

## CHRISTMAS INTERLUDE

### **God's Stability In An Unsettled World At Christmas Part V: God's Stability Amid Spiritual Unsettledness At Christmas (Matthew 2:1-23 with Revelation 12:4b)**

Introduction: (To show the need . . . )

This Christmas and New Year's Season, we face significant spiritual unsettledness:

(1) We face it in the secular realm: Tom Beaudin of New Hartford, in a letter to the Republican-American, December 21, 2018, p. 8A, told how he "wept" at a "middle-school 'Winter Concert'" because it was "not a Christmas concert . . . not even a holiday concert." He added, "I wept when . . . I realized that 'political correctness' had become such an overwhelming influence in our society" in a "quest for inoffensiveness" that "(t)he . . . beliefs and traditions that saw the United States into existence as an exceptional country have been relegated to the scrap heap." (Ibid.)

(2) We face it in the religious realm: we face pressure to adopt the "seeker-friendly" format like many other evangelical churches have done, a format in which church leaders go "light" on Bible content and ministry to make the unsaved feel comfortable in the church so as to attract them into the church and there to evangelize them.

However, I have a friend in another state who was head of his Church Board when that Church chose to adopt the "seeker-friendly" format, and doing so indeed attracted many unsaved people. Yet, the conservative believers in the Church became so upset at the spiritual decline in the ministry that they left the Church and went elsewhere!

Without even checking Scripture, just hearing of this event left me dreading the "seeker-friendly" format!

Need: *So, we ask, "How does God want us to respond to the spiritual unsettledness we face?!"*

- I. Revelation 12:4b, 9 reveals that when Israel was about to produce Messiah Jesus, Satan like a great red dragon stood before the nation Israel prepared to destroy Jesus as soon as He was born.**
- II. There was thus a great angelic conflict at Christ's birth between the forces of Satan and the forces of God over Jesus' safety, a conflict that was displayed in the events recorded in Matthew 2:1-23 as follows:**
  - A. Spiritual unsettledness in Israel led God to direct Joseph to take Mary and Jesus into Egypt to escape murderous king Herod's Satanically-fueled effort to kill the Infant Jesus, Matthew 2:1-15a, 16:
    1. God warned Joseph in a dream to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt to guard Jesus from Herod, v.13.
    2. Events leading up to this warning show that spiritual unsettledness via the angelic conflict was behind it:
      - a. The Magi had come to Jerusalem asking for the newborn king of the Jews, troubling Herod, Matt. 2:1-3: (i) Herod was an Edomite, so news of a Jewish king threatened him, Z. P. E. B., v. Three, p. 126. (ii) The Magi, Parthian foes of Rome, were kingmakers who had come with a cavalry, further threatening Herod.
      - b. However, Herod dared not fight the Parthian force lest he attract Caesar's attention and anger him, for Caesar had already demoted Herod for invading Arabia. (Ibid., v. Four, p. 33-34; Wm. Whiston, Josephus, 1974, citing Josephus, Antiq., xvi. 9. 3, p. 350) Thus, Herod planned to use the Magi as his unwitting informers on the new Jewish king so that when the Magi had left, he could kill the Messiah, Matt. 2:4-8.
      - c. Nevertheless, after God led the Magi to Jesus by the moving star, He warned them in a dream not to return to Herod, so they left for their own country without reporting back to Herod, Matthew 2:9-12.
      - d. God knew that when Herod learned that the Magi had left without returning to him, he would furiously seek for and kill all the infants in and around Bethlehem in order to destroy the Infant Messiah, Matt. 2:16. God thus sent word to Joseph to take his family and flee into Egypt, so he obeyed the Lord, Matt. 2:13, 14.
  - B. Spiritual unsettledness in Israel fueled by Satan when Joseph returned from Egypt led God to direct him not to settle Jesus in Judah, Christ's birthplace, but to settle Him far north up in Nazareth of Galilee, Matt. 2:19-23a:
    1. Herod's last will that was written just six days before his death so that it had not been ratified by Caesar gave his throne to Herod's son Archelaus, creating unrest since two of Herod's other ambitious sons who opposed that will left for Rome to contest it before Caesar, Ibid., Zon. Pict. Ency. Bible, v. Three, p. 138.
    2. Meanwhile, Jewish insurrectionists sought revenge for the late Herod's slaughter of those who had tried to tear down the idolatrous image of an eagle he had installed on the temple, so trying to avoid a mob at the coming, politically sensitive Passover, Archelaus killed 3,000 Jews to suppress all opposition, Ibid.
    3. However, such brutality only fomented greater Hebrew revolt even at Passover, what led to the "Temple porticos being burned and its treasury pillaged by the Romans," Ibid.
    4. Archelaus reacted to this revolt and rioting by increasing his brutality, attacking not only Jews but also Samaritans, what only led to pockets of destructive riots all over the land of Israel, Ibid.

5. When Joseph returned from Egypt, he heard of such inflammatory events, so he was justifiably afraid to settle the Infant Messiah Jesus in Judah under murderous Archelaus's authority, Matthew 2:19-22a; *Ibid.*
  6. God also warned Joseph in a dream not to settle in Judah, and as Archelaus was committing atrocities not only in Judaea, but also against Samaritans north of Judaea, the only reasonable place for Joseph to settle was in the far north up in Nazareth of Galilee where he and Mary had lived, Matt. 2:22b-23a; Luke 2:4-5.
  7. Furthermore, Caesar made Herod's son Antipas tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (*Ibid.*), and he proved to be an able ruler, learning from Archelaus' mistakes to rebuild cities ruined by riots against Archelaus and thus to keep the peace. (Harold W. Hoehner, Herod Antipas, 1972, p. 264) Joseph would have readily chosen to live in Nazareth under Antipas' more orderly, peaceful jurisdiction than in Judah under Archelaus!
- C. However, God allowed all this spiritual unsettledness to occur to fulfill His plan, Matthew 2:15b, 17-18, 23b:
1. The flight from murderous Herod into Egypt was necessary to fulfill the Hosea 11:1 prediction that God would call His Son out of Egypt, Matthew 2:15; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Hosea 11:1.
  2. Herod's subsequent slaughter of the Bethlehem area infants, though a brutal deed, fulfilled Jeremiah 31:15 where Herod's atrocity was predicted as part of the same broad picture of Judah's sufferings under Gentile domination, starting with Babylon and extending to Rome, Matthew 2:17-18; *Ibid.*, ftn. to Matt. 2:17-18.
  3. Matthew 2:23b KJV claims that Joseph's decision to settle in Nazareth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would be called a "Nazarene." However, this claim has long been mocked by supporters of Liberal Theology and it has puzzled evangelicals, for the Old Testament nowhere claims the Messiah would be called a "Nazarene." However, more recent archaeological finds now support Matthew's claim:
    - a. The Arabic and Hebrew translations of "Nazareth" supply the letter "ts" for the English letter "z," making the city have as its root word the term "netser," or "branch." (Ronald B. Allen, "Does Anything Good Come from Nazareth?" Kindred Spirit [Dallas Theological Seminary], Winter, 1999, p. 3, 11)
    - b. Isaiah 11:1 predicted Messiah would be the "Branch" Who would spring up from David's line, and finds from the old city of Nazareth show that around 100 B. C., some Jews returning from Babylon settled in the area, giving it their family name "Natsara," thinking the Messiah, or "Branch," would come from them, *Ibid.* Matthew 2:23 thus refers to Jesus' fulfilling Isaiah 11:1 as the "Natsarene" or "Branch-man"! (*Ibid.*)

***Lesson:*** *When Joseph, Mary and Jesus at His birth faced great spiritual unsettledness caused by the angelic conflict between God and Satan over Jesus' safety, humanly obvious danger and God's Word led Joseph to take Mary and Jesus and flee into Egypt, and upon returning to Israel, to avoid resettling in Judah, all in God's plan.*

***Application:*** *(1) May we trust in Christ to be saved, John 3:16. (2) If facing spiritual unsettledness, (a) may we realize that we are involved in an angelic conflict, (b) and that it all fits God's plan for us. Then, like Joseph of old, (c) may we avoid humanly observable, obvious danger and (d) obey God's leading through His Word.*

***Conclusion:*** (To illustrate the message . . . )

We apply this message to the two issues of spiritual unsettledness mentioned in our introduction (as follows):

(1) The reason why many in the world suppress honoring "Christmas" is that "Christmas" reminds them of **Christ**, and that elicits **guilt** in them **since the Holy Spirit convicts the unsaved of sin for not trusting in Christ**, John 16:7-11. We should thus **expect** the lost world to suppress honoring "Christmas" in the angelic conflict!

(2) Similarly, the "seeker friendly" movement is also affected by the angelic conflict: (a) in trying to make the unsaved feel "comfortable" in the church by going "light" on Bible content, "seeker friendly" churches **sin** by **quenching the Holy Spirit** (1 Thessalonians 5:19), **countering His uncomfortably convicting work of the lost for their not trusting in Christ!** (John 16:7-11) Adopting the "seeker friendly" format thus plays into Satan's hand to counter the Holy Spirit's evangelistic work! (b) Also, since the lost are controlled by Satan (John 8:44), the "seeker-friendly" route merely lets lost people who are controlled by Satan enter the Church and feel comfortable in their lost state so that by Satan's influence, they can strongly impress the church to go apostate! (c) Also, New Testament evangelism was performed outside the church, the sole exception being 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 where the visiting unbeliever is impressed by the power of the Holy Spirit witnessed in the spiritual gifts to acknowledge God is in the church. If the unsaved visit a church, they should be exposed to the power of the Holy Spirit in its **full** presentation!

(d) Finally, my dread of the "seeker friendly" route due to my friend's harmful experience with in it another state warns me against that route like news of Archelaus' brutalities warned Joseph not to expose Jesus to his reign!

**(1) May we trust in Christ for salvation. (2) To address spiritual unsettledness, what reflects the angelic conflict behind it, may we heed Joseph's example (a) to avoid clear danger and (b) heed God's written Word.**