

CHRISTMAS INTERLUDE
God's Protections At Christmas
Part III: God's Protection With Livelihood Issues
(Matthew 2:11b-18)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Obtaining personal protection with livelihood risks is a big concern today:

(1) Multiple sources such as USA Facts, Newsweek, Moneywise and Dave Ramsey's Ramsey Solutions report that this year, a lot of American adults are facing difficulties with their finances: 49% of American adults are living paycheck to paycheck, unable to save or get ahead; 29% expect their situation to worsen in 2026; 34% struggle to pay bills and 53% cite inflation as their top concern. I have often heard Dave Ramsey on his radio program claim that a lack of self-discipline in handling one's personal finances is a chief source of such problems.

(2) However, Veronique de Rugy, the George Gibbs Chair in Political Economy and a senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University shared her expert opinion that the government is largely to blame. She wrote: "The . . . Left and Right . . . insist that a brighter future is possible only through top-down political control, and neither wants to confront the real risk: a government already too large, spending money it doesn't have and drifting toward fiscal crisis . . . (P)rice controls, industrial planning, more trade barriers, more centralized economic management and political control over our lives generally . . . have failed everywhere they've been tried . . . (M)any Americans could be doing much better. Housing costs are high and rising . . . health care" is "too expensive. Energy infrastructure is inadequate. Immigration is mismanaged. These issues are real, but their cause isn't capitalism, markets or global competition – it's often the barriers created by the government itself, at the state and local levels and in Washington . . . If we want lower prices and greater opportunity, we must scale back the size and scope of government, build more housing, reform permitting, expand energy capacity . . . remove tariffs and open the door to more workers. These are supply-oriented solutions, grounded in evidence and consistent with a free and dynamic society." (Veronique de Rugy, "The American experiment isn't what's failing," op. cit., December 6, 2025, p. A6)

(3) Regardless of the financial headwinds we face from various sources, I have long witnessed what David claimed in Psalm 37:25 KJV when he wrote: "I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." God has a financial aid program that everyone needs to know how to utilize!

Need: So we ask, "With concerns we have over livelihood risks we face this Christmas, what would God advise?"

- I. What Joseph and Mary were obliged to do that first Christmas left them facing major livelihood risks:**
- A. Rome's Emperor Caesar Augustus decreed that a census enrollment was to occur to levy taxes on the entire empire, and Roman law required that Joseph and Mary had to travel from Nazareth southward to Bethlehem 70 miles away (Luke 2:1-5a NIV; J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 58-59).
 - B. While they were in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to the Messiah Jesus, Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:5b-7.
 - C. When Israel's King Herod sought to find and kill the Infant Messiah, God directed Joseph to take his family and flee 200 miles further southwest into Egypt and stay there until God sent him word again, Matthew 2:13.
 - D. These requirements by Caesar and God left Joseph's family humanly facing major financial risks:
 1. Rome's taxes on the empire's non-Roman provinces like Israel were so burdensome that "the provinces were almost bled to death" by them. (Zon. Pict. Ency. Bib., vol. Five, p. 605)
 2. When Mary gave birth to Jesus, she had to pay for a temple postpartum purification sacrifice, Lev. 12:1-8.
 3. Joseph had to finance the 70-mile trip to Bethlehem, his family's previously unplanned flight 200 miles into Egypt and their stay there for an indefinite time until God sent him word to return with its return costs.
 4. The family's stay in Egypt involved about an extra month of previously unplanned livelihood costs:
 - a. Scripture states that Joseph stayed in Egypt until the death of Herod (Matthew 2:13-15, 19-20).
 - b. To identify the length of time they stayed in Egypt, (i) we note that Mary's purification sacrifice was offered 41 days after Jesus' birth (Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, 1978, ftn. to Luke 2:22 with Lev. 12:1-8). (ii) We also note that since she paid the price of a poor woman's sacrifice (Luke 2:22-24 with Lev. 12:8), the magi had not then arrived with their costly gifts that would increase Mary's net asset value and require her to pay for a lamb for her sacrifice. (Ibid.) (iii) Christ was likely born on December 25th in 5 B. C. and secular records show Herod died between March 29 and April 11 in 4 B. C. (Harold Hoehner, Chron. Aspects of the Life of Christ, 1979, p. 11-13, 22-23, 25-27). (iv) If we allow for two more weeks for the magi to arrive and visit them, Joseph's family stayed in Egypt for about a month facing unplanned livelihood costs.

- E. These requirements by Caesar and God also left Joseph's family humanly facing major health risks:
1. Since Christ was likely born on December 25th and the flight of Joseph's family into Egypt then likely occurred in February, and "the winter months are all wet" and cold, the trip to Bethlehem and then into Egypt in winter would have tested Mary's health in her late pregnancy and the health of her and her Infant after she had given birth. (Hoehner, loc. cit.; Zon. Pict. Ency. Bib., op. cit., p. 579-580)
 2. Luke 2:7 indicates that Mary gave birth in a stable, an area notorious for massive germ contamination.
 3. Also, the possibility of postpartum infection and other complications coupled with the sudden flight of 200 miles into Egypt in cold, rainy weather would have enhanced the health risks for both mother and infant.
 4. The long trips in winter, the flight from Herod, the high and unforeseen travel costs and stay in a foreign Gentile land for a month would have been very stressful for Joseph's family, taxing their immune systems!

II. Nevertheless, when they obeyed what was required of them, God amply met the family's living needs:

- A. When Joseph's family obeyed what was required of them, God amply met their financial needs:
1. Since Mary paid for the poor woman's sacrifice of birds and not for a lamb in her postpartum dues (Luke 2:22-24 with Leviticus 12:1-8), the Lord had arranged for Joseph and Mary to pay Caesar's tax and Mary's postpartum temple sacrifice at reduced rates before the magi had arrived and bumped up their net asset value with costly gifts that would have increased their tax burden and Mary's sacrifice cost.
 2. Since the magi were Parthian-Persian kingmakers (Zon. Pict. Ency. Bib., vol. Four, p. 34), their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh would have been in large enough amounts to be of great value to Joseph's poor Hebrew family. These items could then have been used by Joseph to finance the family's flight into Egypt, their stay there for a month and their return up to Nazareth in northern Israel, cf. Matthew 2:11-23.
- B. When Joseph's family obeyed what was required of them, God also amply met their health needs:
1. Frankincense and myrrh have been used since ancient times to counter infection and inflammation. These products from the magi kingmakers could have been used to help the family's immune systems combat the effects of the wet, cold weather in their travels and help in cases of postpartum infection for Mary or Jesus.
 2. The illness-inducing effects of physical and emotional stress that the family faced in their trip down to Bethlehem and then flight into Egypt would have been countered by God's provisions for them in Egypt:
 - a. In the time of Jesus, "the largest and most affluent community" of the "Jewish diaspora (dispersed Jews)" was "in Egypt," and "Jewish communities (there) were centered around the synagogue, with full internal autonomy." (The Carta Bible Atlas, p. 179: Map 243, "The Jewish Diaspora in the Time of Jesus")
 - b. Joseph's family would have felt comfortable to enter a large, established, internally self-governing Hebrew community in Egypt that was centered around the synagogue where God was worshiped. This kind of setting would have countered the stress they had faced with their travel to Bethlehem, their flight from Herod into Egypt, Mary's childbirth in a stable and the cultural strain of living in Gentile Egypt.
 - c. Egypt in winter also has mildly warm, breezy weather that is loved by tourists (seasonsyear.com/Egypt), so their month-long stay in Egypt would have felt to Joseph's family like a recuperating vacation since it was also completely funded through the magis' bountiful gifts under God's sovereign provision!

Lesson: *When Joseph and Mary obeyed Caesar's edict to travel to Bethlehem to pay their taxes, to heed God's Biblical requirement that Mary offer a postpartum sacrifice and then to heed God's directive to flee into Egypt, God arranged for their financial and health risks involved to be amply met by His forethought and provisions.*

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) If we face livelihood risks this Christmas, may we obey the requirements God has for us and see Him meet all of our livelihood needs.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message and/or provide additional guidance . . .)

Hudson T. Armerding, a former President of Wheaton College, told how a friend of his had manipulated his accounts so his creditors and bank would not know he was in financial distress. Dr. Armerding urged him to confess his deception to the bank and trust God to help. When his friend heeded this advice, Dr. Armerding wrote, "(T)he president of the bank told him he was willing to give him a chance because he believed that my friend would not have come to him if he did not have something in his character that was worthy of confidence. Then he worked out a line of credit for him and a system whereby he could pay his debts." (Hudson T. Armerding, Leadership, 1979, p. 92-93)

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. If we face livelihood risks, may we obey the Lord and see Him meet all of our livelihood needs.