

## **Jesus Begins His Ministry**

### **Matthew 4:12—25**

Before Jesus could begin preaching He needed to prove that He had the authority to do so. He wasn't just any Israelite who was elegant in speech and able to sway the multitudes with His oration. When He came out to where John was baptizing He identified Himself with those who received and believed the message of John the Baptist: Repent (Matthew 3:2), be baptized (Matthew 3:11) because the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. The people who came out to see John were Jews who understood they needed to confess their sins and the sins of their nation (Matthew 3:6, see also Daniel 9:20; Leviticus 26:40; 2 Chronicles 6:24—26) and in order to become right with God they needed to repent of turning away from God (Luke 1:17) and become baptized for purification (John 3:22—26). Jesus identifies Himself with the righteous remnant (Little Flock of Luke 12:32) by being baptized by John. His was not a baptism of purification but one of identification. He identified Himself with sinners but was without sin.

#### **Order of events after Jesus' baptism**

Matthew states that after Jesus heard John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee. Luke adds that He went into Galilee filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. John 1:35—3:36 tells us what happened between Jesus' temptation and John being cast into prison.

Jesus met two of John's disciples, one of whom was Andrew. They stayed with Him that day. Andrew brought his brother, Peter to Jesus telling him he had found the Messiah. As soon as Jesus met Peter He said, "You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas." Peter was Greek for rock while Cephas (or Kephass) is Aramaic for rock. Jesus spoke Aramaic so it was natural for Jesus to call Peter Cephas. I believe that Jesus named Peter before anyone told Him what his name was (John 3:42).

This all happened before Jesus called any of His disciples. Matthew 4:18 begins relating how the disciples were chosen. As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee He saw Peter and Andrew fishing. They had already met back at where John was baptizing the Little Flock and were primed to drop everything and follow Jesus. According to Luke 5:1—11 James and John were fishing with Peter and Andrew and heeded the call of Jesus to follow Him.

John 1:43—51 tells of Philip being called by Jesus. Philip was from the same town as Andrew and Peter (Bethsaida). Philip found Nathanael and encouraged him to come and see the One of whom the prophets wrote. Matthew was called to follow Jesus a little later according to Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27.

Even though we have details of Jesus calling seven people to come and be His disciple, they have not yet been placed in the special group of 12 for Luke says:

**Luke 6:12—13** <sup>12</sup> It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. <sup>13</sup> And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:

The disciples were called as late as nine months after Jesus was baptized and He could have selected the 12 Disciples almost 18 months after His baptism (Note: I try to use the lower case disciple to indicate a generic follower and the upper case Disciple for the special group of 12 men).

#### **Jesus' Galilean ministry**

Matthew can be divided into three sections: Confirmation, Crown and Cross. The early part of Matthew shows Jesus confirming Himself to be the only One capable to be Israel's Christ. Beginning with Matthew 4:17 Jesus is shown preparing for the crown. The last section beginning with Matthew 16:21 shows His focus on the cross.

##### **Matthew 4:17**

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

## Matthew 16:21

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

Jesus spent perhaps 15 months in the area of Judea until John the Baptist was cast into prison. It was then, and for that reason that He left Judea and went into Galilee. He gave the leadership in Jerusalem the opportunity to accept the good news of the Kingdom but instead it was soundly rejected as evidenced by them throwing John into prison. Jesus spends the next 21 months or so in Samaria and Galilee occasionally going into Jerusalem for Passover and other requirements of the Law. Jesus' time in Galilee is covered from Matthew 4:12 to 19:1. The last six months of His life are centered in and around Jerusalem.

## Spiritual and physical condition of the people

The northern region of Israel was separated politically from the southern Judea area. This happened under the rule of king Rheoboem who led the northern 10 tribes into idol worship. Israel had remained in a state of apostasy and was cursed by God for it. Blessings and curses for Israel are clearly spelled out in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 with verses 1—14 being the blessings and 15—47 the curses.

**Deuteronomy 28:36—37** <sup>36</sup>The LORD will bring you and your king, whom you set over you, to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone. <sup>37</sup> You shall become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the people where the LORD drives you.

**Deuteronomy 28:22, 27—29, 59—61** <sup>22</sup> The LORD will smite you with consumption and with fever and with inflammation and with fiery heat and with the sword and with blight and with mildew, and they will pursue you until you perish. <sup>27</sup> “The LORD will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. <sup>28</sup> The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart; <sup>29</sup> and you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you. <sup>59</sup> then the LORD will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants, even severe and lasting plagues, and miserable and chronic sicknesses. <sup>60</sup> He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they will cling to you. <sup>61</sup> Also every sickness and every plague which, not written in the book of this law, the LORD will bring on you until you are destroyed.

This help to explain why the Disciples would wonder if the blind man or his parents sinned causing him to be born blind. The Disciples understood the connection between sinning and curses.

**John 9:1—2** <sup>1</sup> As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?”

According to Matthew 4:15 this land was given to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali by God but because they turned their back on Him, God allowed the Gentiles to possess the land. This is why it is called the Galilee of the Gentiles.

There were many physical ailments including those with all types of diseases, pains, epilepsy, paralysis, leprosy, lame, blind, dumb and even maimed (missing limbs) (Matthew 4:24; 15:30). Hundreds were coming to be healed giving us a picture of how much suffering the people were enduring for turning away from God. Jesus was able to heal them all (Matthew 8:16; 9:35; 10:1). This healing was the fulfillment of what Isaiah wrote.

**Isaiah 53:4** Surely our griefs (diseases, sicknesses) He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

**Matthew 8:17** *This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: “HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES.”*

If you compare the healing ministry of Jesus and the Disciples with those who claim to be faith healers today you will realize how far short they fall from the true biblical model of healing. Today's “faith healers” will blame the one needing healing for not having enough faith. This was not the criterion when Jesus was healing. When Jesus said it was their faith that made them whole it was not that they had worked up enough faith to believe they could be healed but that they had faith in the healer, Jesus.

There was also a great spiritual darkness and demonic oppression in the whole region. Being possessed by demons was a common occurrence because Satan was very active while Christ was on earth. This same

intensity of satanic activity will be seen during the Tribulation. When Peter wrote to the Jews who were scattered, he acknowledged the overt activity of Satan at that time and the satanic trials they would face during the Tribulation (1 Peter 5:8). As Jesus went throughout the region casting out demons He was fulfilling what Zechariah had written.

**Zechariah 13:22** “It will come about in that day,” declares the LORD of hosts, “that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and I will also remove the prophets and the unclean spirit from the land. **3** And if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who gave birth to him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you have spoken falsely in the name of the LORD’; and his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies. **4** Also it will come about in that day that the prophets will each be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies, and they will not put on a hairy robe in order to deceive;

All of this healing and cleansing from demons is in preparation of the coming Kingdom. Those who go into the Kingdom will not go in sick, lame, blind or possessed by Satan. Healing is directly connected to the soon-to-come Kingdom. Jesus was a light in a very dark place. His command over the physical and spiritual worlds proved that He was indeed the Messiah and that He will be the only one capable of taking control over this world and rule in righteous sovereignty.

In this present age of Grace there is no direct connection between our sins and God’s curses. There may be natural ramifications of sin but no direct God-given curses. This is why we cannot connect a natural disaster with a mistreatment of Israel or of a tornado tearing off a steeple of a Lutheran church because they voted to allow practicing homosexuals to serve as official ministers. The Church, the Body of Christ does not have a list of blessings and curses contingent upon us obeying or disobeying God. There certainly may be consequences, but God has not given us any direct connection between the two like He has with Israel.

### **Jesus’ message**

According to verse 17 it was after Jesus was baptized and tempted and after John was thrown into prison that He began preaching that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. According to Mark 1:14—15 Jesus said the time is fulfilled (it was prophetically the right time), the Kingdom of God was at hand (the setting up of the Kingdom was right around the corner) so they needed to repent and believe the gospel (of the Kingdom). This was not the Gospel Paul preached because Paul preached Christ’s death, burial and resurrection which has not happened yet. This was the same message that John the Baptist preached (see lesson 8) and was rejected by Israel’s leadership.

**Luke 7:30** But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.

The Kingdom was not ready to set up at this time but it was near. First Christ must die and be raised then the Tribulation would come before the Kingdom could be set up.

**Luke 12:49—50** <sup>49</sup> “I have come to cast fire upon the earth [Tribulation]; and how I wish it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup> But I have a baptism to undergo [the cross], and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!

**Luke 12:19—15** <sup>12</sup> So He said, “A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself [Christ needed to go back to heaven before He would return and set up the Kingdom], and *then* return. <sup>13</sup> And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, ‘Do business *with this* until I come *back*.’ <sup>14</sup> But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to reign over us.’ <sup>15</sup> When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done.

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