

Epiphany III: Matthew 4:12-23: Jesus begins His Great Galilean Ministry

1. Mt. 4:1-11 treats the temptation of Jesus. Between vss. 11 and 12 falls the early Judean ministry, a period of about one year, described at Jn. 1:1-4:42. Thus Robertson, *Harmony of the Gospels*, and Beck, *The Christ of the Gospels*. Others, like Stoeckhardt, include also Jn. 4:42-5:47 before Mt. 4:12. At any rate, at Mt. 4:12 begins what is known as the Great Galilean Ministry, the larger portion of Jesus' public ministry.
2. Vs. 12: The subject of the sentence is Jesus understood. Here one of the reasons for Jesus' leaving Judea is stated: the Baptist was arrested. Thus RSV, NEB, LB and JB. AV, NKJV, TEV and NIV translate "was cast (put) into prison." He was imprisoned by Herod Antipas at Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea. Jn. 4:1-3 gives us another reason: He did not want the Pharisees to pit His baptism against that of the Baptist. Jesus did not go to Machaerus to bail the Baptist out of prison. He left him there to testify and to give his life. "Fear not them that kill the body." ἀνεχώρησαν: this verb occurs ten times in Matthew, once in Mark, once in John, twice in Acts but nowhere in the epistles. AV and NKJV have "he departed", RSV, NEB and NASB: "he withdrew", LB and NIV "he returned" implying that He had been there before. Remarkably enough this same verb occurs at Mt. 14:13, after the Baptist's death. Stoeckhardt says: "This removal of John from the scene of activity served Jesus as a suggestion from His heavenly Father to enter to the full extent upon His Messianic career."
3. Vs. 13: On the way He must have passed through Nazareth. καταλιπὼν means that He abandoned it as His home. κατοίκησεν means that He took up permanent residence in Capernaum. τὴν παραθαλασσίαν, qualifies Capernaum "the sea-side town." It lay on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. ἐν ὄροις does not mean that the boundries of Zebulun and Naphtali still existed. They had long ago been forgotten.
4. Vs. 14: He went to Galilee and moved His residence from Nazareth to Capernaum in fulfillment of a prophecy. τὸ ῥηθὲν, passive, denotes what God said. λέγοντος, active, denotes the prophet.
5. Vs. 15: Is. 9:1-2 (NASB) reads as follows: "But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them." (Don't overlook the great Messianic prophecy in vss. 6-7 of Is. 9). In this instance Matthew does not quote the LXX but gives his own rendering, based on the Hebrew. (By the way, vss. 13-16 are peculiar to Matthew.) Matthew does not alter the substance of Isaiah's words. γῆ (twice in 15) is in apposition to λαὸς in 16. He is speaking of five districts of people. All our translations read thus except JB which combines the first two items in line two, vs. 15 thus: "way of the sea on the far side of Jordan." ὁδὸν θαλάσσης is a difficult phrase. AV and NASB: "by the way of the sea," LB: "beside the Lake", RSV: "toward the sea", TEV: "in the direction of the sea", NIV, NEB and AAT: "the way to the sea", and NKJV: "the way of the sea". Vs. 15 speaks of five districts of people: Zebulun, Naphtali, the land between the sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean, Perea (east of the Jordan) and Gentile Galilee. Hendriksen summarizes thus: "It was in and around Galilee that Jesus spent most of his life on earth. . . . In all probability the five items mentioned here in vs. 15 refer to five different sections of Greater Galilee. . . . The land of Zebulun was west of the Sea of Galilee, and was bounded on the north by the land of Naphtali. The region toward the sea was to the west of these, and extended from north and south along the Mediterranean. Beyond the Jordan indicates the territory east of the Jordan (Perea). The region which because of the strong pagan element in its population is called Galilee of the Gentiles (Galil in OT) was the northern-most stretch

of what used to be called Naphtali. . . . The name of Galil (Is. 9:1) was changed to Galilee, and thus altered, became the designation of the entire large province ruled by Herod Antipas. . . . For centuries those living in this large territory had been exposed to political and military aggression from the north (Syria, Assyria, etc.) and to the corrosive moral and religious influences of a pagan environment." Delitzsch says: "Since the days of the Judges all these stretches of country were by reason of their proximity exposed to corruption by heathen influences and by subjugation through heathen enemies. The northern tribes on the other side suffered most by reason of the almost constant wars with the Syrians and the later war with the Assyrians, and the deportation of the inhabitants gradually increased under Phul, Tiglatpileser, Salmanassar until a total depopulation resulted." The people of Galilee were a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, pagan people, by and large.

6. Vs. 16: This verse tells us of the utter spiritual destitution of these people, but also of the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus goes where people need Him most. ὁ λαὸς reminds us that Covenant people still lived among them but it includes also the Gentiles. καθήμενος denotes the spiritual stupor of the people. Note the antonyms σκότος and φῶς. The first denotes the hopeless condition of natural man, sunken in ignorance, unbelief and sin. The second, of course, a great Light, reminds us of the Gospel of John, where Jesus is called Light in the darkness of the world. εἶδεν, they actually realized that He was the great Light. This first line involves the metaphor of the glorious light of the sun after a night of storm and fear. The second line repeats the idea of "sitting". The datives have been called a hendiadys: "death's black shadow-land." They could not rescue themselves from sin and its penalty, but Jesus the Light rose over them and dispelled it. By the way, the Baptist was not privileged to preach to these people. His hearers came from Jerusalem and its environs. For the thought cf. Lk. 1:78.79 and the parallel passages noted there. Note the verbs εἶδεν and ἀνέτειλεν. When a man sees a great light or when the bright sunlight shines on him, he surely attributes nothing to himself. He is passive. The point is that the unmerited kindness, the grace of God, underlies this thought.
7. Vs. 17: Ἄπὸ τότε, immediately upon arriving in Galilee. AV, RSV, TEV, NIV, NASB and NKJV read "from that time". JB has "from that moment". NEB: "from that day". LB: "from then on". Jesus wasted no time in preaching. ἤρξατο "began" because His public ministry in Galilee begins here. κηρύσσειν καὶ λέγειν "to announce and speak formally constantly." Cf. Mt. 3:1-2. Almost identical. μετανοεῖτε means: "constantly acknowledge and confess your sins." Confession of sins goes on constantly in the life of a Christian. γὰρ explains why they should confess their sins. Confession of sin is not a meritorious deed or attitude whereby man placates God. Man's only help is in the person and work of Christ. ἤγγικεν, punctiliar-durative perfect tense is rendered "is at hand" by AV, RSV, NASB and NKJV. LB, TEV, NIV translate "is near" but is not recommended because it gives the impression that it's not here. JB is not much better: "is close at hand", nor is NEB: "is upon you". Perhaps AAT is best: "is here". What is here? ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. This does not differ essentially from ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. Both the Baptist and Jesus announced the presence of "the kingdom of heaven" lest it be misunderstood as a physical, earthly, political kingdom. What type genitive is this? It is adjectival, telling us what kind it is. It is also subjective. It comes from God in heaven through the incarnate Christ. It could also be called objective because it is consummated for the individual in everlasting life. This is purest Gospel.
8. Vs. 18: At Jn. 1:40ff we read about Andrew, Peter, James and John meeting and following Jesus during the Judean ministry. This was not permanent. They went back to fishing. Here in Mt. 4:18-22 (and its parallel, Mk. 1:16-20) we read of their first call. The final call is described at Lk. 5:1-11. But many think that this is parallel to Mt. 4 and Mk. 1. See the author's notes on Epiphany V: Lk. 5:1-11 for a fuller explanation. Περιπατῶν denotes attendant circumstance. παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν, Jesus went where the people were. τῆς Γαλιλαίας is adjectival genitive. βάλλοντας

- ἀμφιβληστρον, "casting their casting-net". Hendriksen: "When skillfully cast over the shoulder it will spread out, forming a circle as it falls into the water, and then, because of the pieces of lead attached to it, will quickly sink into the water, capturing the fish underneath." Were they in a boat or standing in the water? LB goes too far: "out in a boat fishing with a net", γάρ is explanatory. They were fishermen by trade.
9. Vs. 19: Jesus commands with a purpose. καὶ well-nigh denotes purpose. Parataxis where we would use hypotaxis. ὑμᾶς ἀλιεῖς is an instance of predicate accusative. ἀνθρώπων is adjectival, a specific kind of fisherman. The meaning is obvious.
 10. Vs 20: A year earlier (Jn. 1) they had acknowledged this man as the Messiah. That explains their immediate compliance on this occasion. They were not blind followers. They were believers.
 11. Vs. 21: Note the subparagraph in the 25th of Nestle's but not in the 26th ed. LB translates: "A little farther up the beach etc." This is likely the intended sense. τῶν with the genitive of relation means "son of". Ἰωάννην and ἀδελφὸν are in apposition to each other. Bengel remarks: "In the very ardour of doing their daily work, they received the call," referring to both sets of brothers. God often calls men for a specific work while they are hard at work in their profession. Bengel adds: "They followed ingenuously, without any immediate stipulation concerning reward." Remarkable! ἐν τῷ πλοῳ, obviously the boat was in the water. Fahling remarks: "It seems that Zebedee the father of James and John, was a prosperous fisherman with connections in Jerusalem." Read him further for an explanation. καταρτίζοντας can mean either to prepare for use or to repair after use. TEV and NIV translates with the former, all the rest with the latter meaning. It makes little difference. τὸ δίκτυον is a general word for any kind of net. καὶ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτούς, Matthew and Mark agree that Peter and Andrew were given a specific command but in the case of James and John it is said that Jesus called them. Likely Jesus said the same to both pairs. The only point we make is that the command to follow Him was at the same time a specific call.
 12. Vs. 22: Mark has the adverb εὐθύς with reference to Jesus' call. Matthew has εὐθέως attached to the participle in vs. 22. Things happened in quick succession without debate and argumentation. At this point Mark says that James and John left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men. They did not abandon him in the sense that he had no helpers. Jesus does not aid and abet people in breaking either the fourth or any commandment.
 13. Vs. 23: This vs. might be called a summary statement of Jesus' entire Galilean ministry. περιήγεν is impf. of continued action. ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ, according to the prophecy in Is. 9:1.2. The verb is followed by three present participles of attendant circumstance. διδάσκων reminds us immediately of the Sermon on the Mount, His many parables, etc. Except for Lk. 11:1 it is never said that the Baptist taught. Furthermore, there is no record of the Baptist preaching "in their synagogues." He preached in the open air, in the Jordan Valley. κηρύσσων, preaching, heralding, announcing "the Gospel of the Kingdom." τῆς βασιλείας is not an easy genitive. It is adjectival, telling us what kind of Gospel. It could also be called content or even objective, "the Gospel about the Kingdom." In any case it is not merely eschatological. It denotes the forgiveness of sins now, fulfilling the prophecy in Is. 9:1.2. θεραπεύων explains itself. Bengel notes that νόσος denotes a disease of the whole body whereas μαλακία denotes an infirmity of any particular part, attended with pain. Note that πᾶσα is used twice. The Baptist performed no miracles. Lenski remarks: "No type or kind of disease, and no case, whatever its stage of development, did Jesus leave unhealed." Hendriksen says: "Christ's healing miracles had a threefold significance: a) They confirmed his message (Jn. 14:11); b) They showed that he was indeed the Messiah of prophecy (Is. 35:5; 53:4.5; 61:1; Mt. 11:2-6); and c) They

proved that in a sense the kingdom had even now arrived, for, as has already been indicated, the concept 'kingdom' includes blessings for the body as well as for the soul." Bengel says: "No one sick or dead, whom Jesus met, remained in sickness or death." ἐν τῷ λαῷ "among the people", means primarily the Jewish people but should not be restricted to them. Cf. Mt. 8:1-13. Here Bengel aptly says: "It was in public, that, as the sick were promiscuously brought to Him, even those were healed whose disease was matter of public notoriety; see Jn. 9:8 and Acts 3:10."

14. Vss. 17-23 prove that the prophecy in Is. 9:1.2 was truly fulfilled.