

## CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

### Handling Angelic Conflict Stress At Christmas, Matthew 1-2

#### Part I: Handling Angelic Conflict Stress On Marriage

(Matthew 1:18-25)

Introduction: (To show the need . . . )

We face a lot of stress this Christmas Season, much of it fueled by angelic conflict in the spiritual realm:

(1) Britain's Health Secretary Sajid Javid recently said that "reinstating work from home or more severe social-distancing measures" to protect against the new "Omicron" variant of COVID "carry a very heavy price, both economically" and "socially in terms of non-COVID health outcomes such as impact on mental health' . . ."

("Countries on edge over COVID variant," Associated Press, Republican-American, November 29, 2021, p. 1A)

(2) The stress is wide-reaching, too: (a) It is affecting marriages globally: "Around the world -- from South America to West Africa -- previously happy couples are splitting up and divorcing. The stress of the pandemic has been blamed by some, while others say it has highlighted old problems." (Emma Ailes, "'Covid ended our marriage': The couples who split in the pandemic," December 3, 2020; [bbc.com](http://bbc.com)) (b) It is affecting children throughout our nation: Howard Sovronsky, chief behavioral health officer at Connecticut Children's Hospital, claims, ". . . (T)he nature of the pandemic that we are experiencing . . . is a mental health pandemic" resulting "'in an inordinate number of children being brought to emergency rooms . . . around the state and around the country . . .'" (Adria Watson, "Mental health on agenda," Ibid., Republican-American) (c) It is affecting families around the world: Leon F. Seltzer, Ph. D., claimed, "(W)orldwide, lockdowns have increased the rate of domestic violence . . ." (Leon F. Seltzer, "7 Ways to Meet the Marital Challenges of COVID-19," April 8, 2020; [psychologytoday.com](http://psychologytoday.com))

(3) Though we have learned from Revelation 3:21 with 7:17 that God is allowing many trials to arise due to His will that we face a Mini-Great Tribulation in our era of Church History, much of the stress itself is caused by Satanic activity: (a) Ephesians 5:22-23 with 6:12-13 and 1 Corinthians 7:5 reveals that Satan seeks to harm marriages. (b) Ephesians 6:4 with 6:12-13 reveals that Satan seeks to harm relationships between children and their parents in families. (c) Mark 5:1-7 reveals that Satan afflicts people on a personal level, pressuring the emotions, the mind and spirit to make them feel intimidated, to be withdrawn, to have a nervous breakdown or even to become suicidal.

Need: So, we ask, "*How do we handle angelic conflict stress on our marriages this Christmas Season?!*"

#### **I. From Revelation 12:1-4, we know that the events surrounding Christ's birth in Matthew 1-2 were heavily affected by Satan's effort to try to destroy Jesus at His birth (as follows):**

- A. The Revelation 12:1-2 vision of the "woman with child" who "travailed to give birth" represents Israel who suffered greatly to produce the Messiah, and her "child" in Revelation 12:5 is identified as Jesus the Messiah Who would later ascend to heaven. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftns. to Revelation 12:1 and 12:5)
- B. The Revelation 12:3 "great red dragon" who tried to destroy the "child" is Satan according to Revelation 12:9.
- C. Thus, anticipating Christ's birth, Satan spiritually positioned himself to destroy Jesus at His birth, Rev. 12:4b.
- D. In summary, the stressful events in Matthew 1-2 surrounding Christ's birth were influenced by Satan's intense efforts in the spiritual realm to try to influence people to act in ways that would destroy Jesus at His birth.

#### **II. Matthew 1:18-19 thus reveals Satan's attempts to destroy the marriage of Joseph and Mary when she became pregnant with Jesus by the Holy Spirit, thus leading to the unborn Jesus' untimely death:**

- A. In line with their marital customs, the parents of Joseph and Mary had arranged by contract for the two to be wed, Matthew 1:18a. However, the couple had not yet come together, for Mary was living with her parents for a year after the marital contract was made to prove to Joseph that she had been a virgin when the contract was formed. The only way to terminate the contract was to get a divorce. (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 20)
- B. When it was learned that Mary was pregnant, Joseph understandably but mistakenly presumed that she had become pregnant by committing immorality, so he thought of privately divorcing her, Matthew 1:18b-19.
- C. However, divorce would expose Mary to shame and contempt, producing great stress for her and possibly lead to her expulsion or even execution, risking her welfare and jeopardizing the life of an unborn Jesus! (Ibid.)

#### **III. God intervened and used a godly Joseph to function in ways that would protect his marital arrangement with an innocent Mary and so protect the Infant Jesus Who was still in her womb, Matthew 1:20-25:**

- A. Joseph was a *righteous* man (Matthew 1:19a), explaining why he initially intended to divorce Mary for what he presumed was immorality on her part. Yet, God used Joseph's commitment to be upright to preserve his marital contract when he learned that Mary's pregnancy was caused by God, not by immorality, Matthew 1:20.

- B. Joseph was a *considerate* man, not wanting to inflict a lot of damage on Mary, explaining his intent to divorce her privately instead of having her exposed before the judges at the city gate as an immoral woman so that she might be executed, Matthew 1:19b; Ibid.
- C. Joseph was a *patient* man, giving himself **time** to think before divorcing Mary, Matthew 1:20a. Joseph's patience also gave time for the Lord to reveal to Joseph Mary's innocence and thus to solve their marital crisis.
- D. Joseph realized God's *precedent* in the matter: when told by the angel that he was not to fear sticking to the initial plan he had made to take Mary as his wife, Joseph realized God had arranged for him to make his initial commitment to marry her, that he was thus not to change course due to that divine precedent, Matthew 1:20b.
- E. Joseph accepted *God's Word* on the matter, believing the angel of God and later realizing the fulfillment of Scripture as to Christ's virgin birth and mission to save Israel from sin, Matthew 1:21-23.
- F. Joseph was *protective* of his espoused wife, **immediately** taking her as his wife upon waking from sleep so as to protect the reputations of Mary and Jesus under the shield of her marital union with Joseph, Matthew 1:24.
- G. Joseph practiced great *self-restraint*, choosing not to be physically intimate with Mary though taking her as his wife out of respect for the virgin birth of Jesus until after she had delivered Him, Matthew 1:25a.
- H. Joseph *obeyed God*, naming Mary's infant "Jesus" like the angel had said, Matthew 1:25b with 1:21. A father normally named his son at his birth (Luke 1:59-63), but in this case, Joseph submitted to God's Word and will.

***Lesson:*** *By being righteous, considerate, patient, by relying on God's precedent and God's Word and by being protective, showing self-restraint and obeying the Lord, Joseph was used of God to thwart Satan's effort to try to destroy Jesus at His birth.*

***Application:*** *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. (2) In handling marital-threatening stresses this Christmas Season, may we (a) rely on the Holy Spirit for thought and behavior control (Galatians 5:16, 22-23) to (b) be righteous, considerate, patient, to rely on God's precedents and His Word, to be protective, to show self-restraint and to obey the Lord toward preserving the marital commitments God has already led us to make.*

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

Though Adam and Eve were created as husband and wife in sinless harmony, when Satan led them into sin, Adam blamed Eve for his sin (Genesis 3:12), indicating marital tension. Viewing Satan's work to lead the couple into sin thus becomes a revealing *overview* of Satanic activity that harms marriages, what we do well to study (as follows):

(1) Satan tried to reverse the roles of husband and wife that God established at creation: In Genesis 2:22-24, when God created a wife for Adam from his rib, God brought her to Adam just like God had brought the land animals to him in Genesis 2:19 to see what Adam would name them. In the Semitic world in which the book of Genesis was written, naming someone indicated lordship over that person. (*Ryrie Study Bible, KJV*, 1978, ftns. to Genesis 1:10 and 2:20) Yet, Satan tried to get Eve to lead her husband Adam to sin, to get her to violate her God-ordained role as a subordinate to Adam. Satan's effort succeeded, for when Eve ate of the fruit and gave it to Adam, he submitted to her lead in violation of God's role where Adam was to lead Eve, so he ate of the fruit, Genesis 3:6b. Many problems rise in marriages due to a reverse of the roles of husband and wife! **We need to stay in God's roles.**

(2) Related to the role reversal issue, Satan approached Eve in Adam's absence (Genesis 3:1), trying to get her to act independently of her spiritual protective head in Adam, so she ended up deceived. (1 Timothy 2:14) **Wives need to function in union with their husbands.**

(3) Satan also sought to get Eve to question the command God had given on abstaining from the forbidden fruit, asking, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1 ESV) Eve's answer was **not fully** correct, for she replied that though God had allowed them to eat from all the trees except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she added that they could **not even touch** it, what was **not true**, Genesis 3:2-3 with 2:16-17. Eve's partial error opened the door for Satan to deny that she would die were she to eat of the fruit, a brash lie, but Eve by then was open to believing that lie, Genesis 3:4-5. Many angelic conflict problems arise from adopting partial truths, leading to deception and great error that produce much harm. **We need to stay with God's absolute truth!**

(4) Eve yielded to the lusts of the flesh, the eyes and the pride of life (Gen. 3:6), worldly lusts (1 John 2:15-16), what foments marital problems! **We must rely on the Holy Spirit to avoid indulging in lusts!** (Galatians 5:16)

**May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we handle marital-threatening stresses caused by the angelic conflict this Christmas by relying on the Holy Spirit for the thought and behavior control we need for functioning righteously.**