
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: *Did Joseph suspect Mary of fornication?*

Matthew 1:18-21

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰ But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

In this passage:

- Joseph sees his fiancé is pregnant.
- He makes a decision to divorce Mary quietly.
- He has a dream wherein an angel of God speaks with him – to encourage Joseph not to divorce Mary, but rather, to take her into his home and adopt the baby as his own.

There are two general views on how to interpret this story.

The first view is call the "suspicion view."

This is by far the most popular view. This view says Joseph was suspecting Mary of having committed fornication.

This view makes at least two assumptions:

- First, it assumes Mary did not inform Joseph that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit or, if she did inform him, he did not believe her.

- Second, it assumes that if Mary was guilty of fornication, Joseph could divorce her on that basis. In other words, the Law of Moses allowed for divorce based on the grounds of fornication.

WHY THIS IS NOT CORRECT

I do not believe the "suspicion view" is correct for the following reasons.

First, Mary was not simply found to be "with child."

In other words, she's not just simply found to be pregnant. The passage clearly says, "*She was found with child of the Holy Spirit.*" If words mean anything, these words mean Joseph knew this was a miraculous conception. He found her to be with child "*of the Holy Spirit*" – that is, he discovered her to be with a child that had been conceived by the Holy Spirit – not by a man.

Q: How would Joseph know the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit?

A: My answer would be simply, "*Mary told him and he believed her.*" What's so difficult about believing that scenario?

If someone should argue, "Who could believe a story like that?" I would reply by asking, "Do you believe in the virgin birth of the Lord?" If you believe in His virgin birth, how did you come to believe that? Is it because someone told you ... and you believed it?

My friend, I believe in the virgin birth of the Lord and I believe it because I was taught that by my parents. If I can believe in the virgin birth of the Lord because someone told me, why couldn't Joseph believe in the virgin birth if Mary told him?

The scriptures are calling upon men and women to believe in the virgin birth of the Lord. This is why He is known as the "Son of God" – because God is his father – not a man. If we do not believe this, we forfeit salvation (Jn 8:24).

John 20:30-31

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written **that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Being a Christian requires believing in the virgin birth of Jesus.

So the first problem with the "suspicion view" should not be considered as the correct view is simply that Joseph found Mary to be with child "*of the Holy Spirit.*"

Second, the OT Law did not allow divorce for an impure bride.

Listen carefully to the Law:

Deuteronomy 22:13-14

¹³ "If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, ¹⁴ and charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, 'I took this woman, and when I came to her I found she was not a virgin,'

So here is a man claiming his fiancé is impure.

Deuteronomy 22:20-21

²⁰ "But if the thing is true, and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman, ²¹ then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house. So you shall put away the evil from among you.

Our study today is not to discuss the merits of stoning an impure bride. The point I want you to focus on is simply the fact that the penalty for being an impure bride was not divorcement. Rather, the penalty for impurity was death.

You will notice that when Joseph is being described, he is called a "*just man*" (Mt 1:19).

Five and only five men have been called by the Bible as "*just men*":

- Noah was a "just man" (Gen 6:9)
- Joseph (Mt 1:19)
- Jesus (Mt 27:19)
- Joseph of Arimathea (Lk 23:50)
- Cornelius (Acts 10:22)

A "*just man*" means a man who keeps the law of God. Since Joseph was "*just*" it means he kept the law. But the Law then in force, the Law of Moses, did not provide divorce for an impure bride. That Law required stoning the impure bride to death.

Here are the facts:

- Joseph was a "*just man*" (he kept God's law).
- The Law at that time required stoning for an impure bride.
- Since Joseph kept the law, and since he was not going to have Mary stoned, that means he was not suspicious of Mary being a fornicator.

The "suspicion view," in my understanding, is not valid. It does not take all the facts into consideration. We will discuss the alternative, but less popular view, called *the "humility view"* in our next study.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Well ... thanks for listening to our message this week. We invite you to visit our website www.WillOfTheLord.com. There you may download the notes and the audio file of the message you just listened to.

Call again next week when we consider a new subject on *Bible Talk*.