

Matthew Chapter 4 Continued

Verses 12-16: Matthew designates four clear geographical areas in relation to the ministry of Christ: Galilee (4:12), Perea (“beyond Jordan,” 19:1), Judea (4:25), and Jerusalem (21:1). The author then omits some of the early Judean ministry and begins with Jesus at Capernaum in Galilee where he first met Christ (9:9).

“John was cast into prison”: The circumstances of the arrest and eventual beheading of John the Baptist are recorded in chapter 14. Apparently a widespread persecution of the followers of John and Jesus took place at this time. Luke 4:16-31 explains that the reason for Jesus “leaving Nazareth” was an attempt on His life after a synagogue service at Nazareth. From this point on, Capernaum became the headquarters of Jesus’ ministry to the house of Israel. This city was a Roman settlement near the Sea of Galilee and was the center of the Roman government of the northern provinces of Israel.

“That it might be fulfilled” (verses 14-16) refers to the coming of Christ into Galilee in fulfillment of the prophecy of (Isaiah 9:1-2), “beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light,” Jesus Himself was that great Light that now would shine forth in His earthly ministry to the people of Galilee, who had so long been despised by their southern Judean cousins.

Matthew 4:12 "Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;"

John was imprisoned for his bold rebuke of Herod Antipas (see 14:3-4).

We will see, here, that the end of John's work (proclaiming the coming of the Christ), would be the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Just as Jesus came not for those who already knew God, He began His ministry in a very spiritually dark place. Without Jesus Christ, there is no hope, nothing to look forward to.

God's purpose in His beginning in the dark place was to show that His power and might were not drawn from Jewish law. This was a new day. Jew and Gentile alike would have to receive Him not through law, but through grace.

Galilee is the regional name for the northern part of Palestine extending from the Esdraelon plain some 50 miles north and from the Sea of Galilee about 30 miles to the west. Its primary feature is the 13-mile-long Sea of Galilee (seven miles wide at its broadest point). In the Old Testament this lake is called Chinnereth (Num. 34:11; Josh. 12:3; 13:27); in the New Testament it is variously identified as Gennesaret (Mark 6:53), Tiberias (John 21:1) and Galilee (John 6:1).

It lies 695 feet below sea level with the Jordan River flowing through it. Some towns of Galilee that were situated on the seashore were Capernaum, Bethsaida, Tiberias, and Magdala. Of these only Tiberias exists today. Other significant Galilean towns include Nazareth and Chorazin. Galilee is important to the New Testament not only as the place of Jesus’ youth, but also as the

primary region of His public ministry (the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration, 25 of His 33 miracles and 19 of His 32 parables).

During New Testament times this region was governed successively by Herod the Great, Herod Antipas and Herod Agrippa. Since Antipas ruled Galilee from 4 B.C. to A. D. 39, virtually all of the events of the Gospels and of the first decade of the church age relate to his time. Tiberias beside the sea was his capital.

Matthew 4:13 "And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali:"

“Leaving Nazareth”: Some time elapsed between verses 12 and 13. Jesus’ stay in Nazareth ended abruptly when He was violently rejected by the people of Nazareth, who tried to murder Him (see Luke 4:16-30).

Capernaum lay on the northwest shore of Galilee. The exact site has been confirmed in modern times through archaeology. Though two sites had been traditionally claimed, only one (Tell Hum) possesses archaeological evidence that dates it as early as the New Testament.

Capernaum is never mentioned in the Old Testament and is found in the New Testament only in the Gospels. Yet it was a central city in Christ’s ministry; most of the time Christ spent in Galilee was in Capernaum.

When Jesus began His public ministry He made it His home base (verse 13; 9:1), partly because of its prominence in Galilee. It housed a tax collector (9:9), a high government official (John 4:46), and a centurion with his soldiers (8:5-9). It became the home of Peter and Andrew, and probably James and John (Mark 1:29; Luke 5:10).

Jesus performed many miracles in Capernaum including healings of the centurion’s servant, the nobleman’s son, Peter’s mother-in-law, the paralytic, and probably the raising of Jairus’s daughter (also Luke 4:23). Later, Jesus condemned the people of Capernaum, for despite His many miracles, they still disbelieved (11:23).

Matthew 4:14-15 "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying," "The land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, [by] the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;"

“Galilee of the Gentiles”: This name was used even in Isaiah’s time because Galilee lay on the route through which all Gentiles passed in and out of Israel. In Jesus’ time, the region of Galilee had become an important center of Roman occupation. The prophecy cited by Matthew is from Isa. 9:1-2; Isa. 42:6-7.

Matthew 4:16 "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up."

Later on, we will hear Jesus say that He came not for those who need not a physician, but for the lost. It is very interesting, to me, that God would have Jesus come from Nazareth where it would be spoken (that "no good thing could come out of Nazareth".)

The "sea", mentioned here, was the Sea of Galilee, a large rough sea where much fishing was going on. This sea had several towns scattered along the banks. Capernaum was where Peter's home was. Later on, because of so widespread unbelief here, this city would be totally destroyed. Today it is a tourist sight. Walls are thrown down and rubble is everywhere.

Many of the activities of Jesus took place near this sea. The demonic man was freed of the legion of demons near here, the feeding of the multitude took place here, the draft of the fishes was here; I could go on and on, but you get the idea.

Even all the fantastic miracles that Jesus did here, was not enough to convince these people of who He was. A prophet is not accepted in his or her own land. Many of the Gentiles believed, but their Jewish friends already had the law, and felt they were not in need of a Savior.

Matthew 4:17 "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

“From that time Jesus began to preach”: This marks the beginning of His public ministry. Note that His message was an exact echo of what John the Baptist preached.

“Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”: The opening word of this first sermon sets the tone for Jesus’ entire earthly ministry (Luke 5:32). Repentance was a constant motif in all His public preaching. And in His closing charge to the apostles, He commanded them to preach repentance as well (Luke 24:47).

The message of John the Baptist is now clearly proclaimed by Jesus Christ. However, Jesus, as the Messiah, is not calling on His listeners to prepare for the coming of the kingdom but rather announces that the kingdom is here. The kingdom blessings promised in Isaiah 35:5-6 to be fulfilled in a future kingdom, here become the credentials of the King at His first coming.

Verses 18-20: “Simon called Peter and Andrew” became the first two disciples called publicly by Jesus. Andrew had introduced his brother to Jesus on an earlier occasion (John 1:40). The invitation, “Follow me,” called these earlier believers into a permanent ministry to be shared with Christ.

“I will make you fishers of men” clearly indicates the nature of this ministry. They would receive special training in bringing men into the kingdom. Having “left their nets,” these disciples entered into a new relationship and would never again be able to fully return to the occupation they once held so dear.

Matthew 4:18 "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers."

“Two brethren”: Jesus had encountered Peter and Andrew before, near Bethabara, in the Jordan region, where Andrew (and perhaps Peter as well) had become a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35-42).

They left John to follow Jesus for a time before returning to fishing in Capernaum. Perhaps they had returned to Capernaum during Jesus’ earlier ministry here. Here He called them to follow Him in long-term discipleship.

“Peter” was originally named Simon. Jesus surnamed him “Rock” (Greek Petros; Aramaic Cephas). Peter and his brother Andrew were fishermen from Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44) who later worked out of Capernaum (Mark 1:29).

Andrew, a disciple of John the Baptist, immediately began to follow Jesus on the day John announced Him. At once he introduced Simon to Christ (John 1:35-42). Peter’s devotion to Christ brought him within the innermost circle of disciples. Peter shared in the greatest moments of Christ’s ministry; Peter was always listed first among the Twelve.

Yet Peter’s devotion was at times an impulsive one. Peter’s faith in Christ’s command allowed him to walk on water; and then, after he had walked, his disbelief caused him to sink (14:28-31)! Peter’s sensitivity to God’s witness prompted his great confession that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” only to be followed by words inspired by Satan (16:16-17, 22-23).

Three events during Christ’s earthly ministry were significant to Peter’s life and future ministry:

1. His confession concerning Christ at Caesarea Philippi (chapter 16);
2. His involvement at Christ’s transfiguration (chapter 17);
3. His threefold denial of Christ before the Crucifixion (chapter 26).

After the ascension of Jesus, Peter continues as the leader, opening the door of the gospel to the Jews (Acts 2), to the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), and to the Gentiles (Acts 10; 11:1, 18; 15:7, 14). However, his ministry in the early church remained primarily to the Jews.

Matthew 4:19-20 "And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." "And they straightway left [their] nets, and followed him."

This Sea of Galilee, as we said, was a popular place for the men in this area who made their living fishing. This sea is about six miles wide and seventeen miles long. When the wind would get up, it would be really rough; so rough that you could easily lose a ship and all aboard.

These verses tell us a lot about our Lord Jesus Christ while He walked on the earth. He spoke and these two men obeyed. These men, by vocation, were fishermen. When the call came for the

ministry, they did not hesitate. We could take a real lesson from these men. So many times, when the call comes to the ministry, we hesitate and try to finish the job at hand before we answer.

These men dropped everything and followed Jesus. This call that Jesus made to these two men was not for salvation, but to work with Him. They had to give up the comforts of home, and even the living they had, for an uncertain future of winning souls. This call brought them out of the worldly into the spiritual.

These men were strong. It takes a lot of muscle to pull in fish nets full of fish. The name "Andrew" means manly, and "Peter" means rock. You can see by their names, that these men were powerful physically. Jesus was about to make strong spiritual men of them. They would face more hardships as ministers of the Word than they ever did as fishermen.

These men were just ordinary men. They had no degrees in ministry, only the call of God upon their lives. These two were to become part of the elite 12 that would, through Jesus, make a giant impact upon the world. We will look at them, again and again, as we go through this study. For now, it is enough to know that they would no longer fish for food, but for the souls of men.

Verses 21-22: "James and John" were also brothers and fishing partners with Simon and Andrew. Matthew and Mark agree that they were "mending their nets," but Luke seems to differ. The two accounts can be harmonized simply: As two men were mending nets, the other two were fishing.

Jesus then came upon them and called them all to follow Him. The statement in verse 22 that they "immediately" responded to His call gives us a perfect picture of true obedience to the lordship of Christ.

Matthew 4:21 "And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James [the son] of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them."

"James": This James is easy to distinguish from the other men named James in the New Testament, because he is never mentioned in Scripture apart from his brother John. His martyrdom by Herod Agrippa I marked the beginning at a time of severe persecution in the early church (Acts 12:2).

"James ... and John," the sons of Zebedee, two of the 12 apostles, were fishermen in partnership with their father and also Simon Peter (Luke 5:10). Since James is normally mentioned first, he was probably older than his brother John.

Peter, James and John formed the inner circle among the disciples, who exclusively witnessed the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:37), Christ's transfiguration (Mark 9:2), and the Gethsemane experience (Mark 14:33). But James and John are remembered with less distinction for their impulsive desire to destroy the non-receptive Samaritans with fire from heaven (Luke 9:54), and their desire to be first in Christ's kingdom (Mark 10:35-40).

James is the first and only apostle whose martyrdom is recorded in Scripture. In A.D. 44 King Herod beheaded James and planned the same for Peter (Acts 12:1-3). John, by contrast, lived a very long life and was a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:9).

Among the 12 apostles, only John and Peter are given individual recognition in the Book of Acts and in Paul's epistles. John wrote the fourth gospel, his three epistles, and the Revelation. John never mentions by name his brother James or himself, except in Revelation, and as the beloved disciple in the gospel. Hence, James is mentioned in Scripture only by Matthew, Mark and Luke (Acts included).

Matthew 4:22 "And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him."

You see, again, James and John did not hesitate when Jesus called. They left their father, their means of support, their home, and all worldly possessions, and followed Jesus. These two were, also, known as "sons of thunder". John, as we would see in later lessons, was very close to Jesus. He was known as John the beloved.

The mother of James and John would ask Jesus to let her two sons sit on the right and left of Jesus in His kingdom. He did not grant her wish. He said it was not His to give.

Matthew 4:23 "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people."

Jesus was about the Father's business. He taught, preached, and healed in their churches and wherever people had needs, the three main aspects of Christ's public ministry.

There were a number of little towns in Galilee. Many miracles were done in these cities.

Jesus stated that if the miracles that were done in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, they would have repented and been saved. In Capernaum, they believed that Jesus was the carpenter's son, not the Son of God.

Matthew 4:24 "And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them."

Syria was the area immediately northeast of Galilee.

The Bible says that if all the miracles that Jesus did were written in a book, there would not be enough books in the entire world to hold them. You can easily see how this fame would spread.

Literally thousands were healed, freed from demon spirits, restored to sanity, and stopped shaking from the palsy. All these people had to do was to believe, and just one touch from Jesus' hand restored them. You can easily see that His powers were not limited.

As we will see in verse 25, people from all areas that were in traveling distance, brought their sick to Jesus and then carried the message back of His great powers. He not only healed the body, but the spirit, as well.

Matthew 4:25 "And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and [from] Decapolis, and [from] Jerusalem, and [from] Judaea, and [from] beyond Jordan."

We know of several occasions of over 5,000 people following Him. This was a great company of people. Where did they all disappear to when He was crucified?

“Decapolis” was a confederation of 10 Hellenized cities south of Galilee and mostly east of the Jordan. The league of cities was formed shortly after Pompey’s invasion of Palestine (64 B.C.), to preserve Greek culture in the Semitic region. These cities were naturally Gentile strongholds.

Matthew Chapter 4 Continued Questions

1. What did Jesus hear had happened to John before He went into Galilee?
2. When John's ministry ended, what happened to Jesus' ministry?
3. Jesus' ministry beginning in a spiritually dark place, showed what?
4. Jew and Gentile alike would have to receive Jesus, not through the law, but through what?
5. What was the regional name of the northern part of Palestine?
6. Capernaum was near what body of water?
7. The people, which sat in darkness, saw what?
8. What negative thing was spoken about Nazareth?
9. What was the main occupation of people around the Sea of Galilee?
10. Where was Peter's home?
11. Why was this city destroyed later?
12. Name 3 special things that occurred near the Sea of Galilee.
13. Where is a prophet not accepted?
14. Why did the Jews believe they did not need a Savior?
15. What message did Jesus preach similar to John the Baptist's message?

16. What two brothers did Jesus call to the ministry in verses 18-19?
17. How big was the Sea of Galilee?
18. What occupation did Peter have?
19. What does the word "Andrew" mean?
20. What did Jesus call them to do?
21. Who were the two sons of Zebedee that Jesus called?
22. They were, also, called sons of what?
23. What special name was John called by?
24. What wish of James' and John's mother did Jesus not do?
25. Jesus went about Galilee doing what?
26. What four kinds of people were brought to Jesus for help?
27. How many books would it take to hold a list of Jesus' miracles?
28. Name five places the multitudes came from?