mary asked the angel, "But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin."<sup>NLT</sup> Unlike Zechariah, who desired a sign as proof of the angel's words ([1:18](#)), Mary's

question displayed her faith. She merely asked how this miraculous event could occur because she was a *virgin*. She was engaged to be married and probably planned on having children. Engagements usually occurred when girls were in their early teens. Mary may have been as young as thirteen when this event took place. Her question reveals spiritual sensitivity—Mary understood that Gabriel was referring to a miracle child to be born while she was still a virgin, prior to her marriage to Joseph. She naturally wondered how this was going to occur.

The birth of Jesus to a virgin is a miracle that many people find difficult to believe. Some have said that the concept of a virgin birth was picked up from other ancient sources. However, this concept has no precedent in either Jewish or pagan stories. That Jesus would be conceived without sexual activity between a man and a woman, that he would be conceived by God's power, was never imagined—until it happened. Even the often-quoted Old Testament prophecy in [Isaiah 7:14](#), referring to a virgin giving birth, was interpreted as referring to a young woman of marriageable age who had never had children.

Others say that the reference to the Virgin Birth in Scripture is merely theological, not historical. But if the believers had intentionally made this up, they also caused all kinds of problems to go along with it, such as inviting the charge that Jesus was an illegitimate child.

Given such information, Luke would have been far better off *not* giving this information if he had been making it up. It would be too unbelievable. Luke reported it because it was true. Note these three facts: (1) Luke was a medical doctor, and he knew perfectly well how babies are made. It would have been just as hard for him to believe in a virgin birth as it is for people today, and yet he reported it as fact. (2) Luke was a painstaking researcher who based his Gospel on eyewitness accounts. Tradition holds that he talked with Mary about the events that he recorded in the first two chapters. This is Mary's story, not a fictional invention. (3) Christians and Jews, who worship God as the Creator of the universe, should believe that God has the power to create a child in a virgin's womb.

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### ***LIFE APPLICATION***

#### **JESUS UNDERSTANDS**

**Why is the Virgin Birth important to the Christian faith? Jesus Christ, God's Son, had to be free from the sinful nature passed on to all other human beings by Adam. Because Jesus was born of a woman, he was a human being; but as the Son of God, Jesus was born without any trace of human sin. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. Because**

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Jesus lived as a man, human beings know that he fully understands their experiences and struggles ([Hebrews 4:15-16](#)). Because he is God, he has the power and authority to deliver people from sin ([Colossians 2:13-15](#)). People can tell Jesus all their thoughts, feelings, and needs. He has been where they are, and he has the ability to help.

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Jesus' miracles, transfiguration, and resurrection were all actual, historical events that defy explanation. They were acts of God in a human world. Jesus' birth was no exception. Christians' faith, however, rests not on the Virgin Birth—indeed two of the four Gospels don't even mention it. Faith rests on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not on his virgin birth. Paul explained, "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" ([1 Corinthians 15:14](#) NIV). However, the Virgin Birth reveals two important facts: (1) In Jesus, God began a "new creation," for through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, sin's power would be broken. In Jesus, people can come to God for a personal relationship and be freed from the power of sin. (2) Jesus was God's Son before he was even conceived in Mary's womb. He did not become God's Son at a later time. He was not accepted as God's Son because of good behavior or obedience. He was not a man promoted to that position. God's Son was born God's Son. In the birth of Jesus, God himself became human and entered the world—for fallen human beings! Therein lies the miracle! People are not meant to explain it, prove it, or ignore it—they are meant to believe it and worship God, who made it happen.

[1:35](#) The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby born to you will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God."<sup>NLT</sup> Gabriel explained how Mary would become pregnant and yet remain a virgin. *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you*—these words picture the powerful presence of God (the same word is used in the Transfiguration accounts to describe the overshadowing cloud, see [9:34](#); [Matthew 17:5](#); [Mark 9:7](#)). This would indeed be a special baby, for he *will be holy*. Jesus was born without the sin that had entered the world through Adam. He was born holy, just as Adam had been created sinless. Believers must be careful not to explain that Jesus was sinless simply because he did not have a human father. To do so would mean that Mary would have been sinless, which she was not.

Jesus' sinlessness rests not on his miraculous birth to a virgin girl but on the basis of his position with God. Through the birth of Jesus, God himself entered the world in human form. This is the miracle!

If Jesus Christ were not true God, how could he *help* us?  
If he is not true man, how could he help *us*?

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

In [1:32](#), the angel said Jesus would be called "the Son of the Highest"; here he adds that *he will be called the Son of God*. This passage is very key to the theology of who Jesus was. The title "Son of God" shows that he has a special role in God's purpose and that he is the true Son of David, the expected Messiah. The mention of the Holy Spirit gives the name greater significance, showing that God, through the Spirit, has a special role in creating this child. The connection of "Son of God" to Son of the Most High states Jesus' divinity. In contrast to Adam, who disobeyed God, Jesus would completely obey his Father, enabling him to face sin's consequences in sinners' place and make them acceptable to God ([Romans 5:14-19](#)). This Son would be born totally because of God's initiative and by his grace. Jesus came as a gift from God.

[1:36-37](#) "Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."<sup>NIV</sup> Mary did not ask for a sign, but it seems that Gabriel gave her one by explaining that Mary's relative Elizabeth was also pregnant as the result of God's grace. Gabriel gave Mary a person to whom she could go for support during what could prove to be a difficult time for Mary as she humbly fulfilled God's will. This also illustrated for Mary the fact that *nothing is impossible with God*. God took a barren woman who was past childbearing age and caused her to become pregnant. God took a virgin and caused a child to grow in her womb. With God, nothing is impossible (see [18:27](#); [Genesis 18:14](#); [Jeremiah 32:17, 27](#); [Matthew 17:20](#); [19:26](#); [Mark 10:27](#)).

[1:38](#) Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.<sup>NRSV</sup> God's announcement of a child to be born was met with various responses throughout Scripture. Sarah, Abraham's wife, laughed ([Genesis 18:9-15](#)). Zechariah doubted ([1:18](#)). By contrast, Mary submitted, knowing that she was merely *the servant of the Lord*. She believed the angel's words and agreed to bear the child, even under humanly impossible circumstances, even with difficult social consequences

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2. What price is Mary being asked to pay to do the will of God for her life just before the first Christmas?

**A young unmarried girl who became pregnant risked disaster. Unless the father of the child agreed to marry her, she would probably remain unmarried**

for life. If her own father rejected her, she could be forced into begging or prostitution in order to earn her living. She risked losing Joseph, her family, and her reputation. And her story about being made pregnant by the Holy Spirit risked her being considered crazy as well. Still Mary said, despite the risks, *"Let it be with me according to your word."* When Mary said that, she didn't know about the tremendous opportunity she would have. She took the risk of faith; she didn't consult with anyone else; she didn't take time to weigh the pros and cons. She only knew that God was asking her to serve him, and she willingly obeyed. Believers need Mary's kind of trust and responsiveness. Too many wait to see the bottom line before offering themselves to God. God wants willing servants.

3. What are some of the prices we have to pay to be faithful followers of Christ?

**We are called to let go of our plans for our lives, called to let go of people, let go of careers, let go of possessions, let go of desires, let go of opportunities, and even let go of our lives. Nothing is to take precedent over God's plans for us.**

4. How comfortable would you have been saying to the angel, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me according to your word."

**Even knowing what happened to Mary, I found it difficult to utter those words and completely mean it. Although I am striving to get there, I am not at the place of complete abandonment to God. I still want to have some control and say in where I live and what I give up. I think I may be too comfortable with where I am and reluctant to consider alternatives. I know that God is still ultimately in charge of what happens but there is still too much of me in me.**

### **Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son Matthew 1:18-23**

<sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about<sup>[a]</sup>: 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. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,<sup>[b]</sup> because he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”<sup>[c]</sup> (which means “God with us”).

### COMMENTARY

**1:18** This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit.<sup>NIV</sup> In **1:16**, Matthew had stated that Mary was Jesus' mother, but Joseph was not his father. This needed some explanation, for, taken at face value, it sounded immoral.

Jesus' mother Mary *was pledged to be married to Joseph*. Modern readers need to understand the traditions involved in ancient Jewish marriages. First, the two families would agree to the union and negotiate the betrothal, including a price for the bride that would be paid to the bride's father. Next, a public announcement would be made. At this point, the couple was "pledged." This is similar to engagement today, except that it was much more binding. At this point, even though the couple was not officially married, their relationship could be broken only through death or divorce. Sexual relations were not yet permitted. This second step lasted for a year. During that time, the couple would live separately, with their parents. This waiting period would demonstrate the bride's purity. If she were found to be pregnant during that time, the marriage could be annulled. Otherwise, the couple would be married and begin living together.

Because Mary and Joseph were pledged to be married, they had not yet had sexual relations (the meaning of the phrase "before they came together"). Yet she *was found to be with child*. Mary was pledged and pregnant, and Joseph knew that the child was not his own. Mary's apparent unfaithfulness carried a severe social stigma. According to Jewish civil law, Joseph had the right to divorce her. The law also explained that the penalty for unchastity was death by stoning (**Deuteronomy 22:23-24**), although this was rarely carried out at this time. That Mary was "found" to be pregnant indicates that she may not have

immediately told Joseph, but had waited until her condition could be seen. This probably occurred after her return from visiting her pregnant cousin Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist) with whom she had stayed for three months (see [Luke 1:39-56](#)).

Removing any doubt of Mary's purity, Matthew explained that Mary was pregnant *through the Holy Spirit*. During Old Testament times, the Spirit acted on God's initiative (for example, see [Genesis 1:2](#)). Thus, the divine initiative in Mary's conception was made clear. [Luke 1:26-38](#) records this part of the story. When the angel announced to Mary that she was chosen to be the mother of the promised Messiah, Mary asked the obvious question: "How will this be . . . since I am a virgin?" ([Luke 1:34](#) NIV). The angel's amazing answer both surprised and reassured Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" ([Luke 1:35](#) NIV). Mary humbly accepted the angel's words, "I am the Lord's servant. . . . May it be to me as you have said" ([Luke 1:38](#) NIV). Surely Mary's mind must have tumbled with concern over how Joseph would respond. She chose to trust the Lord, however, and the Lord took care of Joseph, as we see in the following verses.

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### **LIFE APPLICATION**

#### **FULLY HUMAN, FULLY GOD**

Why is the virgin birth important to the Christian faith? Jesus Christ, God's Son, had to be free from the sinful nature passed on to all other human beings by Adam. Because Jesus was born of a woman, he was a human being; but as the Son of God, Jesus was born without any trace of human sin. Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. The infinite, unlimited God took on the limitations of humanity so he could live and die for the salvation of all who believe in him.

Because Jesus lived as a man, we know that he fully understands our experiences and struggles ([Hebrews 4:15-16](#)). Because he is God, he has the power and authority to deliver us from sin ([Colossians 2:13-15](#)). We can tell Jesus all our thoughts, feelings, and needs. He has been where we are now, and he has the ability to help.

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**1:19** Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.<sup>NRSV</sup> Joseph was called Mary's *husband*, even though they were not yet officially married. However, they were "pledged" (see explanation on [1:18](#)), which was as legally binding as marriage. Joseph had a difficult decision to make. Being a *righteous man*, he did not want to go against God's laws. To marry Mary would have been an admission of guilt when he was not guilty. To have a public divorce would have exposed Mary to *public disgrace*, and apparently Joseph's compassion would not allow him to expose her to public humiliation. Therefore, he chose the option to have a private divorce before two witnesses and *dismiss her quietly*. This way he could keep his reputation, while still showing compassion.

Evidently, Mary had not explained her visit from the angel to Joseph at this time. Joseph only resolved to dismiss Mary after her condition had become visible ([1:18](#)). And the angel's words in [1:20](#) indicate that Joseph did not know the Holy Spirit's role in Mary's pregnancy. So, Joseph thought he had only two options: divorce Mary publicly or dismiss her quietly, but God had another option for Joseph.

God often shows us that we have more options than we think. Although Joseph seemed to be doing the right thing by breaking the engagement, God helped him make the best decision. We should always seek God's wisdom, especially when our decisions affect others.

**1:20** But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."<sup>NRSV</sup> As Joseph began to move forward on his decided course of action, God intervened. The conception of Jesus Christ was a supernatural event beyond human logic or reasoning. Because of this, God sent angels to help certain people understand the significance of what was happening (see [2:13, 19](#); [Luke 1:11, 26](#); [2:9](#)). In this case, an angel *appeared to him in a dream*. Dreams function in the Bible as a means to convey God's message to people. They occur in three major portions of the Bible: [Genesis 20–41](#); [Daniel 1–7](#); [Matthew 1–2](#). Based on [Numbers 12:6](#), Jews believed that God communicated his will in dreams. In Matthew, dreams are used repeatedly to guide people ([2:12-13, 22](#); [27:19](#)). God used dreams in a special way during these key times. We can benefit spiritually from our dreams, but there is no certainty that they are authoritative messages from God.

Angels are spiritual beings, created by God, who help carry out his work on earth. They bring God's messages to people ([Luke 1:26](#)), protect God's people ([Daniel 6:22](#)), offer encouragement ([Genesis 16:7ff.](#)), give guidance ([Exodus 14:19](#)), carry out punishment ([2 Samuel 24:16](#)), patrol the earth ([Zechariah 1:9-14](#)), and fight the forces of evil ([2 Kings 6:16-18](#); [Revelation 20:1-2](#)). Both good

and evil angels exist ([Revelation 12:7](#)), but because evil angels are allied with the devil, or Satan, they have considerably less power and authority than good angels. Eventually the main role of angels will be to offer continuous praise to God ([Revelation 7:11-12](#)). The angel who appeared to Joseph was one of God's messengers, sent to correct Joseph in his dealings with Mary.

The angel called Joseph *son of David*, signifying that Joseph had a special role in a special event. The angel explained that Joseph was to take Mary as his wife, for the child was to be in the royal line of David. Joseph, as "son of David," would establish that royal lineage. Joseph was not to *be afraid* to take Mary as his wife—no matter what the social repercussions might be. Of course, she was already his wife because they were pledged, but the angel told Joseph that instead of divorcing Mary, he should complete the marriage process and take her home as his wife. Mary had committed no sin. Instead, the angel explained that *the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit*. God himself had caused this pregnancy, and the child would be very special—God's Son. He would also be the fulfillment of prophecy, as described in the next verse.

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### LIFE APPLICATION

#### MAKING GOOD DECISIONS

When facing big decisions, some people freeze with fright. What if I decide wrong? What if I miss God's will? What if . . . ?

To make good decisions, first take all these worries and put them under God's promise: God cares for you, watches over you, and guides your steps.

Joseph came to the best decision he could, but God had other plans and made them clear. Most of our decisions will not be overruled by angels, but that's no reason for lack of confidence. To make good decisions, pray, evaluate all the options, talk with trusted friends, then act in faith. God is with you, every step.

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[1:21](#) "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."<sup>NKJV</sup> The angel's message included telling Joseph what was to come and what he should do. There seems to have been no doubt that Joseph would hear and obey. Mary would give birth to a baby boy. Joseph was to name the child *Jesus*. "Jesus" is the Greek form of "Joshua." The name means "the Lord saves." Jesus' name identified him as the one who would bring God's promised salvation. The baby Jesus would be born to *save His*

*people from their sins.* From the very start, the book explains, to a Jewish audience, that Jesus would not save the people from Rome or from tyranny, nor would he set up an earthly kingdom. Instead, Jesus would save people from sin. The words "his people" form a mystery to be unfolded in the pages of Matthew's Gospel. Who were "his people," and how would Jesus save them from their sins? The answers to these questions will be found in the unfolding story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

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## LIFE APPLICATION

### A NEW LIFE

Jesus came to earth to save us because we can't save ourselves from sin and its consequences. No matter how good we are, we can't eliminate our alienation from God. Only Jesus can do that. Jesus didn't come to help people save themselves; he, and he alone, came to be their Savior from the power and penalty of sin. Thank Jesus for his death on the cross for your sin, and then ask him to take control of your life. Your new life begins at that moment.

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[1:22-23](#) All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us."<sup>NIV</sup> Throughout his Gospel, Matthew delighted in quoting or alluding to Old Testament Scripture to show how Jesus fulfilled it. Jesus was to be called *Immanuel*—which means "God with us," as predicted by Isaiah the prophet ([Isaiah 7:14](#)). Jesus was God in the flesh; thus, God was literally "with us." The point was not that Jesus would ever bear the name "Immanuel," but rather this name described Jesus' role—to bring God's presence to people. Jesus Christ, who was himself God ([John 1:1](#)), brought God to earth in his human body—living, eating, teaching, healing, dying. Matthew closed his Gospel with the same promise of "God with us" because, before his ascension, Jesus promised his followers, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" ([Matthew 28:20](#) NKJV). Perhaps not even Isaiah understood how far-reaching the meaning of "Immanuel" would be.

Matthew quoted [Isaiah 7:14](#) probably from the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament (the Septuagint). In [Isaiah 7:14](#), "virgin" is translated from a Hebrew word used for an unmarried woman old enough to be married, one who is sexually mature (see [Genesis 24:43](#); [Exodus 2:8](#); [Psalm 68:25](#); [Proverbs 30:19](#); [Song of Solomon 1:3](#); [6:8](#)). Some have compared this young woman to Isaiah's



young wife, who gave him a son ([Isaiah 8:1-4](#)). This is not likely because she had already borne a child, Shear-Jashub, and her second child was not named Immanuel. Some believe that Isaiah's first wife may have died, and so this is his second wife. It is more likely that this prophecy had a double fulfillment. (1) A young woman from the house of Ahaz who was not married would marry and have a son. Before three years passed (one year for pregnancy and two for the child to be old enough to talk), the two invading kings would be destroyed. (2) [Matthew 1:23](#) quotes [Isaiah 7:14](#) to show a further fulfillment of this prophecy in that a virgin named Mary conceived and bore a son, Immanuel, the Christ.

[1:24](#) When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.<sup>NRSV</sup> The angel had spoken to Joseph "in a dream" ([1:20](#)), so immediately *when Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him*. Joseph had been faced with a difficult choice after discovering that Mary was pregnant. Although he knew that taking Mary as his wife might be humiliating, Joseph chose to obey the angel's command to marry her. He did not hesitate. The decision was no longer difficult, for he simply did what he knew God wanted him to do. His action revealed four admirable qualities: (1) righteousness ([1:19](#)), (2) discretion and sensitivity ([1:19](#)), (3) responsiveness to God ([1:24](#)), and (4) self-discipline ([1:25](#)).

Apparently Joseph broke with tradition and *took her as his wife*, even though the customary one-year waiting period had not passed. However, Joseph did as God commanded and "completed" their marriage by taking Mary to live with him. No matter what the social stigma, no matter what the local gossips thought about this move, Joseph knew he was following God's command in marrying and caring for Mary during her pregnancy.

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### **LIFE APPLICATION**

#### **"BUT WHAT WILL EVERYONE THINK?"**

Joseph changed his plans quickly after learning about God's plan for his life from the angel. He obeyed God and proceeded with the marriage plans. Although others may have disapproved of his decision, Joseph went ahead with what he knew was right. Sometimes we avoid doing what is right because of what others might think. Like Joseph, we must choose to obey God rather than seek the approval of others.

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**1:25** But had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.<sup>NRSV</sup> To squelch any doubts about the conception and birth of Jesus while Mary was still a virgin, Matthew explained that Joseph *had no marital relations with her* until after the son was born. These words also set aside the notion that Mary lived her whole life as a virgin; after Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary consummated their marriage, and Jesus had several half brothers (**12:46**). Two of Jesus' half brothers figured in the early church—James, leader of the church in Jerusalem, and Jude, writer of the book that bears his name.

Traditionally, baby boys were circumcised and named eight days after birth. Luke records that "on the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus" (**Luke 2:21** NIV). Joseph did everything that God had told him through the angel (**1:21**), naming the baby his God-given name: *Jesus*.

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5. At first in verses 18 & 19 what price was Joseph being asked to pay to accept Jesus for the first Christmas, and what price was he willing to pay?

**Joseph was being asked to accept a wife that had been unfaithful to him and to provide for a child that was not his. He was being asked to give up his reputation for being a righteous man. He was not willing to pay that price.**

6. Why didn't God tell Joseph in advance what the Lord was doing in Mary's life?

**One of the mysteries of God is that God calls us all to live by faith. At some point, we have all wanted God to give us an early warning about something that was going to happen or to give us supernatural insight into certain situations. God simply usually does not do this. God tends to force us to come to him in prayer after a situation has arisen. Rarely does God reveal to us how God is at work in another's life. We simply have to take it by faith that God is at work.**

7. Why is it at times that God seems to care so little for our reputation among others? (For example, God had to have known the things people would have been saying behind Mary and Joseph's back about the child being born so soon)

**When we become God's children, our reputation is found in Jesus Christ. God is more interested in making us like Jesus than he is in keeping us in good standing with the opinions of others. Sometimes God will require us to do things that others think are crazy or just plain stupid. God has a different track for us to follow than the one the world has for us. Reputations are short lived anyways. People are going to talk about us and spread rumors about us, because the same was done to Jesus.**

8. Why didn't God just sit down Mary & Joseph and give them both the same news at the same time?

**There probably would have been a good chance that the two of them would have tried to make the situation happen by taking matters in their own hands. Instead of there being a supernatural birth, we may have ended up with an ordinary birth that would have thwarted God's plan for their lives. Jesus had to have been born of a virgin. God is not obligated to explain his plan in detail to anyone. When God asked Abraham to leave, his country, God didn't tell him where he was to go only "go to a land that I will show you." God was working something in both Mary's and Joseph's lives in doing things in the way that he did. Mary became an example for us on how to completely abandon yourself to God's will despite the circumstances. Joseph became an example to us that all the facts in the world can still lead us to the wrong conclusion when God is at work in a person's life. We may have to lay down our pride, our ego, and our own righteousness to be obedient to God. We would not have gotten these messages if God had of told them both what was going to happen at the same time. So God actually had us in mind as well in the way God went about revealing His plan to Mary and Joseph.**

9. How is a Christmas a reminder of our sins and brokenness before God?

The angels made it clear that the purpose in Jesus coming to us was to save us from our sins. A savior was coming into the world. There would have been no need for a Savior if there had been no sin and alienation from God.

**John 3:16-18 Today's New International Version (TNIV)<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.**

### COMMENTARY

**[3:16](#) "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."<sup>NKJV</sup> The entire gospel comes to a focus in this verse. God's love is not just to a certain group of individuals—it is offered to *the world*.**

God's love is not static or self-centered; it reaches out and draws others in. Here God's actions defined the pattern of true love, the basis for all love relationships—when you love someone, you are willing to sacrifice dearly for that person. Sacrificial love expresses itself without assurance that the love will be returned in kind. The timing of that love was highlighted by Paul's words, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" ([Romans 5:8](#) NIV).

Sacrificial love is also practical in seeking ways to meet the needs of those who are loved. In God's case, that love was infinitely practical, since it set out to rescue those who had no hope of rescuing themselves. God paid dearly to save us; *He gave His only begotten Son*, the highest price he could pay. The term translated "only begotten" (monogene) expresses Jesus' unique value and position as God's only Son. The salvation God offers freely was costly to him.

This offer is made to *whoever believes*. To "believe" is more than intellectual agreement that Jesus is God. It means putting our trust and confidence in him that he alone can save us. It is to put Christ in charge of our present plans and eternal destiny. Believing is both trusting his words as reliable and relying on him for the power to change.

Jesus accepted our punishment and paid the price for our sins so that we would *not perish*. *Perish* does not mean physical death, for we all will eventually die. Here it refers to eternity apart from God. Those who believe will receive the alternative, the new life that Jesus bought for us—*everlasting life* with God.

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## **LIFE APPLICATION**

### **THE CHOICE**

[John 3:16](#), along with the rest of the New Testament, assumes that apart from God's intervention, people perish (see [Mark 4:38](#); [Luke 13:3, 5](#); [John 10:28](#); [Romans 2:12](#); [1 Corinthians 1:18](#); [2 Peter 3:9](#)). The word adds a sense of hopelessness to the fact of dying—"to perish" is to come to a dead end. In this verse, escape from the tragic fate of perishing is promised to those who believe in God's Son. Instead of perishing, they will have "eternal life," or "life in the ageless age." Perishing is not an end to be desired, for it removes from the picture any vestige of what we could call life. But this verse makes it clear that those who refuse to choose Christ and the life he offers have chosen to perish. Eternal life awaits our decision.

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One of the distinctives of John's Gospel is its awareness of the reader. John often includes reflective and explanatory statements that help us understand events more clearly. For instance, in [2:17](#) John explained the insight given to the disciples about Jesus' actions and words in the temple. Further on, in [2:23-24](#), John summarized Jesus' general ongoing relationship with people. As an eyewitness, John wanted us to know not only the facts of God's human visit to earth, but also the eventual lessons and conclusions that came to light from those facts.

With this characteristic of John's Gospel in mind, some commentators have concluded that Jesus' direct speaking stopped with [3:15](#), and that John added the following inspired words ([3:16-21](#)) by way of further explanation. Either way, no other verse in all the Bible so encapsulates the basic message of the gospel: God so dearly loved all the people in the world that he gave his only Son so that we could have eternal life.

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## **LIFE APPLICATION**

### **LIVING FOREVER DOESN'T SOUND SO GREAT . . .**

Some people are repulsed by the idea of eternal life because their lives are miserable with pain, hunger, poverty, or disappointment. But eternal life is not an extension of a person's mortal life; eternal life is God's life

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embodied in Christ given to all believers now as a guarantee that they will live forever. Not only will we be changed, almost everything else will also be changed ([Revelation 21:1-4](#)). In eternal life there is no death, sickness, enemy, evil, or sin. When we don't know Christ, we make choices as though this life is all we have. In reality, this life is just the introduction to eternity. Receive this new life by faith and begin to evaluate all that happens from an eternal perspective.

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Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – John.

10. Where do we find Christmas in the passage above?

**We find Christmas in God taking the initiative to send a Savior into the world that will allow for anyone who wants to be saved, to be saved. Christmas is about being reconciled to God. Reconciliation to God is at the heart of Christmas.**



## **Life-Sharing Lesson 4 “At Christmas, Expect The Unexpected” Matthew 2:7-18**

1. What’s the most unexpected thing to ever happen to you during the Christmas season?

***As a child, on our way to GA for Christmas, we had a car accident. Some strangers took us into their home for the night until our car was fixed and we were on our way the next day. The hospitality of those people was completely unexpected. That’s all I can remember about that Christmas.***

### **Matthew 2:7-18 Today's New International Version (TNIV)**

**<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”**

**<sup>9</sup> After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.**

### **The Escape to Egypt**

**<sup>13</sup> When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”**

**<sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, <sup>15</sup> where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”<sup>[a]</sup>**

<sup>16</sup> When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

<sup>17</sup> Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup> “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”<sup>[b]</sup>

## COMMENTARY

**2:7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.**<sup>NRSV</sup> Herod had a problem on his hands, and already his troubled mind was making a plan. He called the wise men back to him in order to answer their question (2:2) and send them along to Bethlehem. However, Herod also needed some information from them. He needed to know the age of this "king." Herod deduced that if he knew *the exact time when the star had appeared*, he would know the child's age. We infer from this that the star had appeared a couple of years earlier, for when Herod went on his murderous rampage, he ordered the killing of all boys two years old and under (2:16), although he may have added to the age to make sure the child would be destroyed.

**2:8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."**<sup>NIV</sup> Discovering that this future king was not in Jerusalem, King Herod sent the wise men down the road to the little village of *Bethlehem to make a careful search for the child*. Not knowing the age of the child, nor exactly where he would be found, might make for a difficult and lengthy search. Herod certainly wondered how they would know this child even if they found him. But Herod would not let rumor of a future king go unchecked. So he sent the wise men on their way, instructing them to return to Jerusalem after they found the child. Herod's reason? *So that I too may go and worship him*, he explained. This deceitful ruse fooled the wise men, and they agreed to return and *report to* Herod the whereabouts of the child. The wise men had no reason to expect that Herod would do anything other than pay homage to a king, and Herod had no reason to think that the wise men would not return with the information he needed. But Herod did not want to worship Christ—he was lying. Herod planned to kill Jesus.

**2:9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.**<sup>NIV</sup> Having been told that the child was to be born in Bethlehem, the wise men left Jerusalem, heading south. As *they went on their way*, suddenly they saw once

again *the star they had seen in the east*. The wise men had followed this star thousands of miles, traveling west toward Jerusalem.

At this point, the star reappeared as they traveled south toward Bethlehem, moving *ahead of them*.

Then, the star *stopped over the place where the child was*.

Obviously this was no ordinary star (see comments on [2:2](#)). Matthew does not tell us what the star looked like, how it moved, or how the wise men found the child from the movement and stopping of the star. But Matthew made his point that God had purposely sent this star to guide these men to his Son.

God comes to men in the spheres with which they are most familiar; to Zacharias in the Temple, to the shepherds in the fields, to the wise men by a portent in the heavens. He knows just where to find us. Be sure to follow your star, whatever it be; only remember that it must ultimately receive the corroboration of Scripture.

*F. B. Meyer*

**2:10** **When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.**<sup>NRSV</sup> The star's movement had been constant and visible to these men who studied the sky and watched the stars. They had followed this star across thousands of miles. They had not found the child in the palace in Jerusalem as they had expected. So they had wearily continued on their way, only to once again follow the moving star. No wonder that *when they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy*. Their journey was completed; they had found the one for whom they were searching.

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### LIFE APPLICATION

#### FINDING CHRIST

The wise men were overjoyed at finding the child. If you think becoming a Christian means putting on a long face and behaving like a person in a straitjacket, think again. Finding Christ brings real joy—deeper than winning at sports, more enduring than the first test drive in that new car—this joy fills the soul and makes you glad. This joy comes from knowing all is well, you're OK, God loves you, the future will be secure.

Have you been on a journey to find yourself, to find love, satisfaction, or some sense of what this life is all about? There's joy at the end of that journey when you find Christ.

**2:11** And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.<sup>NKJV</sup>

Jesus was probably one or two years old (a *young Child*) when the wise men found him. By this time, Mary and Joseph were married, living in a *house* and intending to stay in Bethlehem for a while. The wise men gave expensive gifts because these were worthy presents for a future king. The wise men were simply bringing customary expensive gifts for a superior, but scholars have seen in the gifts symbols of Christ's identity and what he would accomplish. *Gold* was a gift for a king ([Psalm 72:15](#)). *Frankincense* (also simply called "incense"), a glittering, odorous gum obtained from the bark of certain trees, was a gift for deity ([Isaiah 60:6](#)). *Myrrh*, a valued spice and perfume ([Psalm 45:8](#)), also came from trees and was used in embalming; thus, it was a gift for a person who was going to die ([Mark 15:23](#); [John 19:39](#)). These gifts certainly would have provided the financial resources for Joseph and Mary's trip to Egypt and back ([2:13-23](#)).

These wise men, astrologers from the east, *fell down and worshiped* the young king of the Jews, indicating a further fulfillment of prophecy. [Psalm 72:10-19](#) speaks of a coming king before whom all will bow and whom all nations will serve.

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### LIFE APPLICATION

#### HE ALONE IS WORTHY

The wise men brought gifts and worshiped Jesus for who he was. This is the essence of true worship—honoring Christ for who he is and being willing to give him what is valuable to you. We see in their lives a pattern for worship:

- *They entered.* They had prepared for their journey, studied, and sought out Jesus.
- *They bowed.* They humbled themselves in the presence of their superior. They acknowledged his authority.
- *They gave.* They gave expensive and sacrificial gifts out of respect and honor for the child king.
- *They worshiped.* They recognized God's guidance in bringing them and attested to Jesus' royalty. They exalted Jesus as the rightful king.
- *They obeyed.* Their worship was not empty. They followed the guidance they received from God.

Worship God because he is the perfect, just, and almighty Creator of the

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universe, worthy of the best you have to give.

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**2:12** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.<sup>NIV</sup> After finding Jesus and worshiping him, the wise men were warned by God *in a dream* not to return through Jerusalem and take their news *back to Herod* as they had intended. God gave guidance to Joseph at four separate times in dreams (see [1:20](#); [2:13](#), [19](#), [22](#)). The first three times, the angel of the Lord is specifically mentioned as appearing and delivering God's message to Joseph. The angel is not mentioned as appearing to the wise men, but somehow God guided the wise men in a dream. The wise men "wisely" followed the guidance given them; after worshiping the child, they *returned to their country by another route*. Going back through Jerusalem would make it impossible to avoid Herod; so they apparently went out of Bethlehem in another direction, perhaps continuing south and going around the southern end of the Dead Sea before heading back north and east. It took courage to refuse the king's command; it also took courage to follow guidance that added many miles to their already lengthy journey.

In this story, God reveals his care for his Son as the hostile world already was attempting to take the young child's life. Matthew has divine intervention as a major theme. He shows how God superintends Jesus' life in order to accomplish the divine plan.

#### THE ESCAPE TO EGYPT / [2:13-18](#) / [13](#)

Even before the tiny baby could speak, the worldly powers, led by Satan himself, were moving against him. Herod, a ruthless king who had killed three of his own sons to secure his power, was afraid of losing that power, so he embarked on a plan to kill the tiny child who had been born "king of the Jews." In his madness, Herod murdered innocent children, hoping to kill this one child. Herod stained his hands with blood, but he did not harm Jesus. No one can thwart God's plans.

**2:13-14** When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."<sup>NIV</sup>

This was the second dream or vision that Joseph received from God. Joseph's first dream had revealed that Mary's child would be the Messiah ([1:20-21](#)). His second dream told him how to protect the child's life. Even though the wise men didn't return to Herod, Herod did not give up on his evil plan. *An angel of the Lord* warned Joseph that *Herod is going to search for the child to kill him*. Joseph had to move immediately; it would not be long before Herod would realize that he had been tricked and

Faith means taking the bare Word of God and acting upon it because it is the Word of God. It means believing what God says

would unleash his anger. The angel told Joseph exactly what to do, and Joseph obeyed.

simply and solely because He has said it.

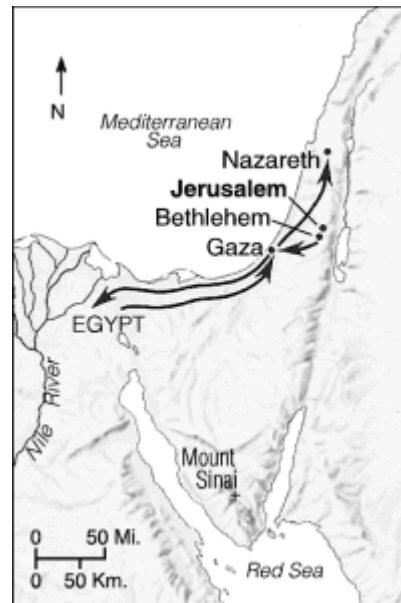
*Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

**Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt.**<sup>NRSV</sup> Joseph *got up* after this dream, took Jesus and Mary, and began the seventy-five mile journey to Egypt *by night*, escaping from Bethlehem under cover of darkness. The angel instructed Joseph to remain in Egypt until God told him otherwise (*stay there until I tell you*) through another dream (see [2:20](#)). Going to Egypt was not unusual. Egypt had been a place of refuge for Israelites during times of political upheaval ([1 Kings 11:40](#); [2 Kings 25:26](#)). There were colonies of Jews in several major Egyptian cities (Alexandria was a key center of Jewish knowledge and education). These colonies had developed during the time of the great captivity (see [Jeremiah 43–44](#)) and may have numbered as many as one million Jews. Egypt was a Roman province, but outside Herod's jurisdiction. Even more important, however, this event fulfilled the prophecy of Hosea (see [2:15](#)).

**[2:15](#) And remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."**<sup>NRSV</sup> Joseph followed the angel's instructions and remained in Egypt *until the death of Herod* (see [2:19-20](#)).

Thus, Jesus was kept safe.

There is an interesting parallel between this flight to Egypt and Israel's history. Hosea wrote about God's love for Israel and his promise of a deliverer who would draw them to himself. Matthew viewed Hosea's prophecy in light of Jesus Christ as the one who came as the promised deliverer of Israel and of the entire world. As an infant nation, Israel had gone to Egypt, just as Jesus did as a child. Joseph had been taken as a captive to Egypt when he was sold into slavery by his brothers. His brothers had almost killed him, but he was kept safe in Egypt. There is also a parallel between the Egyptian pharaoh's killing of



### ***The Flight to Egypt***

*Herod planned to kill the baby Jesus, whom he perceived to be a future threat to his position. Warned of this treachery*



*in a dream, Joseph took his family to Egypt until Herod's death, which occurred a year or two later. They then planned to return to Judea, but God led them instead to Nazareth in Galilee.*

the baby boys of the Israelites and Herod's killing of the baby boys in Bethlehem. Years later, in the Exodus, God led Israel out; God had brought Jesus back. Thus, the prophet Hosea's words, "*Out of Egypt I have called my son*" ([Hosea 11:1](#)), see Israel's miracle-filled Exodus from Egypt as foreshadowing Jesus' return from Egypt to Israel. And in Jesus, the restoration of Israel from exile is complete.

**[2:16](#) When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.**<sup>NRSV</sup> The events recorded in [2:7-14](#) most likely happened over just a couple of days. Bethlehem was only five miles from Jerusalem and was a small village. It would not have taken long for the wise men to find the child. Herod certainly expected the wise men to return within a day. But in the meantime, both the wise men and Jesus' family had escaped the city. Probably by the next evening, *Herod saw that he had been tricked* (literally "outwitted") *by the wise men*. Herod was not just upset, *he was infuriated*. And when this king became infuriated, his anger knew no bounds. History documents the terrible acts of this evil man—especially concerning potential rivals to the throne. In his later years, Herod had three of his sons killed, as well as his wife and many actual or suspected conspirators. It did not bother Herod to spill some blood to secure his power.

At this point, all Herod knew was that a future king, still a child, lived in Bethlehem. After the wise men explained when the star had first appeared ([2:7](#)), Herod deduced that the child would not be more than two years old. So *according to the time that he had learned from the wise men*, he dispatched his soldiers, and they *killed all the (male) children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under*. Scholars have estimated that if this tiny village had about one thousand residents, there may have been about twenty male babies. The record of this atrocity is told only here, so some have doubted its authenticity. Considering Herod's ruthlessness and the murderous acts already listed under his name, apparently the slaughter of a few children in an insignificant village did not make the historical annals. There are examples of Romans having entire towns razed, killing every living creature, just as an example to a region. So while the "slaughter of the innocents" by Herod was terrible, it was not as uncommon as we think. But Matthew saw it as fulfillment of Scripture ([2:17-18](#)).

Modern readers question how God could allow such evil to occur even as he allowed Jesus to escape it. Yet Matthew did not ask that question. He, as a Jew, knew all too well that the history of God's people was littered with hatred and evil acts against them. The coming of the Messiah caused Satan to unleash an arsenal of evil. In this instance, Satan used Herod, a willing vessel. Herod, the king of the Jews, killed all the boys under two years of age in an obsessive attempt to kill Jesus, the newborn King.

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### LIFE APPLICATION

#### WHO'S ON THE THRONE?

Herod was afraid that this newborn king would one day take his throne. He completely misunderstood the reason for Christ's coming. Jesus didn't want Herod's throne; he wanted to be king of Herod's life. Jesus wanted to give Herod eternal life, not take his present life. Today people are often afraid that Christ wants to take things away when, in reality, he wants to give them real freedom, peace, and joy. Don't fear Christ—allow him to reign on the throne of your life.

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**[2:17-18](#) Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."**<sup>NIV</sup> Matthew saw that the grieving of the mothers in Bethlehem further fulfilled the words of Jeremiah the prophet in [Jeremiah 31:15](#). *Rachel* was one of the wives of Jacob, one of the great men of God in the Old Testament. From Jacob's twelve sons had come the twelve tribes of Israel. Rachel was the symbolic mother of the nation; she had been buried near Bethlehem ([Genesis 35:19](#)). The Jeremiah passage describes Rachel, the

"mother" of the nation, *weeping for her children* who had been taken away into captivity. *Ramah* was a staging point of deportation ([Jeremiah 40:1](#)). The mothers in Bethlehem also wept and mourned for the little boys killed by the soldiers; certainly their sorrow was so great that they could not be comforted. Matthew compared the grief of the mothers at the time of the Exile to the grief of the mothers of the slaughtered

It is a terrible and awful story, that of his [Jeremiah's] prophesying, and suffering, and tears. But in Jeremiah, as in every other prophecy, there was a gleam of the glory of hope. How great were these Hebrew prophets— so cloudy, so rough, so stormy; but on every storm-cloud there is a rainbow, and the promise of deliverance.

*G. Campbell Morgan*

children.

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### *LIFE APPLICATION*

#### WHEN WE GRIEVE

With the slaughter of these young children, there was much grief and suffering. Matthew implies that the weeping of these mothers connects to a long tradition of grieving. Rachel, the mother of Israel, weeps with the Bethlehem mothers.

When a loved one dies, feelings of loss are strong and sometimes overwhelming. How should Christians help a friend deal with his or her grief?

Some well-meaning comforters advise keeping a "stiff upper lip" in view of the departed's heavenly reward. "Don't cry, she's in a better place" is the comforting phrase. In other settings, where busy people don't know each other well, grief takes its course until everyone gets back to business. "She needs time" is the phrase they use to keep a distance.

However, helping someone through grief really means that we cry together, we share the sadness, we enter the other's world.

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Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.

2. How do you think Mary & Joseph felt when the magi came to visit them?

**They probably felt overjoyed. This would have been another verification of the words that angles had spoken to them. They may have even thought this was the first of many type of things to come since they knew their child was to be the Savior of the world.**

3. What plans do you think they may have made with the gifts for Jesus before the visit of the angel, and what were probably the plans after the visit from the angel?

**They may have made plans for a nice new home. They may have thought about new clothing or sharing their blessings with others. After the visit of the angel they probably used those items to pay for their trip and their expenses in Egypt for two years. Those gifts may have been God's provisions to preserve their lives.**

4. Why do our plans for our money or special gifts sometimes have to be discarded?

**Everything that we receive from God is not necessarily for us to keep. Sometimes God wants us to be channels of blessings to others. Sometimes God entrusts us with money to be held for a use that is not readily apparent to us. When we say yes to the will of God for our lives, we are saying yes with our possessions as well.**

5. If you had of been Mary or Joseph, how would you have felt after the visit from the angel saying Herod was going to search for the child to kill him?

**I probably would have been shocked. Just when things seemed to be going so well, this unexpected news would have thrown me for a loop. To go from the joy of celebrating a great gift, to know now that the child's life is in danger would have been quite a roller coaster ride. It would have been hard to believe someone would see a small child as a threat to their kingdom. The angel's news probably revealed a dark and sinister side of being the parents of the Son of God that Mary and Joseph had not thought of before. Often when we say yes to God's plan for our lives, there will arise enemies in our lives that we did not foresee, but they will arise to try to destroy God's purposes.**

6. How do we know when we are to stay in a situation and fight, and when it is we are to run from a situation to save our lives?

The key to this question is what is the leading of the Holy Spirit. In this case it was obvious that the Holy Spirit was saying get out of here. But we find situations like Acts in the following passage:

**Acts 21:10-15 (NIV)**

<sup>10</sup> After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

<sup>11</sup> Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

<sup>12</sup> When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.

<sup>13</sup> Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

<sup>14</sup> When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

<sup>15</sup> After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.

Spurred along by the graphic and foreboding prophecy of Agabus, the believers in Caesarea urged Paul *not to go up to Jerusalem*. Even Paul's traveling companions (*we*) added their voices to the crowd. Evidently, they had heard enough from the Holy Spirit on the subject and had decided that Paul should pursue another course. Paul was an invaluable and—to them—irreplaceable asset to the church. In addition, he had not always walked into a fight; instead, he had escaped many, fleeing some cities to save his life. Paul had avoided confrontation in Ephesus and had appealed to his Roman citizenship in Philippi. Why must he go to certain imprisonment in Jerusalem?

Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and not tried.

*G. K. Chesterton*

The answer, pure and simple, was that Paul knew God wanted him to go. Paul had faced rejection and persecution from the beginning. Doors had closed on the second journey ([16:6-8](#)) and then had swung wide open to Macedonia ([16:9-10](#)). God had led Paul, coming to him during difficult times to spur him on ([18:10](#)). Paul knew that he would be imprisoned in Jerusalem.

Although his friends pleaded with him to not go, Paul knew that he had to go because God wanted him to. No one enjoys pain, but a faithful disciple wants above all else to please God. Paul was not ignoring the warnings. He was not suicidal. Paul simply disagreed with his brothers and sisters in Christ as to whether the prophesied

difficulties outweighed the potential progress that could be made for the gospel. And the ultimate issue—the will of God—was the one to which Paul's friends finally resigned themselves: *"The Lord's will be done."*

### **Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts.**

Sometimes God calls for us to give up our lives for His namesake and other times he requires that we get out of a situation. It's going to be a step of faith with either decision that we make.

7. Joseph's response to the angel's word was immediate. He got up and left the country that night. Why do we delay obeying God in our own situations?

**We delay obeying God many times because of the fear of the things that we will have to leave behind. We find ourselves far more attached to this world than we could have originally imagined. Some of the things we are attached to may be good things, even spiritual things, but our goal is to be attached to God and God alone.**

8. How was Jesus bringing further complications to Mary & Joseph lives? Do you think Mary was expecting anything like this when she said, "May it be to me all that you have said"?

**It is unlikely that Herod would have been satisfied with just the death of Jesus. He would have wanted to put Mary and Joseph to death as well to squash out any future potential kings they could give birth to. Saying yes to God's will for our lives comes with a host of unexpected events in our lives. Some of those events are good and some of them are going to be chilling. We usually do not expect saying yes to God is going to have us fleeing as fugitives to another country not knowing where we are going or what we are too expect. Our situations may not be as dramatic as Mary and Joseph's were, but they will still produce the same kind of anxiety for us. We too will have to trust in God.**

9. What are some of the unexpected heartbreaks that can happen to us at Christmas?



**We can suffer the loss of a loved one through illness or a tragic accident. It could be the day our spouse walks out on us from a marriage. We can receive some tragic news of something that has happened. We can have planned the perfect Christmas only to see it ruined by the behavior of a family member or a friend who has gotten out of control. We can discover something in our kids rooms that indicate they are leading a dangerous lifestyle or headed in the wrong direction.**

10. How do you think the people of Bethlehem felt toward Mary and Joseph after Herod's soldiers slaughtered their children? Do you think they would have been welcomed back into the town after they returned from Egypt?

**Many of the people would not have known Mary and Joseph because they were from Nazareth. This would have probably made them even angrier since they were outsiders who had brought this tragedy to them. Even though Herod was gone, Bethlehem probably would not have been a safe place for Mary and Joseph. No doubt some of the people blamed them for what had happened to their children.**

11. If you had of been in Bethlehem and knew where Mary and Joseph were, would you have been willing to tell the soldiers to save your child's life?

**Most of us would not have known about the story surrounding the birth of Jesus. With them being outsiders, I may have convinced myself they were criminals and that's why the soldiers were after them. I may have been willing to turn them in.**

12. Why is a life following after God, is a life that will be filled with the unexpected.

**God's will for our lives is not a book that is given for us to read knowing how each section ends. God's will for our lives unfolds before us and**

**we rarely know which direction the unfolding is going to take place. God will often tell us where we are headed, but God often leads out the details. This allows for us to depend on God. There are going to be unexpected events so the Lord can show us how much He loves us, and unexpected events to humble us so that we can keep our dependence on God.**