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Isaiah chapter 7

10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, **11** Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.'

12 But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.'

13 Then Isaiah said, 'Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? **14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. **15** He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, **16** for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. **17** The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah--he will bring the king of Assyria.'

Psalms chapter 24

New International Version

1 Of David. A psalm. The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

2 for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. **3** Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?

4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. **5** They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior.

6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob. **7** Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. **8** Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. **9** Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. **10** Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty-- he is the King of glory.

Context Summary

Psalm 24:1–6 affirms what is declared in John 1:1–3 and Genesis 1–2: that God created everything. The people at worship or a chorus sang the first two verses, and a leader asked the question in verse 3. Psalm 15 echoes the truth taught in Psalm 24:4–6, and Matthew 5:6–8 reinforces the fact that only the righteous can see God. Tradition says this psalm celebrates David bringing the ark of the covenant back from Obed-edom's house (2 Samuel 6).

Psalm 24:1, NIV: Of David. A psalm. The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

What does Psalm 24:1 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

This psalm is credited to David. It is possible, even likely, that this was composed to celebrate the return of the ark of the covenant from Obed-edom's house (2 Samuel 6). This is not certain, however.

Abraham referred to the Lord as "Possessor of heaven and earth" (Genesis 14:22). In Psalm 24:1 David affirms the truth that the Lord owns all creation. He states that the earth and everything pertaining to it, including human beings, belongs to the Lord. Although God placed a curse on the earth following our first parents' sin, the Lord possesses the earth and everything in and on it, and when Jesus returns to earth, he will roll back the curse and restore earth to Edenic conditions (see Genesis 3; Isaiah 11:1–16; Romans 8:19–21).

David also acknowledges that God owns all human beings. The term translated "fullness" here is meant as a reference to all people. Genesis 1:26–27 reports that God created humanity, as males and females, in His own image. First John 2:2 declares that Jesus Christ died for the sins of all mankind. Therefore, the Lord has a rightful claim to our lives by virtue of creation and redemption.

Psalm 24:2, NIV: for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

What does Psalm 24:2 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

The point here is not about the exact construction of the planet. Even as stated the meaning is not that the earth rests on water; rather this refers to how God separated the land from the water. He formed the sea and the rivers, the lakes and streams, the springs, ponds, and waterfalls. Genesis 1:2 points out that when God initiated the creation, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."

When civilization reached its lowest moral point, God demonstrated clearly that He owns the waters. He sent a flood to sweep away the entire corrupt human race—with the exception of righteous Noah and his family (Genesis 6–9). The apostle Peter reminds us that "the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God [the land appeared from water], and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished" (2 Peter 3:5–6).

The Lord's ownership of the waters is further illustrated by the fact that He caused the flood in Noah's time to abate so that dry land appeared again (Genesis 8:1–5). Such a flood has not recurred, nor will it recur because the Lord promised He would never send such a flood again (Genesis 9:11).

Psalm 24:3, NIV: Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?

What does Psalm 24:3 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

David asks a basic question about approaching God. He ponders who can climb the hill to worship in the tabernacle and who can enter the Lord's presence. Because God is holy and man is sinful, no one in his natural state can worship God acceptably or enter His presence (Exodus 33:20).

The Samaritan woman, with whom Jesus conversed at Jacob's well, believed worship involved a special place. She told Jesus, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain" (John 4:20). But Jesus assured her that true worship is not about a place but about the condition of the heart. He pointed out that worshipers must worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Many religious people believe they cannot truly worship without being in church, surrounded by religious symbols. Or they feel they must repeat certain religious prayers or follow prescribed rituals. David's question, therefore, carries relevance for people today as well as for his original readers.

Psalm 24:4, NIV: The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.

What does Psalm 24:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The answer to the question posed in verse 3 is given here. Proper worship of God requires clean hands, a pure heart, and integrity. A person cannot truly *worship* God unless they are *submitted* to Him in faith, and that submission cannot occur until they have been *redeemed* by salvation. The question is not whether or not a person is capable of singing or saying words; it's whether their efforts are appropriate.

The Levites who transported the ark had to be ceremonially clean, as did the priests. Exodus 30:18–21 instructs Aaron, the high priest, and his sons to wash their hands and feet at the laver in the tabernacle before ministering to the Lord. Isaiah 52:11 commands: "Purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD."

Having "clean hands" refers to the performance of righteous deeds, as well as avoidance of evil deeds. This imagery is reflected in modern English expressions

such as "willing to get his hands dirty," which implies someone willing to do evil to accomplish their goals. Pilate's dramatic washing of his hands declared his opinion that he was completely innocent of what happened to Jesus (Matthew 27:24).

Having a pure heart likely refers to a person's godly thoughts and character. Further, the person who legitimately enters the Lord's presence in worship does not worship idols: anything or anyone other than the one true God.

A true worshipper does not practice deception (John 4:24). He is a person of integrity. The Lord cannot be fooled. He knows our thoughts, motives, deeds, and speech, and He hates hypocrisy. Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees because they appeared righteous but were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Matthew 23:28).

Psalm 24:5, NIV: They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior.

What does Psalm 24:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This proclaims blessings and righteousness to the person described in verse 4: someone with clean hands, a pure heart, and truthfully faithful soul.

These benefits are not wages a person earns. They are gifts from the God of salvation. All who have been saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8–9) are blessed "in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3) and have "become the righteousness of God" in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Isaiah 61:10 states: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness."

It is a tragic mistake to think our righteous works can earn God's favor. Titus 3:5 declares that God saves us "not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."

Psalm 24:6, NIV: Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.

What does Psalm 24:6 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

David refers to seeking God's face. This means to meet with God in a personal way. We use similar terminology in modern language. When a conversation needs to be personal, we speak of it needing to happen "face to face," or that something needs to be said "to that person's face." This level of direct communication requires closeness and deliberate choice. In Jeremiah 29:13–14 the Lord promises, "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD." Seeking the Lord, then, is not a casual or haphazard experience but an intense experience, a yearning to know God intimately (Matthew 7:7–8).

Here, David compares those who seek God in worship to the patriarch Jacob, who wrestled with God and would not quit until God blessed him (Genesis 32:22–26). When the match ended, Jacob was blessed, and he called the place where he wrestled with God, Peniel, meaning *the face of God* (Genesis 32:30).

Because Jesus paid the penalty of our sin, He opened the way to God so by faith we have a personal relationship with God. Paul phrases this in similarly personal terms, saying God speaks to us "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). We can get to know God better if we spend quality time with Him.

This verse ends with the term *selah*, which has an unclear meaning. It might refer to a musical pause, or a declaration similar to the "amen" sometimes shouted when hearing a message.

Psalm 24:7, NIV: Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

What does Psalm 24:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

David appeals to Jerusalem to make room for the King of glory to enter the city. Today, when a prominent dignitary like a royal person visits the nation's capital, a

flurry of activity precedes his arrival. Traffic is cleared, flags are hoisted, and security is enhanced. Every precaution is taken to welcome the distinguished visitor. Jerusalem's gates were the site where official business was transacted. David's call to the gates was a poetic summons to the whole city of Jerusalem to welcome the King of glory.

Tradition suggests this psalm is connected to when David brought the ark of the covenant back from the home of Obed-edom (2 Samuel 6). The ark that represented God's presence was about to enter Jerusalem. When it had been seized by the Philistines, Eli's daughter-in-law bore a son and called him Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured" (1 Samuel 4:21). Now that the ark was about to enter Jerusalem, the glory of the King of heaven and earth was returning.

Psalm 24:8, NIV: Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.

What does Psalm 24:8 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

This describes the King of glory. He is "Yahweh, strong and mighty, Yahweh, mighty in battle." David had seen the Lord display His strength in defeating David's enemies, such as the giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17:41–49). He surely recalled how God had drowned Egypt's military in the Red Sea after miraculously granting the Hebrews safe passage (Exodus 14:26–29).

In his song of praise to the Lord, Moses asked, "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). Moses also depicted the inhabitants of Canaan as trembling and experiencing terror and dread because of the greatness of the Lord's arm (Exodus 15:15–16).

Believers should be encouraged to know the Lord is strong and mighty. In Romans 8:31 the apostle Paul asks, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" He adds in verse 37, "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Psalm 24:9, NIV: Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

What does Psalm 24:9 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Again, David calls upon the city of Jerusalem to welcome the King of glory. In Hebrew, this is a word-for-word repetition of the proclamation made in verse 7. This emphasizes the importance of the statement, and fits into the poetic structure of the psalm.

It's likely that at this moment, David was returning the ark to Jerusalem from the home of Obed-edom (2 Samuel 6:12–15). The ark was a visible reminder of God's presence. It was constructed to rest in the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle (Hebrews 9:3–4). David was returning the ark to Jerusalem to rest once again in the tabernacle. The King of glory, therefore, would be entering the city.

However, the scene of the ark entering Jerusalem also previews a future event. Before He was arrested and nailed to a cross, Jesus entered Jerusalem. He arrived in humility, but received a spontaneous welcome. "Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road" (Matthew 21:8). Those who went before Him and those who followed Him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Clearly, they were acknowledging that He is the Messiah. However, before long the crowd clamored for His crucifixion (Matthew 27:23).

Nevertheless, Christ will enter Jerusalem again, at His second coming. Then He will arrive as the conquering King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11–16).

Psalm 24:10, NIV: Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty-- he is the King of glory.

What does Psalm 24:10 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

This closing verse of Psalm 24 describes the glorious King as "the LORD of hosts." This divine title occurs well over two hundred times in the Old Testament. Its first occurrence is in 1 Samuel 1:3. Isaiah and Jeremiah combined use this phrase well over one hundred times.

The name "LORD of hosts" identifies the Lord as eternal and ruler over all the angels and stars. The title reflects the truth that, although Israel's earthly king was David, her real king was Yahweh. Prophetically, the glorious king who will enter Jerusalem is the Lord Jesus. He is the Lord of heaven and earth by virtue of creation and redemption. Colossians 1:15–17 describes Jesus as having created everything in heaven and on earth, not only visible objects but invisible. The invisible would include the angelic host. He also holds everything together. Someday the Lord of hosts will return to earth with mighty angels to execute judgment on unbelievers and to reign from the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6–7).

Romans chapter 1

New International Version

1 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God-- **2** the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures **3** regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, **4** and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. **5** Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. **6** And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Context Summary

Romans 1:1–7 begins Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome with an introduction of himself as a servant and apostle of Jesus. He has been set apart to preach the gospel, or good news, about Jesus. Paul interrupts his own introduction by immediately beginning to teach the gospel, that Jesus Christ our Lord is the Son

of God who was resurrected from the dead. He addresses his letter to those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints. This would include all the believers in Jesus.

Romans 1:1, NIV: Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—

What does Romans 1:1 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Romans is inspired Scripture, but it is also a letter from Paul to the Christians living in Rome. It follows the custom of the time for the opening of a letter, identifying who it is from, who it is written to, and a formal greeting.

Paul begins by identifying himself. First, he understands himself to be a servant of Jesus Christ. The Greek word used here for servant is *doulos*. A *doulos* in Greek culture was a "bondservant," someone who had sold himself into slavery to another person either for a specific amount of time or indefinitely. Paul considered himself to be owned by Christ.

Paul next calls himself an *apostle*. The word *apostle* means "a person who is sent by another to represent him and his authority." In the New Testament, the apostles of Jesus Christ were considered to speak with the authority of Christ Himself. The 12 disciples of Jesus became known as His apostles. Paul became an apostle later when Christ revealed Himself to Paul and called him to fill that role (Acts 9:15). Later, the other apostles of Jesus confirmed that was Paul's calling (Galatians 2:7–9).

So Paul begins his letter by making it clear to his readers that he is both servant and representative of Jesus Christ. What he tells them in this letter will carry the authority of Christ Himself.

Finally, Paul identifies the mission Christ has given to him. He understands himself to be "set apart" for the *gospel*—the "good news"—of God. This letter to the Roman Christians, in fact, is a thorough and carefully-constructed presentation of exactly what the gospel is and why it is so significant.

Romans 1:2, NIV: the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures

What does Romans 1:2 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul has identified himself as both a servant and authorized representative of Jesus set apart for the gospel of God. Now he begins to explain, in the middle of his introduction, what the gospel of God is.

First, Paul writes, the gospel of God is not a new thing that has popped up since Jesus' death and resurrection. Instead, the gospel had been promised by God long ago through what his prophets wrote in the "holy Scriptures." Paul's readers would have understood the holy Scriptures to include the books we refer to as the Old Testament.

Paul does not give examples of the promise of the gospel in this brief verse, but he is consistent throughout his writing in insisting that the Scriptures were always pointing forward to the coming of the Messiah and salvation through Him for both Jewish people and Gentiles (Galatians 3:7–9). New Testament books such as Hebrews go to great lengths showing how the Scriptures of the Old Testament were filled with predictions and descriptions of Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:3, NIV: regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David,

What does Romans 1:3 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul is so eager to begin teaching about the gospel of Jesus Christ that he seems unable to even wait to finish the opening greeting to his letter. He has written that the gospel is something God promised long ago through His prophets in the Old Testament Scriptures. Now he continues that the gospel is about Jesus Christ.

Jesus, as a human being, was a direct descendant of King David. That will become important to Paul's case that Jesus is the Messiah because of the prophetic Old Testament promises that one of David's descendants would sit on

the throne of Israel forever (2 Samuel 7:12–16). In the following verse, Paul will show that Jesus was more than just a fully-human man.

Gospels such as Luke and Matthew also provide a genealogy of Jesus to demonstrate that He comes from this Davidic line. The theme of proving that Jesus is the Messiah, and the One promised by the Jewish Scriptures, is also found in books such as Hebrews.

Romans 1:4, NIV: and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

What does Romans 1:4 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Paul, having just begun the greeting to his letter, is already sidetracked by proclaiming the gospel to his readers. He has said Jesus Christ is the focus of the long-ago promised gospel—the "good news"—from God.

Jesus, as a human being "according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3), was a direct descendant of King David. Now Paul adds that the resurrection of Jesus from death to life proves that He was more than just a man. That event, predicted by Jesus Himself (Matthew 28:6), established that He was in fact the Son of God. It was a declaration by the power of the Holy Spirit of God—"the Spirit of holiness"—that Jesus, as God's eternal Son, was in fact God. Who else could have raised Jesus from the dead but God's own powerful Spirit?

Already in verse 4, Paul has established the truth that Jesus was fully human and also fully God. As God's Son, Christ has reigned with God the Father forever. It is only right, then, that we should bow to Him as "Jesus Christ our Lord."

Romans 1:5, NIV: Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

What does Romans 1:5 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

After declaring who Jesus is—both man and Son of God, resurrected from the dead and deserving of the title "Our Lord"—Paul returns to identifying himself to his readers. It turns out that Paul's identity cannot be separated from that of Jesus.

It is through Jesus that Paul has received grace, which is unearned favor, as well as apostleship, which gives Paul the authority to speak on Christ's behalf. Paul has been sent by Christ, for the sake of Christ's name—or for the sake of His honor—to bring about the "obedience of faith."

That's a very specific phrase. Paul will be completely clear about what this does not mean. He has not been sent by Christ to get people to obey the law of Moses. He has been sent to bring about obedience to faith in Christ. In other words, Christ calls people to believe in Him. To refuse to believe in Jesus is to disobey that call. Believing is obedience, both in becoming a Christian and walking in Christ throughout our lives.

Paul has been sent to bring this about among "all the nations." Paul's unique mission, given to him directly by Jesus, was to carry the good news about salvation through faith in Christ to all the non-Jewish peoples of the world.

Here's what Jesus said about Paul in Acts 9:15: "He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."

Romans 1:6, NIV: And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

What does Romans 1:6 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

In the previous verse, Paul boldly declared his mission in life, given by Christ Himself, to carry the gospel to all the nations of the world. More specifically, he was called to "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations" (Romans 1:5).

Paul now adds that his mission field, his target audience, includes those called to belong to Christ in Rome. In other words, Paul's point in writing this letter is to lay out exactly what it means to obey Christ's call to believe in Him. Paul is preparing to present a clear and thorough description of the good news that all can be forgiven for their sin and made right with God forever by faith in Jesus and what He accomplished when He died on the cross.

The words that follow will form the most complete picture of Christian theology given in the New Testament.

Romans 1:7, NIV: To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does Romans 1:7 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

The opening of Paul's letter was sidetracked momentarily by his eagerness to begin talking about the gospel of Jesus. Having successfully identified himself as Jesus' representative sent to proclaim the gospel to his readers, Paul now moves on to describe exactly who this letter is for.

He is writing to everyone in Rome at the time who is both loved by God and called by God to be saints. According to John 3:16, God loves the world, including all of those in Rome at this time. Beyond that, Paul understood that God had called those reading his letter to be "saints" or "holy ones." In the New Testament, all who believe in Jesus carry the title of "saint" (Ephesians 2:19). It is not a name meant only for those who are thought to be especially righteous Christians. Because believers are "in Christ," and Christ is holy, we are all officially "holy ones," as well.

Paul concludes the opening of his letter with his standard blessing. He used it often, but it is meaningful. He pronounced upon his readers grace and peace from both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The mystery and beauty of the Trinity is that God is one in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Matthew chapter 1

18 This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. **19** Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: **23** The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us').

24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. **25** But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Context Summary

Matthew 1:18–25 tells the story of the birth of Christ from the perspective of Joseph. This man is betrothed to be married to Mary, but finds out she is pregnant. He does not realize, yet, that this child is Christ, and that she is pregnant by a miracle of the Holy Spirit. God interrupts Joseph's honorable plans to divorce Mary, and tells him through an angel in a dream not to fear taking her as a wife and that the child is from God. Jesus will fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that Immanuel, "God with us," will be born to a virgin. Joseph obeys, demonstrating his faith in God.

Matthew 1:18, NIV: This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

What does Matthew 1:18 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

Having concluded his genealogy of Jesus, Matthew begins telling the life of Jesus right from the beginning: Jesus' miraculous conception. Matthew does not spend nearly as much time introducing Mary as Luke's Gospel does. Instead, he focuses the story on Joseph and his response to the surprising news.

Betrothal in Jewish culture was a binding agreement, often between the father of the bride and the husband to be. It was far more serious than the modern concept of engagement. If a woman slept with another man during the betrothal period, she was said to be guilty of adultery.

At first, Joseph didn't understand that Mary's pregnancy was the work of the Holy Spirit. He only knew that she was "found to be with child." This put him in the difficult place of deciding what to do about their upcoming wedding. The natural, common sense explanation for that situation is that Mary had been unfaithful. It's only when Joseph is informed by an angelic messenger that he realizes the full truth (Matthew 1:20).

Joseph's first response seems tempered by compassion. Rather than make a spectacle of Mary, his initial thought is to end the betrothal discreetly (Matthew 1:19).

Matthew 1:19, NIV: Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

What does Matthew 1:19 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

While Luke's version of the story of Jesus' birth focuses more closely on Mary's experience, Matthew is describing it from Joseph's perspective. Mary and Joseph were betrothed to be married, something far more formal than a modern engagement. This likely meant Joseph had made an agreement with Mary's father, perhaps years earlier, to take Mary as his wife. The agreement was binding—legally, they were as good as married, other than the wedding ceremony and physically consummating the relationship.

The previous verse revealed that Mary was found to be with child "from the Holy Spirit." It's helpful to remember that, at first, the only part of this Joseph knows is that she is pregnant. He would not have known, immediately, about the crucial explanation. He knew only that his almost-wife was pregnant with a child that is not his.

Joseph is said to be "a just man." He may have felt hurt and betrayed, but he did not apparently fly into a rage or wish to hurt Mary, even though all signs pointed to what amounted to adultery in their culture. On the contrary, he seems not to want additional shame for her if he could help it. This seems extraordinarily kind, given the circumstances. Part of this kindness might have been that Mary was likely much younger than Joseph. We don't know that for sure, and marriage arrangements such as this were common, even when there was an age gap. Still that's a possible explanation for why Joseph disappears from the Gospel narratives by the time Jesus is grown.

Compassion did not require Joseph to go through with marrying a seemingly-unfaithful woman. Instead, he was going to divorce her as quietly as possible. He did not intend to make a public issue about why he was breaking off their agreement by legal means. The fact that this required divorce papers shows just how binding a betrothal was in the culture of the day.

Matthew 1:20, NIV: 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.

What does Matthew 1:20 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

From Joseph's initial perspective, his betrothed, Mary, has betrayed him. She has been found to be pregnant, and he is not the father. To assume she was unfaithful is exactly how anyone would react in that situation. If that is the case, Mary has violated the legally-binding agreement to marry Joseph. Yet Joseph shows an exceptionally decent response to what looks like obvious infidelity.

Instead of flying into a rage or exposing her to the community, Joseph demonstrates that he is "a just man" (Matthew 1:19) by planning to divorce her a

quietly as possible. He has no interest in bringing greater shame on her or her family.

Before he takes that action, however, an angel of the Lord shows up in one of Joseph's dreams. This is not the last time Joseph will have the experience of being directed by God through an angel messenger in a dream. This angel has a very specific message for Joseph: *Don't divorce Mary!*

More specifically, the angel calls Joseph a son of David, which backs up Matthew's message that Jesus, also, is a direct descendant of David. The angel tells Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, despite his legitimate concerns about her pregnancy, and what it means about her character and trustworthiness. The angel reveals to Joseph what is really going on. She is not pregnant as a result of having sex with another man. The baby conceived in her is miraculously given from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:21, NIV: She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

What does Matthew 1:21 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

God is revealing to Joseph His plan to bring the promised Savior into the world. Joseph already knows that his betrothed wife is pregnant. As anyone would, he assumes this has happened as a result of her having sex with another man, breaking the terms of their betrothal. He had planned to divorce her, quietly, which would have been a relatively compassionate response (Matthew 1:19).

Before he ends the relationship, however, an angel from God appears to Joseph in a dream. The angel tells Joseph not to fear going through with the marriage. Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit, not by sexual sin, and not from another man.

The angel continues in this verse with more details. The baby is a boy. You will call His name *Jesus*, the angel says, because He will save His people from their sins. The Greek name Jesus is derived from the same Hebrew name from which we get the name "Joshua". This name means "Yahweh saves." The angel's revelation to Joseph is specific: not that Jesus will free His people, the Jews, in

some general sense. The angel does not say Jesus will end Israel's captivity under Rome. The prediction is that Christ will save His people from their sins.

Matthew's Gospel will make clear that salvation from sin was needed far more than salvation from Rome.

Matthew 1:22, NIV: All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

What does Matthew 1:22 mean? [[↑](#) [See verse text](#) [↑](#)]

An angel of the Lord has just revealed to Joseph in a dream that his betrothed wife Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit and not another man. This puts to rest Joseph's concerns that she has been unfaithful, and ends his plans to discreetly divorce her (Matthew 1:19). Further, the angel has said the baby is a boy, a son, who "will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Ancient writing was recorded without capitalization, or punctuation, including quotation marks. For that reason, scholars differ about whether this verse should be included in the quote by the angel. That is, it is possible the angel told Joseph about the connection between Jesus' birth and Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 7:14). The alternative is that these words are stated by Matthew as the narrator, not part of the declaration the angel made to Joseph.

Either way, this statement is part of the Word of God. It will be the first of several mentions of Jesus' role in fulfilling Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. In this case, the prophet was Isaiah and the quote in the following verse (Matthew 1:23) is from Isaiah 7:14.

Matthew 1:23, NIV: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us').

What does Matthew 1:23 mean? [[↑ See verse text ↑](#)]

An angel of God has appeared to Joseph in a dream with a very specific set of instructions and revelations. Joseph, a decent man (Matthew 1:19), was considering divorcing his betrothed wife. Since the wedding had not yet taken place, they had not yet slept together. And yet, she was recently found to be pregnant (Matthew 1:18). Joseph would be well within his rights to divorce Mary but planned to go the extra mile of compassion by doing so quietly.

The angelic messenger from God changes Joseph's perspective. He told Joseph not to be afraid to go through with the marriage. The baby was not the result of adultery. Mary was still a virgin and was pregnant by the Holy Spirit with a boy they would call Jesus. He would save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:20–21). It's possible the angel cited Isaiah's words to Joseph; it's also possible these words are recorded by Matthew as part of his explanation. Either way, they are part of the Word of God and have the same meaning.

Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7:14 to show this miraculous pregnancy was the fulfillment of prophecy. The purpose of this prophecy, in part, is to point out that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Isaiah's prophecy spelled it out to the letter: A virgin would conceive and give birth to a son. People will call him "Immanuel," which means "God with Us." Viewed in this light, the prophecy is clear that Jesus is God, sent to earth to be with us, and to save mankind from our sins.

Some critics object to this use of Isaiah's words. They note that the original Hebrew word, translated here as "virgin," does not necessarily mean a woman with no experience of sexual intercourse. The Hebrew word *almāh'* can be used simply to mean a young woman. However, long before Jesus' birth, Jewish scholars had translated that term into Greek as *parthenos*, a word explicitly indicating a virgin.

Matthew, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, applies the prophecy to Mary and to Jesus. Additionally, the angel is very clear with Joseph that Mary is not pregnant by a human male, but by God's Spirit.

Matthew 1:24, NIV: When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

What does Matthew 1:24 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

Based on what he knew at first, Joseph had every right—legally and morally—to divorce Mary (Matthew 1:18). The period of betrothal was treated as part of the marriage contract in this ancient time. Even though the couple had not yet lived together or had sex, they were legally bound together in virtually the same way as a fully married couple would be. Mary's pregnancy by another man would have given Joseph a legal and justifiable way to terminate his agreement. His initial plan was to do exactly that, but discreetly for Mary's sake (Matthew 1:19).

He did not follow through with that plan, however. God intervened by sending an angel to visit Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:20–21). The angel revealed to Joseph what was really going on. Mary remained a virgin. The baby she carried came from the Holy Spirit. The boy would be called *Jesus*, from a Hebrew name meaning "Yahweh saves," and also *Immanuel*, meaning "God with us".

Joseph demonstrated remarkable faith in obeying God's command through the angel. He set aside the cost to his own reputation and defied cultural norms. Rather than taking the easy, socially simple path, he chose to obey God. Joseph ended the official betrothal period by taking Mary home to live with him immediately. This would have protected her and her family from scandal, as well as allowing him to provide for her throughout the rest of the pregnancy.

The following verse, though, makes it clear Joseph did not sleep with Mary until after the birth of Jesus. She remained a virgin, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14). After that time, Joseph and Mary would have other children together (Matthew 13:55–57; Mark 3:31–32).

Matthew 1:25, NIV: But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

What does Matthew 1:25 mean? [[↑↑ See verse text ↑↑](#)]

This verse completes a statement begun in the previous verse, which highlights Joseph's remarkable faith (Matthew 1:24). While Luke's telling of the birth of Jesus focuses on Mary's experience, Matthew considers the events from Joseph's perspective.

An honorable and God-fearing man in that culture could have quietly ended this betrothal with a clear conscience. He was not obligated to follow through on his commitment to marry a woman found to be pregnant by another man. Joseph, though, decided he was obligated after being told the real story of what was going on by an angel of the Lord in a dream (Matthew 1:19–21). Mary, still a virgin, carried "God with us," the Savior (Matthew 1:22–23).

Joseph obeyed God, likely at the cost of his own reputation—rumors about Jesus' birth seem to have persisted during His ministry (John 8:19; 8:41–42). He also waived his legal rights to avoid responsibility for Mary or her child. Instead of divorcing her or even waiting for the time of betrothal to end, Joseph immediately took Mary home to live with him. Not only would this minimize any scandal, it allowed Joseph to begin his work of providing for his pregnant wife and the child Messiah.

Matthew makes clear in this verse, though, that Joseph did not have sex with Mary until after Jesus was born. The text uses the biblical euphemism for sex "know." Joseph "knew her not." Matthew also does not suggest that Joseph never had sex with Mary, as some traditions teach. They experienced regular marital relations after the birth of Jesus and had several children together in the natural way (Matthew 13:55–57; Mark 3:31–32).

Joseph also showed that he heard and understood God's command through the angel in his dream by naming the baby Jesus. Jesus is derived from the same Hebrew name from which we get "Joshua," and means "Yahweh saves." *Yahweh* is a Hebrew name for God.

