

Matthew 4

Almost as soon as the Father pronounces His pleasure at His Son (3:17), the Spirit drives the Son into the wilderness to have that filial relationship put to the test (4:1-11). Once the Son passes the test, in contrast to the Israelites who failed their test in the wilderness, Jesus begins His ministry. His message (4:17) is the same as John's was (3:2). First, He calls followers (4:18-22), then we see Him sharing His message of the gospel in numerous villages as He heals their sick (4:23-25).

TRANSLATION - 4:1-11:

1 At that time, Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil. **2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, afterward He hungered. **3** And after coming, the Tempter said to Him, "If the Son you are of God, speak in order that these stones bread they will become." **4** But after answering, He said, "It has been written, 'Not from bread alone will live man, but from every word coming out from the mouth of God.'"

5 At that time, he takes Him, the devil, into the holy city and placed Him on the pinnacle of the temple. **6** And he said to Him, "If the Son you are of God, cast yourself down. For it has been written that, 'His angels He will command concerning you and in the hands they will lift you up, lest you might strike to a stone your foot.'" **7** And Jesus was saying to him, "Again, it has been written, 'You will not tempt the Lord your God.'"

8 Again, the devil takes Him onto a very high mountain and shows to Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, **9** And he said to Him, "Things to you all I will give, if after falling down You will worship me." **10** At that time, Jesus said to him, "Depart, Satan. For it has been written, 'The Lord your God you will worship and to Him only you will serve.'"

11 At that time, the Devil left Him and, behold, angels came and were serving Him.

WORDS:

"To be led" (ver. 1) is used only here in Matthew, out of 23 uses. It can mean "to lead up, bring up, restore, put out to sea." On "Spirit," see 1:18, 20. "To be tempted" is used 38 times, 6 times in Matthew. It can mean to "try, attempt, test, or tempt." "Devil" means "one who slanders" and has been closely associated with the Tempter (see verse 3), Satan. The word is found 37 times in the NT, 6 times in Matthew.

"Fasting" (ver. 2) means to abstain from food. The word is used 20 times in the NT; 8 times in Matthew. "To be hungry" is used 23 times, 9 in Matt. "Bread" (ver. 3) was a principle part of the diets of first-century people. The word is used 97 times in the NT, 21 times in Matt. "To live" (ver. 4) is used very frequently in the NT, 140 times (6 times in Matt.), meaning "to live, become alive again, recover, remain alive." "Man" is *anthropos*, giving us the root of "anthropology," the study of man. Matthew uses the word 115 times, out of 550 uses. It generally means a human being but can, in more narrow contexts, mean a male, or even a husband in very narrow contexts. "Word" is used 68 times, 5 by Matt., and means "saying, expression, thing, object, or matter." "Mouth" can mean "speech, eloquence, or edge of a sword." It is used 78 times, 11 by Matt.

For the word "holy," see 1:18, 20. Matthew uses the word 10 times. "City" means "town, or even its inhabitants." The word is found 162 times, 27 in Matt. It gives us the word "police." "Pinnacle" is found only here in Matt. Its only other use is in the parallel text in Luke 4:9. "Temple" has a rich theological history in the Bible. There are 14 words in this word-family. "Temple" is found 71 times, 11 in Matt. It can also refer to a sanctuary.

"To command" (ver. 6) is not the more widely used word for "command," but this word does mean to "command or order." It is used 15 times, 4 by Matt. "To raise up or lift up, take away, remove" is used by Matthew 19 times, out of 101 times. "To strike or beat against, stumble, take offense, reject" is used only 8 times with Matthew using it twice. "To tempt" is an intensified form of the verb found in verse 1. This form is only used 4 times in the NT, only here in Matt.

“Mountain” (ver. 8) is found 63 times, 16 in Matt., meaning “mountain or hill.” “To show” is only used by Matthew twice (4:8; 8:4). It means to “point out, explain, show, prove.” On “kingdom,” see 3:2. “World” is *cosmos* which gives us *cosmology* and *cosmetics*. It can mean “world, universe, earth, mankind, totality, or adornment.” It is used 186 times, 9 in Matt. “Glory” is another strong biblical word. In Greek, it is *doxa* which gives us *doxology*. It means “brightness, splendor, glory, majesty, reflection, fame.” It is used 166 times, 7 in Matt.

For “worship” (ver. 9), see 2:2. “Depart” (ver. 10) means to “go away, go home, or go.” It is used 79 times, 19 by Matt. “Satan” is the other primary designation for man’s adversary (which is what the word means), along with “Devil.” It is used 36 times, 4 by Matt. In this context, we have three designations for him: “Slanderer” (Devil), “the Tempter,” and “Adversary” (Satan). “To serve” can mean “service” in a broad sense; it can also refer to worship in its individual acts of service honoring Jehovah God. It is used 21 times, only here by Matt. “To leave” (ver. 11) translates the same verb used at 3:15 for “permit” or “allow.” “To serve” here is different from that verb in the previous verse. This verb, which is related to the noun “deacon,” means to “care for, help, serve.” It is used 37 times in the NT, 6 by Matt. Related to the verb is the noun “service, office, ministry,” used 34 times and “servant, helper, deacon,” used 29 times.

GRAMMAR:

The verb “to tempt” from verse 2 is used as a gerund in verse 3, identifying the Slanderer as also the Tempter. “It has been written” (verse 4) translates the verb in the perfect tense, pointing out an action completed in the past but with relevance in the present: “It stands written.” The phrase is found nine times in Matt., all but one in the mouth of Jesus: 2:5; 4:4, 6, 7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31. In these texts, Jesus cites as Scripture: Deuteronomy, Psalms, Malachi, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah.

PARALLELS:

Jesus’ temptations are recorded in Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-13. Luke gives a different order to the second and third temptations. Neither Matthew nor Luke tell us they are writing in chronological order so there’s no way to know for sure which order is exact. The suggestion is that Luke wants to end with Jesus at the temple (4:9-13) because He will be crucified outside of Jerusalem, the home of the temple.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Jesus quotes three passages from the book of Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:16; 6:13). Each time, Jesus prefaces the quotation with the statement: “It is written.” See comments under “Grammar” above. These quotations from Deuteronomy, almost verbatim from the LXX, set Jesus’ temptations in the context of the temptations Satan offered to the nation of Israel while it wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. In contrast to Israel, Jesus does not yield to the Tempter. The “testing” from Deuteronomy 6:16 refers to the event recorded in Exodus 17:1-7 at Massah and Meribah. The Hebrew writer (3:7-4:13) will also refer to that event.

Satan also quotes Scripture, Psalm 91:11-12, yet Satan tries to make a general principle into an exact law. Jesus will show Satan that his interpretation makes Psalm 91 contradict other passages of the Lord’s word. Psalm 91:13 might make reference to Genesis 3:15. If so, Psalm 91 predicts the defeat of Satan, an ironic context from which Satan quotes!

The temple was originally built by King Solomon but destroyed by the Babylonians. It was rebuilt in the days of Nehemiah and Ezra and desecrated again by the Greeks. King Herod began rebuilding the temple. It would be finished just a few years before the Romans destroyed it for good. Its courtyard was 330 x 500 yards.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

No gospel writer identifies the exact location of the wilderness where the temptations occur.

COMMENTS:

While God does not tempt man, with the desire for man to sin (James 1:13), God does test man's faith to see if man will listen to God or to Satan (compare the "tree of knowledge" in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3). Here, the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness in order to be tempted by Satan. This was part of the Father's plan to make Jesus the perfect sacrifice for man.

The "devil" slanders man, speaking evil of him. He is identified as the "Tempter" (vs 3) since that's how Satan does his work. He is further identified as "Satan" (vs 10) because he is man's adversary. Each of those positions are seen here in Jesus' temptations. Despite the power attributed to the devil in Scripture, he is always portrayed as being less powerful than God and less powerful than Jesus. He is never viewed as being on their level. To set the scene for the temptations, at least the first one, Jesus fasts for 40 days and 40 nights, as Moses (Exo. 24:18; Deut. 9:9) and Elijah did (1 Kings 19:8). His fasting was intended to strengthen Jesus and His relationship to the Father, to help Him focus on the challenges that lay ahead.

Satan takes advantage of that fasting. His first challenge is: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones become bread." The condition is a first-class conditional statement which means Satan assumes the reality of the relationship between Jesus and the Father. In other words, we might translate the sentence: "Since you are the Son of God..." Jesus could easily have done that; He created the world from nothing (Col. 1:16). But, Jesus did not have the Father's authority to use His miraculous ability for self-serving purposes. Instead, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 to the effect that He could not turn stones into bread without a word from the mouth of God.

Having been defeated, the slanderer takes Jesus into the "holy city," a designation of the city of Jerusalem (27:53). He sets Jesus on a pinnacle of the temple of God. The main building was 180' high. One pinnacle reached as high as 400' above the Kidron Valley. In imitation of Jesus, Satan quotes Scripture with that same statement, "It is written." Satan quotes Psalm 91:11-12 (the only time Satan quotes Scripture), which teaches that, in general, God will provide for the needs of His followers, yet Jesus follows that up with the quotation from Deuteronomy 6:16. That text shows that Satan's interpretation of Psalm 91:11-12 is limited. Yes, God will provide for His own, but not if His own put themselves in harm's way intentionally to force God to act. God cannot be manipulated as a puppet on a string, even by His own followers. Faith only comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17) so that Jesus would only illustrate faith, in jumping off the pinnacle, if the Father had commanded it.

Having failed a second time, Satan then takes Jesus on a very high mountain. Some suggest that this is a vision. The text does not say it is a vision, yet for Satan to show Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory," suggests that part is a vision. If so, the Father allows Satan to present the kingdoms to His Son. Luke says this event happened "in a moment of time" (Luke 4:5). Satan offers the kingdoms to Jesus on condition that Jesus falls down and worships Satan. Perhaps the intention is for Jesus to become King of the kingdoms of the world without having to suffer for it. For the third time, Jesus strengthens Himself with Scripture and quotes Deuteronomy 6:13. Man shall worship and serve God only. No one deserves worship or spiritual service except Deity.

Having been defeated three times in his challenge to get Jesus to use miraculous abilities for His own purposes, Satan leaves Jesus (for a time, per Luke 4:13). Then, the Father sent angels to serve His Son. Jesus did not use supernatural means to serve Himself; now the Father sends angels to serve Him (supernaturally). Jesus has passed the test; He is ready to begin His ministry. Once He shows Himself faithful in all the Father commands, Jesus will, in fact, be given complete authority over the kingdoms of the world (Matt. 28:18).

APPLICATION:

Satan appeared as man's adversary in the OT: 1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Zech. 3:1-2. For more on Satan, see the "Theology of Matthew" chapter at the end of the commentary. God has given him a certain amount of authority in this world (2 Cor. 4:4; John

16:11). The designation “slanderer” can be applied to humans (John 6:70; 1 Tim. 3:11; 2 Tim. 3:3; Titus 2:3). Satan is designated “the tempter” once more in the NT, in 1 Thess. 3:5. Let us note here that Satan knows Scripture so that sometimes, he can quote Scripture but he does so deceitfully. He can “transform himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). Let us be careful we are not deceived by someone quoting Scripture!

While Jesus was “God with us” (Matt. 1:23), He was also as human as Mary was. The fact that Jesus became hungry illustrates His pure humanity, as well as the fact that He could be tempted to sin. He was as susceptible to temptations as any human being (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). In fact, between the baptism and the temptations in Luke’s gospel, is Jesus’ genealogy which points to Jesus being the “son of Adam.” Since these temptations were real, it was very possible for Jesus to yield and to sin. If He had, then God’s plan for saving man would have come to a catastrophic end. The fact that He did not makes Him all the more precious to us.

Teachers of the Bible often make the temptations of Jesus parallel to Adam and Eve’s temptations in Genesis 3 and John’s list of areas of temptations in 1 John 2:15-17. To defeat Satan, then, we ought to live as closely to the “word from the mouth of God,” Scripture, as possible (see Psalm 119:11). With the “sword of the Spirit,” the word of God (Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17), we can “crush Satan under our feet” (Rom. 16:20). Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8) and He will, one day, cast Satan into the hell of fire (Rev. 20:1-10). Man should not try to put God “to the test,” that is, we should not think that God can be manipulated, either through charms, rituals, or even prayer. He is sovereign over all and will always do what is according to His nature and what is best for us, if we’ll submit to His will.

James, the Lord’s brother, is said to have been thrown off a pinnacle of the temple, according to the early church historian, Eusebius (*Ecc. History* II.xxiii.11).

Man cannot worship men (Acts 10:25-26) or angels (Rev. 19:10). He certainly cannot worship the devil!

TRANSLATION - 4:12-17:

12 And after hearing that John was imprisoned, He withdrew into Galilee. **13** And after leaving Nazareth, after coming, He dwelt in Capernaum, by the sea, in the region of Zebulon and Naphtali. **14** In order that it may be fulfilled the word through Isaiah the prophet saying, **15** “The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, **16** A people sitting in darkness, a great light they saw, and to those sitting in the land and shadow of death light has arisen for them.”

17 From that time, Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent! For the kingdom of heaven has come near!”

WORDS:

“To dwell” (verse 13) is found 44 times. It means “to live, reside” and is related to the noun “house.” Matthew uses it 4 times. “By the sea” is all one word and this is its only use. For the noun “way,” see 2:12 and 3:3. “Gentiles” denotes anyone who is not from the family of Abraham. It is translated “nation, people, or heathen.” The NT uses the word 162 times; Matthew, 15 times.

On “people” (ver. 16), see 1:21. The Greek word, *laos*, gives us the English word “laity.” “Darkness” is found 31 times (7 times by Matt.) and might be understood as “gloom.” Its opposite, “light,” is found 73 times (7 by Matt.) and might be translated “fire.” It is *phos* in Greek so it gives us the root *photo*. “Shadow” is found only here in Matt., out of 7 uses. It might be translated “shade, foreshadowing.” “Death” is used by Matthew 7 times; 120 times in the NT. Theologically, the word means “separation” (see James 2:26). The Greek word is *thanatos*. “To arise” is only found 9 times, three are in Matt. It is related to the word “east.” The significant words in verse 17 echo the message of John the baptizer. See comments on 3:1-2.

PARALLELS:

Matthew tells the story of John's imprisonment and execution in chapter 14. Matthew does not record the details of Jesus' trip to His hometown, Nazareth. That event is told in Luke 4:16-30.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Isaiah 9:1-2 is located within the section of Isaiah which predicted the virgin giving birth to Emmanuel (Isaiah 7-9). Isaiah was anticipating the invasion of the Assyrians but promised deliverance by the God of heaven (cf. 2 Kings 17:1-6). The people who sat in darkness would see a great light when the virgin's Son would come to lead them. It is interesting that the area of Palestine which was taken first into exile is the area which first sees the Light.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Capernaum is believed to be the modern site of Tell-Hum, located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was around 2,624' by 820'. Capernaum may have had around 1,000 citizens at this time. This city eventually rejected Jesus and was rebuked (Matt. 11:23). Zebulun and Naphtali (cf. Joshua 19:32-39) were inhabited by many Gentiles after the Assyrian invasion of 722 BC. Zebulun lay to the south. Nazareth was located within that tribal territory. Naphtali lay to the north, the territory in which was found Capernaum. These towns lay on the "Way of the Sea" (*Via Maris*) trade route. Galilee was an area 45 miles (N/S) by 25 miles (E/W) with a conservatively estimated 300,000 people living in over 200 villages.

COMMENTS:

Matthew will reserve until chapter 14 to give the details of John's imprisonment. Apparently, based on John 1-3, John and Jesus preached contemporaneously for some time. Here, once John is thrown into prison, Matthew presents the ministry of Jesus. Jesus will spend much of His ministry in this area of Palestine, in fulfillment of the prediction of Isaiah the prophet. The area was designated "Galilee of the Gentiles" since many Gentiles (non-Jews) had settled in the area. However, Jesus will preach primarily to the Jews.

The inhabitants had been sitting in darkness ever since they buried the Law of Moses in the temple of Jehovah God. But, the great Light, who is Jesus Christ (John 8:12), had now appeared to them. To those who had been sitting "in the land and shadow of death," will now appear the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25-26). The light of Christ and the light of the gospel of Christ begins to dawn on them.

Jesus' message was the same as John's (3:2): "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near." Jesus desired the Jews to prepare their hearts for the coming of God's reign. The sermon recorded in the next three chapters will detail how they were to get their hearts ready.

APPLICATION:

The light of the gospel shines today (2 Cor. 4:4) so that Satan still tries to hinder it's glow. Paul will write to Timothy (2 Tim. 1:10) that life and immortality have been brought to light through the gospel.

TRANSLATION - 4:18-22:

18 And walking by the sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon the one being called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting nets into the sea; for they were fishermen. **19** And He said to them, "Follow behind me, and I will make you fishermen of men." **20** And immediately, leaving the nets, they followed Him. **21** And after proceeding from there, He saw other two brothers, James the [son] of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and He called them. **22** And these immediately leaving the boat and their father, they followed Him.

WORDS:

The word for “net” in verse 18 is only used here. It was a large net, about 20-25’ in diameter, which was cast into the sea, allowed to sink by lead weights attached, and then pulled up by its edges, collecting fish. “Fishermen” is used 5 times in the NT, twice by Matt. (4:18-19), twice by Mark (1:16-17), and once by Luke (5:2).

The command translated “Follow” in verse 19 is different from the verbs found in the subsequent verses. The first verb is found 12 times, half in Matt. The second verb is found far more frequently, 90 times, 25 by Matt. It means also “to accompany, or be a disciple.” The noun translated “net” in verse 20 is a different word than in 18. This second noun is found 12 times, but only here in Matt. This net had three layers, in five units over 100’ long, used by two boats. “Boat” can be a “ship;” it is used 68 times, 13 by Matt. A boat from the area of Galilee dating from the first century was discovered in 1986. It was 26 1/2’ long, 7 1/2’ wide and 4 1/2’ high and could be propelled by sail or oar. It had a crew of at least 5 but could carry as many as 8-16 people. It was also equipped for cooking. The verb “to mend” is found 13 times in the NT, twice by Matt. It means to “restore, make complete, prepare, or make.”

GRAMMAR:

“Follow” (ver. 19) is an adverb but used here as a strong imperative.

PARALLELS:

There are no parallels in Jewish literature of a teacher calling certain men to be his disciples as Jesus does. Normally, the disciples sought out their preferred teacher, such as Epicurius or Rabbi Hillel or Rabbi Shammai.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

While there are no OT references in this paragraph, Matthew has made it obvious that Jesus is the Messianic figure who fulfills the imagery and predictions from Isaiah 7-9, specifically, see 9:6-7. With this being true, Jesus’ call of the apostles suggests His call to Israel as a whole to repent and follow Him. This is Jesus’ call to regather the nation of Israel together, under His leadership.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The sea of Galilee was about 13 miles by 7 miles. The surface is 682’ below sea level. As we will see, the sea is subject to sudden storms. The sea was also called the Sea of Chinnereth (Num. 34:11), Lake Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), and sea of Tiberias (John 21:1).

COMMENTS:

“Simon” is mentioned 75 times in the NT (there were other men named “Simon” besides Peter); “Peter,” 156 times. Jesus gave him the name “Peter” in John 1:42. “Andrew” is found 13 times. Simon and Andrew were disciples of John first (John 1:35-41; Andrew brought Peter to follow Jesus) so that this call is not the initial interaction these men had with Jesus (cf. Luke 5:1-11). Peter and Andrew were originally from Bethsaida (John 1:44) but apparently had moved to Capernaum (Matt. 8:5, 14), perhaps because of their fishing business.

“James” is found 42 times (not always the same “James”). The same is true with “John,” found 135 times. Jesus gave them the nickname “sons of thunder” (Boanerges) in Mark 3:17. They exhibit a strong desire to defend the Lord’s honor in Luke 9:51-56. They also exhibit a strong sense of self-importance in Matt. 20:20-28. James will be killed in Acts 12:1-2. John is identified as the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20-24). Early Christian writers tell us that John was the last apostle to die, of a natural death.

Peter and John did not study in the schools of the rabbis, since they were fishermen. Consequently, they are derided in Acts 4:13 as “unlearned and ignorant” (cf. Matt. 26:69, 73; John 7:41, 52). Yet, they will illustrate a knowledge and wisdom which cannot, even today, be refuted by the wise of this world (Acts 6:10; 1 Cor. 1:18-21). James and John, along with Peter, were included in some of the most intimate settings with Jesus (Mark 5:37; Matt. 17:1; 26:37).

Repairing the nets probably included mending tears and cleaning debris, such as seaweed, out of the nets. Zebedee was not left alone; he had servants (Mark 1:20). "Zebedee" is found 12 times. There is no record that Zebedee became a disciple of Christ. Some think that Zebedee's wife, Salome, was a sister to Mary, the mother of Jesus, which would make them cousins (see Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25).

APPLICATION:

The main point to draw from this paragraph is that the men immediately left their occupations and followed Jesus. They also left their parents in order to follow Jesus. These men will be designated "apostles" in 10:2.

TRANSLATION - 4:23-25:

23 And He was going around in the whole of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. **24** And there went out His reputation into all Syria. And they brought to Him all those having evil, various diseases and by torments being afflicted [and] demon-possessed and epileptic and paralyzed and He healed them. **25** And they followed Him many crowds from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and beyond Jordan.

WORDS:

"To teach" (ver. 23) is significant for the ministry of Jesus. Matthew uses the verb 14 times, out of 97 times. The synagogue was central to the Jews' weekly life and relationship with God (see below on "Archaeology"). It is found in Matthew 9 times, out of 56 times. It comes from the verb "to gather together." And, it can refer to the assembly as well as the place of assembly. For the verb "to preach," see 3:1. There is no discernible difference between teaching and preaching. Perhaps the context (public versus private) was the difference. The word "gospel" comes from a noun, message, with the prefix "good." Therefore, it means "good announcement or good news." It is found 76 times in the NT, 4 times in Matt. For "kingdom," see 3:2. The verb "to heal" is found 43 times, 16 times in Matt. The Greek word gives us the word *therapeutic* and *therapy*. "Disease" is used 11 times, 5 of those are in Matt. "Sickness" is used by Matthew only (4:23; 9:35; 10:1). For "people," see at 1:21.

"Reputation" (ver. 24) is related to the verb "to hear." Here, it refers to "report," fame, account, or something heard. It is used 24 times, four by Matt. "Torments" is found only three times: here; Luke 16:23, 28 (where it refers to pain endured in one part of hades). The verb translated "to be afflicted" is used 12 times (only here by Matt.); it means "to torment, stop, press hard, hold as a prisoner, embrace, or rule." "Demon-possessed" is all one word; it is found 13 times, 7 in Matt. "Epileptic" is only used twice (here; 17:15) and literally means "moon-struck." Some scholars believe the word refers to mental disorders. "Paralyzed" is used 10 times, half by Matt. and half by Mark.

PARALLELS:

Compare the wording of 4:23 with 9:35. The two passages form a framework around chapters 5-9. In fact, Jesus' "teaching and preaching" are detailed in Matthew 5-7 (the Sermon on the Mount) while His healing and other miracles are detailed in ten such miracles in Matthew 8-9.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

An OT reference is not mentioned here, but Isaiah predicted the Messiah would perform miracles of healing (61:1; see Matt. 11:4-6).

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Some believe that the mention of Syria suggests the place where Matthew wrote the gospel, that is, in Antioch of Syria. That is only a guess. Syria was the Roman province which

included Palestine (Luke 2:2). “Beyond Jordan” referred to an area otherwise known as Perea, a term not used in the NT. Jesus’ ministry here basically covers the land of Israel from the northwest (Galilee) to northeast (Decapolis), to the southwest (Judea) and the southeast (Perea), with Jerusalem in the center.

Synagogues developed during the inter-testamental period, perhaps as early as the Babylonian exile. They are first found in written documents in 200 BC. Synagogues were originally community centers but became gatherings for prayer and study of the Law and the OT and some singing. They were presided over by a ruler (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41; Acts 18:8, 17). James will use “synagogue” to refer to the church assembly in James 2:2.

“Decapolis” literally means “Ten cities.” It might have included different cities during the course of history. Some of the cities, mentioned in the NT, were likely Damascus, Philadelphia, and Gadara.

COMMENTS:

Synagogue rulers would often invite a visiting rabbi to share a message (cf. Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15). Jesus took that opportunity to present His message. In summary, it was: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” The extended message will be presented in chapters 5-7. In order to give the audience a reason to believe that the Father was behind His message (cf. John 3:2), Jesus performed miracles of healing (cf. John 20:30-31).

The “every” in verse 23 is likely hyperbole. Jesus healed everyone who was brought to Him. As His reputation spread, more people came to Him to be healed. Matthew gives some more specific examples of the sicknesses and diseases Jesus healed: torments, demon-possession, mental illnesses, epilepsy, and paralysis. Observe here that demon-possession is distinguished from sickness. In Matthew 17:15, a boy whose father believes he has epilepsy actually suffers from demon-possession. Otherwise, the two are distinguished. We will reserve more in-depth discussion of demon-possession for Matthew 8.

As Jesus healed sicknesses and showed His power over both Satan and nature, crowds flocked to Him, literally from every corner of Palestine. He then took the opportunity to teach them, the essence of His teachings follow in chapters 5-7.

APPLICATION:

Teaching and preaching are two aspects of Jesus’ ministry which are to continue in the church throughout all ages. Miraculous healing would continue in the first century (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-10) until the word from the mouth of God (the NT) was written in its final form. After that, man would use natural means, with prayer, to heal (cf. James 5:14-15).