

Jim's Notes

The Gospel According to St. Matthew Chapter 4:12 - 25

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. . . (Matthew 4:12).

Jesus temptation in the wilderness had followed immediately after his Baptism by John. In the Gospel of St. Matthew one could get the impression that his public ministry also followed immediately after he return from the wilderness and upon the arrest of John the Baptist. We find though, from John 1:19-3:36, that some months actually passed before the events that we will read in this section of Matthew.

. . . and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled (Matthew 4:13-14).

Jesus left his quiet home town of Nazareth to Capernaum, making this busy little market town on the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee the headquarters of his public ministry. Capernaum, whose ruins have been excavated in recent years, is situated on the old major highway between the city of Damascus (the capitol of Syria) and Egypt. It is near the border between the two Israelite tribal districts of Zebulun and Naphtali. Though Capernaum was a Jewish town, it was very near Gentile territory.

Matthew 4:15 - 16:

"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles -- the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." This is a quote from the prophet Isaiah 9:1-2. In language it owes more to the Greek Septuagint translation than to the original Hebrew.

Septuagint:

O land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, and the rest inhabiting the sea-coast, and beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

O people walking in darkness, behold a great light: you that dwell in the region and shadow of death, a light shall shine upon you. (Isaiah 9:1-2).

Hebrew:

But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt

in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. (Isaiah 9:1-2).

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

It is with this verse that Jesus' public ministry begins. The age of the Messiah has passed from the future hope of the prophets to the time of fulfillment in the Messianic age. It is "at hand" in this context means the same as "the time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15) or "in the midst of you" (Luke 17:21).

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called *Peter* and *Andrew* his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, *James* the son of *Zebedee* and *John* his brother, in the boat with *Zebedee* their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22).

In the calling of the first four of his disciples, Jesus as a rabbi was not breaking any new ground. There is continuity in his actions with the common practice of Jewish teachers. At this time it was the general practice for a rabbi to collect a group of disciples about him to mentor them in the faith. One might wonder, if Peter, Andrew, James and John were stranger to Jesus why they would without hesitation drop everything and follow this new teacher from Nazareth. Most likely these first disciples already knew Jesus. It is certain that James and John, the sons of Zebedee and Salome, knew him because there were Jesus first cousins. Their mother Salome was a sister of the Virgin Mary. Compare Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10, and John 19:25.

And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan (Matthew 4:23-25).

From the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry he manifested the fulfillment of the coming of the Messianic age as it was predicted by the prophet Isaiah, that the dead would rise, the deaf would hear, the blind would see, and the Good News would be preached to the people (see Isaiah 26:19, 29:18-19, 35:5-6, 61:1). Through the very action of Jesus healing love to the people he demonstrated that he in his Person was the fulfillments of all their hopes and dreams of the coming Anointed Savior.

These verses sum up and anticipate the breaking forth of Jesus ministry to the Jews first but also to the Gentile nations. Even though as a good Jewish rabbi he spoke to the Jewish people in their synagogues, his fame soon spread north and east into the Gentile lands of Syria and the Decapolis.