

Matthew

Chapter 4

By

Don Stewart

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MATTHEW CHAPTER 4

He had left home under a powerful impulse with the Jordan and baptism in view. The baptism was the decisive act. Whatever more it might mean, it meant farewell to the past life of obscurity and consecration to a new, high, unique vocation (A.B. Bruce, p. 88).

Jesus will spend forty days and nights fasting in the wilderness. During this time He will be tempted by the devil. The temptation concludes Matthew's account of events connected with Jesus' entrance into the public ministry. Only the synoptics and Hebrews (2:18; 4:15) mention His testing. Jesus now moves from innocence to virtue. Purity untested to purity tested.

The account of Jesus' temptation is closely related to the preceding narrative concerning His baptism. The specific connection between His baptism and temptation is in the term "God's Son." Jesus is proclaimed "Son of God" by the two other members of the Trinity immediately following His baptism. Now the question arises, "Will He be faithful to His calling, especially in the circumstances of testing?"

In the story of His temptation, there is a parallel to the nation's experience in the wilderness. The sequence of Matthew's account is the same as Exodus:

After the deliverance from Egypt and the establishment of the covenant relationship at Mt. Sinai, Israel experienced a time of testing in the wilderness.

1. The people leave Egypt and cross the Red Sea (baptism into Moses 1 Corinthians 10:1-2)
2. At Mt. Sinai they enter into a special relationship with God as His son (Exodus 19:4-6) Divine declaration (voice of Father at Jesus' baptism).
3. The time of testing in the wilderness comes after the baptism and declaration with both Israel and Jesus.

Furthermore the answers which Jesus gives are from Deuteronomy 6-8—the very passage that describes Israel's experience in the wilderness. Deuteronomy gives the theological commentary on Israel's time in the wilderness.

Jesus recapitulates their history in His own person. He is the embodiment of Israel and the fulfilled of all her hopes repeats in His own experience the experience of Israel—with of course, the one major difference. Israel failed the test, Jesus succeeded! The temptations are basically the same as God's peoples. (1 Corinthians 10:13). They come to test both the person and program of Jesus.

Adam And Eve

There are further parallels with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), described as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:16) which suggests these temptations are typical of what mankind faces.

THE PURPOSE FOR THE TEMPTATION

1. It gave proof of His true humanity (Hebrews 2:18) that He could be tested. Jesus was genuinely human.
2. It is part of His example to us (1 John 2:6).
3. The temptation formed part of His personal discipline (Hebrews 5:7-9).
4. It helped Him be a sympathizing intercessor (Hebrews 4:15).
5. It formed part of the great conflict in which the “seed of woman” was to “bruise the head of the serpent.” (Genesis 3:15). In this first great struggle of the conflict the destined conqueror came off completely victorious.

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS (4:1)

Before beginning His public ministry, Jesus will be put to the test by the devil. Three specific temptations that Jesus experienced are recorded by Matthew.

Matt. 4:1 Then Jesus was led up into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil.

Then Both Matthew and Mark link the temptation to Jesus’ baptism while Luke inserts Jesus genealogy between the two, suggesting a contrast between Him and Adam. Adam was tested in the perfect environment of Eden yet he fell. On the other hand, Jesus was tested in the hardship of the wilderness, yet He triumphed.

Jesus was led up The passive verb translated “led up” does not express a reluctance on Jesus’ part. It simply means Jesus was willing to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. It also refutes the idea that Jesus went into this temptation on His own accord. This was God the Father’s timing for Jesus.

Mark says “driven” and Luke says “full of the Holy Spirit.” Led up emphasizes the movement from the Jordan valley into higher land. This would be in the solitary regions of the wilderness where the wild beasts, but no human, lived.

into the desert The desert would be a suitable place for temptation. The temptation story is found in the synoptic gospels which all locate the testing of Jesus in the wilderness. The exact location is unknown. Some commentators believe He went east of the Jordan river while most assume He went west. A few believe it was the wilderness of Sinai based upon the fact that Moses and Elijah also fasted there. John Broadus writes:

It was certainly a very retired and wild part of the ‘wilderness’ for Mark says, with one of his vivid descriptive touches ‘and he was with the wild beasts.’ A tradition which appears first in the time of the Crusades places it in a mountain just west of Jericho, hence called Quarantania (a place of forty days comp. *quarantine*, a forty days detention). This mountain is six or eight miles from the traditional place of the baptism, and rises some fifteen hundred feet almost perpendicular from the plain of Jordan which is here at its widest part. In the rocky face of the mountain are the openings of numerous artificial caves, made by monks of the Crusading period perhaps some of

them by old Jewish Eremites. But to our modern feeling it seems unlikely that our Lord withdrew to a cave, and probably that he went further away from the populous plain of Jericho. Some think (Schaff) that Quarantania may have been the place of the third temptation, if not of those preceding, which is quite possible. After all, it may be that a special providence caused the precise locality of this and many other events in our Lord's history to be left unknown, for the purpose of restraining superstition (Broadus, p. 60).

The desert is not only associated with demonic activity (Isaiah 13:21; 34:14; Matthew 12:43; Revelation 18:2) it is also the place where Israel was tempted.

by the Spirit This is in direct continuity with the descent of the Spirit upon Him in the preceding chapter. The same spirit that brought Him to the Jordan to be baptized now brings Him to the temptation.

The Spirit is active in Jesus' life and ministry. The same spirit that brought Jesus into the world (1:20) and confirmed the Father's acknowledgment of His Sonship (3:16,17) now leads Him into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

In this parallel account of the testing of Israel it is the Lord who leads Israel into the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2). The ultimate test is from God (cf. Job 1:6-12). As God's Son Jesus proves to be triumphant in testing. We find that the Holy Spirit was active in all phases of Jesus' life and ministry.

1. CONCEPTION

The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit was involved in the conception of Jesus.

And the angel answered (Mary) and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

The Holy Spirit, through the Virgin Mary, conceived the child Jesus.

2. BAPTISM

The Holy Spirit was also involved in Jesus' baptism. When John baptized Him, the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, identifying Jesus as the Messiah.

And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

3. TEMPTATION

Luke records that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (Luke 4:1).

4. PUBLIC MINISTRY

The public ministry of Jesus was performed through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and the news of Him went out through all the surrounding region (Luke 4:14).

Jesus Himself testified that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed . . . Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4:18,21).

5. MIRACLES

During His public ministry, Jesus performed miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But, if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you (Matthew 12:28).

The signs He performed were done in obedience to the Father through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

6. THE RESURRECTION

The Holy Spirit was also at work in the resurrection of Christ.

But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you (Romans 8:11).

The Spirit of God brought Jesus back from the dead.

Therefore, as we study Scripture we find the Holy Spirit played a vital role in the life and ministry of Jesus being involved with Him from His conception through His resurrection.

to be tempted Whereas the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness it is the Devil that does the tempting. The Spirit's role is prior to the Devil's. It was not the desire of Jesus to court temptation. The translation "tempt" derives its sinister meaning from the context.

How can God tempt someone? Carson comments about this difficult issue:

That Jesus should be "led by the Spirit" to be tempted "by the devil" is not stranger than Job 1:6-2:7 or 2 Samuel 24:1 (1 Chron. 21:1). Recognizing that "to tempt" (*peirazo*) also means "to test" in a good or bad sense somewhat eases the problem. In Scripture "tempting" or "testing" can reveal or develop character (Gen 22:1; Exod 20:20; John 6:6; 2 Cor 13:5; Rev 2:2) as well as to solicit evil (1 Cor 7:5; 1 Thess 3:5). For us to "tempt" or "test" God is wrong because it reflects unbelief or attempted bribery (Exod 17:2, 7 [Ps 95:9]; Deut 6:16 [Matt 4:7]; Isa 7:12; Acts 5:9;

15:10). Moreover God uses means and may bring good out of his agents' evil motives—see Joseph's experience (Gen 50:19,20). In Jesus' "temptations" God clearly purposed to test him just as Israel was tested, and Jesus' response proves that he understood (Carson, p. 112).

R.T. France writes the following of Jesus' temptation.

To refer to this episode as the temptation of Jesus is doubly misleading. Firstly, the verb *peirazo* (vv.1,3) in Matthew always signifies testing (and in its 36 NT occurrences it clearly implies tempting to do wrong only in 1 Cor 7:5; Jas. 1:13,14); see also John 6:6; 2 Corinthians 13:5 for some clear examples of this primary sense. Satan's intention was, no doubt, to persuade Jesus to do wrong, but the initiative was with God, and the whole emphasis of the story is on the testing of Jesus' reaction to his Messianic vocation as Son of God. Secondly, to speak of "the temptation" is misleading because Matthew does not suggest it (and Luke 4:13, 'until an opportune time', clearly denies) that this was the sum total of Jesus' struggle against Satanic suggestions (cf. Heb 4:15); it is rather a specific examination of Jesus' newly-revealed relationship with God (R.T. France, pp. 96,97).

by the devil. The Greek word *diabolos* is borrowed in Latin as *diabolus*, from which comes the French *diable*, and the English word *devil*. It is the term normally used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew name Satan (Job 1:6ff; 2:1; 1 Chronicles 21:1; Zechariah 3:1,2).

We should briefly consider what the Bible has to say about this personage.

According to Scripture, the career of Satan, or the Devil, has been steadily going down since his creation. Originally he was created as a perfect being without any sin. At some unknown time in the past, he decided to rebel against God. When he rebelled against God this beautiful creature became the Devil or the "adversary." It is clear from Scripture that God did not create the Devil. This creature became the Devil when he decided to rebel against God.

Satan was cast out of God's presence because of his sin. The Book of Job informs us that he now has some access to God's presence but only when the Lord allows it.

Satan is presently deceiving mankind. The Bible calls him He the "prince of this world," "the god of this age" and "the prince of the power of the air." Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day:

You are of your father the Devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it (John 8:44).

This deception will continue until his future judgment. During the time of the Great Tribulation, he will be cast down to the earth. After the Second Coming of Christ he will be thrown into the bottomless pit for a thousand years. After the thousand years, the Devil will be released for a short time. He will then be thrown into the lake of fire forever (Revelation 20:10 ff.). Thus will be the end of his inglorious career.

Lenski comments on the devil's part in Jesus' temptation.

We may take it that Satan knew all about this man Jesus, miraculously conceived and born by Mary and then living so long and so quietly in Nazareth. As an invisible spectator he beheld what transpired after the baptism at the Jordan. So this was God's Messiah come to crush Satan, destroy his works, and to erect the kingdom of God among men. At once the devil resolved to break this divine champion. He had conquered the first Adam, he would conquer the second, and that at once. Before this Jesus got under way with his work, Satan, would lay him low with his old cunning (Lenski p. 138).

TEMPTED AS THE SON OF GOD (4:2-4)

The first temptation concerns His identity as the Son of God.

Matt. 4:2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he then became hungry.

And after fasting We are not told the reason for the fast. It was spontaneous not something ascetic or self-denying. In a place where there was no food, Jesus did not desire any.

forty days and forty nights. The forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness after His baptism are a miniature of the forty years Israel spend in the wilderness after their baptism in the Exodus where as God's son they were called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1).

Mark records the possibility that there were 40 days of continuous temptation. The time of His fasting, 40 days and 40 nights would remind Matthew's readers of both Moses (Exodus 34:28) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8) who fasted forty days and nights. However comparisons between Jesus and them are useless since His body was unaffected by sin.

The reference to Moses fasting forty days and nights in Deuteronomy 9:9 occurs in the context of Deuteronomy chapters 6-8 which serves as a basis for the passage.

There is no indication in Matthew whether Jesus' fast was a total abstinence from food or merely living on what little could be found in the wilderness. Luke 4:2 tells us that He ate nothing in those days.

he then became hungry The Jews sometimes fasted by abstaining from food but not abstaining from drink. We do know that Jesus' fast was serious enough to cause Him real hunger. The point is that the Son of God had genuine human physical needs.

This is one of many ironies we find in Matthew's gospel.

1. Jesus dies the death of a sinner, but came to save His people from their sins (1:21).
2. He stays hungry for an extended period (4:2) but twice He miraculously feeds others who are hungry (14:13-21; 15:29-39).
3. He will not turn stones to bread for himself (4:3-4) but Jesus gives His own life as bread for people (26:26).
4. He grows tired (8:24) but offers others rest (11:28);

5. Jesus is called the devil but casts out demons (12:22-32);
6. Though Jesus is the King Messiah He pays tribute (17:24-27);
7. He is sold for thirty pieces of silver but gives his life a ransom for many (20:28);

Matt. 4:3 And the tempter came and said to him, “If indeed you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread.”

And the tempter came The tempter came to Him in outwardly in some type of visible form. This same phrase will later be used of the religious leaders who tempt Jesus.

and said to him, The tempter comes to Him to accomplish His purpose while Jesus is physically vulnerable (cf. Genesis 3:1-7). Temptation was to act on His own initiative apart from God’s perfect will. Satan wanted Jesus to use His personal power to prevent the Spirit-led hunger. Was He to trust God?

“If indeed you are the Son of God, The declaration made (3:17) is now being put to the test. We could translate this “Let us assume for sake of argument you are the Son of God.” Similar knowledge of Jesus is found among the demons (Mark 1:24). As in Genesis 3:1; Job 1:9; 2:4,5 Satan starts the temptation by raising a cloud of doubt.

command that these stones become loaves of bread.” If God was able to turn these stones into children of Abraham (3:9) Jesus certainly could turn them into bread. The temptation was not to see if Jesus had the power to work a miracle—that was understood to be true. The temptation was to see whether He was going to remain obedient to the Father. Fasting and hunger at this stage was the will of the Father. Tempter was trying to have Jesus perform an ill-timed expression of His power. Will Jesus exercise His power for His own ends or will He accept the pain and suffering that is in the Father’s will? That Jesus had the power to satisfy physical need by miraculous means was proved by later miracles (14:15-21; 15:32-38). The act was not wrong in itself.

It has been noted that the order of the temptations is different in Luke and in Matthew. A.H. McNeile give a possible explanation:

The three temptations arise from the Lord’s consciousness of His divine Sonship. Luke follows a geographical sequence, the only change of locality, from the desert to Jerusalem, occurring last. Matthew arranges a psychological climax: the first temptation is to doubt the truth of the revelation just received, the second to test it, and the third to snatch prematurely at the Messiahship which it involves. In actual fact, however, it is probable that the Lord was assailed in all three ways during His period of trial, and perhaps throughout His life (McNeile, p. 37).

Matt. 4:4 But he answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

But he answered and said, “It is written, Jesus answers with Scripture (Deuteronomy 8:3).

‘Man will not live by bread alone, It refers back to Israel’s grumbling about the manna (Numbers 11:4-9).

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” Happiness is not simply satisfying human desires but consists of trusting God.

This then is a temptation to the body or the desire of the flesh. (cf. Genesis 3:6 ‘good for food’). The tempter wanted Jesus dissatisfied with God’s provision. Jesus relives Israel’s experience in the wilderness but in victory rather than defeat.

TEMPTED AS THE SON OF DAVID (4:5-7)

Matt. 4:5 Then the devil took him into the holy city, and stood him upon the pinnacle of the temple

Then As in verse 1, Matthew again begins with “then”

the devil took him into the holy city, This is a common designation for Jerusalem (27:53; cf. Isaiah 52:1; Nehemiah 11:1,18). The expression was rare among later Jews probably due to their banishment from the city by the Romans who renamed Aelia Capitolina.

Here and in verse 8, whether literally or in a vision is not clear. Some commentators suggest that the physical impossibility of a mountain commanding a world-wide view suggests this was a vision. Whatever the case, the temptation was inward.

and stood him upon the pinnacle of the temple Word translated *temple* usually refers to entire temple complex but is perhaps used here in the narrower sense.

We are not exactly sure what is meant by this phrase. Suggestions have included:

- (1) The east corner of the south wall of the temple which overlooked a deep ravine
- (2) The roof of the temple or a projection of it
- (3) The lintel or superstructure of a temple gate
- (4) A tower in the temple precincts.

Wherever it took place, it would have been on a dangerous spot.

Matt. 4:6 and he said to him, “If indeed you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘they will lift you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

Note on a variant reading: After *down* a few manuscripts read *from there*.

and he said to him, “If indeed you are the Son of God, Again, for the sake of argument, if you are the Son of God.

throw yourself down; Simon Magus (Acts 8) is said to have attempted this.

for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ We learn a valuable lesson from this episode—Satan can quote Bible. However when he quotes Scripture he does it out of context. Here he leaves out an important part of the quotation.

and ‘they will lift you up in their hands, This is from Psalm 91:12.

lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ ” Here Jesus is tempted to put Himself into mortal danger and force God to save Him. Satan wants Jesus to needlessly put Himself in danger. The struggle is between Jesus and Satan, we should not assume there were other witnesses for this passage to make sense.

Matt. 4:7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, “You will not tempt the Lord your God.”

Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, Jesus again is appealing to Scripture.

“You will not tempt the Lord your God.” You do not put God to the test. This refers to the incident at Massah where the people demanded signs of God’s presence (Exodus 17:1-7). What was wrong for God’s son Israel to do is also wrong for God’s Son Jesus.

Therefore it is a temptation to the mind (the lust of the eyes). to be dissatisfied with God’s method. The words are not meant to command the devil not to test Jesus. By refusing to jump, Jesus chooses the path of continuing danger and hardship. There is also the temptation to bypass the cross. Real trust does not need to test. Jesus will only perform miracles when they are absolutely necessary, no supernatural sideshow.

TEMPTED AS THE SON OF ABRAHAM (4:8-11)

Matt. 4:8 Again, the devil took him up onto an exceedingly high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

Again, the devil took him up onto an exceedingly high mountain, There is a question as to whether this should be taken literally, particularly in view of the next statement. The passage does have literal associations. Moses went to the top of Mt. Nebo and was told to survey the Promised Land to look in every direction (Deuteronomy 31:1-4).

and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. This means the world and all its wealth. How he accomplished this we are not told.

Matt. 4:9 And he said to him, “All these things I will give to you, if you fall down and worship me.”

And he said to him, “All these things I will give to you, if you fall down and worship me.” Three ideas involved in this temptation.

1. To gain only an earthly rather than an earthly and spiritual dominion over the world.
2. To gain it at once.
3. To gain it as an act of worship to the ruler of this world making the Messiah Satan's vice-regent.

The devil's offer is a parody of what God has already promised the Messianic king (Psalm 2:8; cf Psalm 78:2; Revelation 11:15).

That the devil had dominion over the world, implied here and explicit in Luke 4:6, is stated also in John 12:31 (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19).

Matt. 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! For it is written: 'You will worship the Lord your God, and him alone you will serve.' "

Note on a variant reading. After the Greek word translated *go away*, many manuscripts read *after Me*. These parallel the words spoken to Peter in 16:23.

Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan! This is the first time the term "Satan" is used in Matthew. Jesus now dismisses him.

For it is written: 'You will worship the Lord your God, and him alone you will serve.' " Jesus replies to the implication of his offer. For the third time Jesus answered the Devil with Scripture.

The passage quoted refers back to the golden calf incident (Exodus 32:1-6). This is the culminating temptation. It is to the pride of life (cf. Genesis 3:5 you will be like God) to be dissatisfied with God Himself. The temptation is to manipulate God's program to achieve our own ends. He would have been only a figurehead king if He worshipped Satan.

Matt. 4:11 Then the devil left him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to him.

Then the devil left him; This was only temporary. As the baptism of Jesus represents an identification with the people of God, so also does the story of Jesus' testing. Israel experienced testing in the wilderness for forty years while the Son of God, Jesus experienced testing in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. But Jesus succeeded where Israel failed. The things offered to Jesus are rightfully His yet He will receive them as the obedient servant to the Father. The truth found throughout the gospels is that true greatness lies not in our asserting of our own selves but rather in humility, service and suffering. Jesus declares the rightness of the great commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5) as well as His own submission to it.

The Greek word behind 3:15 (then [John] consented") and 4:11 ("then [the devil] left him") is identical. Though the verb is used in two different ways, the two passages are parallel in that both John and the devil, wittingly or unwittingly, were trying to deter Jesus' appointed course but failed.

and behold, angels came and began to minister to him. The food and the angelic help which He had refused (vss. 4,7), were now given to Him as victor.

The following lessons that can be learned from Jesus' temptation include:

1. Like Jesus, the Christian will be both tested and tempted. The question is not, "If," but "When." We will be tempted to sin.
2. The tempter came to Jesus at His most vulnerable moment—when He was tired and hungry. We should expect the same.
3. As humankind's representative, Jesus, the last Adam, was obedient in His temptation. On the other hand, the first Adam, also representing mankind, miserably failed. Therefore through Jesus we can succeed, however if we allow the old Adamic nature to prevail, we will fail.
4. Jesus resisted the devil by appealing to Scripture three times in succession. We should do the same. Therefore the importance of knowing God's Word is stressed.
5. Scripture says we have a High Priest who, having himself been tempted in all ways, is able to help us when we are tempted (Hebrews 4:14-16). Jesus understands what we are going through.
6. What Jesus was offered by Satan—the rulership of this world—is something that He has now earned through His sinless life and His death on Calvary's cross. This reiterates an important biblical lesson—we should not go about trying to get the right things in the wrong way (e.g. Jacob and his birthright).

JESUS MOVES FROM NAZARETH TO CAPERNAUM (4:12-16)

After His temptation and the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus will move from His hometown in Nazareth to the city of Capernaum alongside the Sea of Galilee.

Matt. 4:12 Now when he heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew into the Galilee

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *He heard* many manuscripts read *Jesus heard*.

Now when he heard that John had been put in prison, We are not told how He heard. We read of John in prison in 11:2 but must wait until 14:3,4 to find out the reason why. Both Matthew and Mark note that Jesus began His ministry in Galilee after the arrest of John. Matthew leaves the impression that Jesus was in Judea for some time after John's baptism. The fourth gospel shows that indeed this was the case.

he withdrew into the Galilee The motivation was John's arrest. Why did He move? Several possible answers:

1. He was fearful of arrest by being associated with John so He kept His distance. Problem with this view is that Herod Antipas ruled both Judea and Galilee.
2. John's ministry was completed so it was time for His to begin.

Matt. 4:13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and lived in Capernaum, which was alongside the sea, by the regions of Zebulon and Naphtali

Note on a variant reading: *Nazareth* is spelled several different ways in the manuscripts.

And leaving Nazareth, The word can also be translated “abandoned.” The reason for leaving Nazareth is not given (Luke has him rejected by His hometown 4:16-30), Matthew mentions this much later (13:53-58).

John performed his ministry in the wilderness, Jesus in populated areas. Josephus tells us that no town in the Galilee had a population smaller than 15,000 (Wars 3:43). Judea was on the road to nowhere while Galilee on the way to everywhere. The ministry of Jesus had better possibilities in Galilee which had a more tolerant atmosphere and was far removed from the Pharisees center of power.

he came and lived in Capernaum, which was alongside the sea, by the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali Little is known about Capernaum. It is mentioned in the other gospels as a scene of Jesus’ ministry, but only Matthew makes it clear that Jesus made it His home (cf. 9:1; 17:24-25). 8:20 suggests that it was only a temporary base in which Jesus and His disciples returned from time to time from the traveling ministry. The busy lakeside town would have a wider audience than Nazareth.

Matt. 4:14 so that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying,

so that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, This is the fifth of the ten fulfillment quotations used by Matthew. It explains why Jesus spent His time in despised Galilee.

Matt. 4:15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

“**The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,** refers to the two northern tribes bordering on the Sea of Galilee.

on the road by the sea, *via Maris.* This road connected Damascus with Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast.

beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—This was the common designation for Galilee with its large Gentile population. Matthew does not refer to a mission of Jesus to the Gentiles. This may be a foreshadowing of what would occur after the resurrection.

Matt. 4:16 The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and to the ones sitting in the land and in the shadow of death, a light dawned to them.”

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, It probably refers to the Jewish people (this term in Greek *laos* is used elsewhere in Matthew only for Israel) living in conditions of frustration and despair among the pagan Gentiles—who are the first to be privileged to see the fulfillment of God’s promises. The word “great” is emphasized in Greek.

and to the ones sitting in the land and in the shadow of death, Note the description of this area.

a light dawned to them.” Galilee, so often looked down upon both in political fortunes and in the eyes of the official Jewish religion, was in fact destined to play a crucial role in the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation. Again we have Matthew’s emphasis on outsiders in the purposes of God.

THE CALLING OF HIS DISCIPLES (4:17-22)

This verse marks one of the three main divisions in Matthew. Jesus will now begin His public ministry. First, He must call certain disciples to follow Him.

Matt. 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

Note on a variant reading: Three manuscripts do not have the words *repent* and *for* in their text.

From that time This verse serves as a turning point in the gospel of Matthew. It marks the beginning of His public ministry. The phrase is repeated verbatim in 16:21 where another major turning point of the gospel occurs.

Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” These are the same words that John the Baptist preached.

This passage serves as an important transition, bringing Jesus to Galilee where His ministry is to have its formal beginning. He has been prepared by the baptism and temptation in the wilderness, the stage is set. Word comes that John has been arrested—the work of the forerunner is now complete. Jesus comes to Nazareth and to Capernaum beside the sea, so significant to the prophecy of Isaiah. Jesus begins to proclaim the presence of the kingdom of God by word and deed—a great light appears to those who sit in darkness.

Matt. 4:18 And while he was walking alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon the one called Peter, and Andrew his brother, throwing a circular casting net into the sea—for they were fishermen.

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *walking alongside* three manuscripts read *going alongside*.

And while he was walking alongside the Sea of Galilee, It is called the Lake of Gennesaret in Luke 5:1 and the Sea of Tiberias in John 21:1 and stands as a reminder of the fulfillment of Isaiah 8:23-9:1 which had just been quoted.

he saw two brothers, Simon the one called Peter, This anticipates the very important role he will have in this Gospel. The significance of the name Peter is not mentioned until 16:18.

and Andrew his brother, Andrew is mentioned again in Matthew only in the list of the twelve (10:2).

throwing a circular casting net, This word is found only here in the New Testament (technical word).

into the sea —for they were fishermen. They are about to have a new occupation.

Matt. 4:19 And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.”

Note on a variant reading: The words *to become* are not found in most manuscripts.

And he said to them, “Follow me, Literally, “Come behind Me.” It was a Rabbi’s call to discipleship.

and I will make you to become fishers of men.” The invitation is accompanied by a promise. Later Jesus will compare the Kingdom of Heaven to a dragnet (which is a different kind of net than the one referred to here) that gathered fish of every kind (13:47-48).

Matt. 4:20 And immediately they left their nets and followed after him.

Note on a variant reading: The word *their* is not found in the majority of manuscripts.

And immediately they left their nets and Matthew notes the brother’s immediate response. In Matthew’s gospel, response to the divine calling is immediate (see Joseph).

followed after him. This is a technical term referring to discipleship.

Matt. 4:21 And after advancing from there, he saw two other brothers, Jacob the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with their father Zebedee, putting their nets in order, and he called them.

Note on a variant reading: Two manuscripts omit verses 21 and 22.

And after advancing from there, he saw two brothers, These two were partners with Simon Peter and Andrew (Luke 5:10)

Jacob the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, These two will figure prominently in the New Testament.

in the boat with their father Zebedee, putting their nets in order, They had returned from a previous outing

and he called them. It is implied He said the same thing to them as to Peter and Andrew.

Matt. 4:22 And immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed after him.

And immediately Like Peter and Andrew they also leave immediately.

they left the boat and their father, and followed after him. Discipleship in the kingdom often involves separation from loved ones (10:35-37). James and John leave their boat and their father.

There is another important lesson in this passage. When Jesus called His disciples they were already busy. In Scripture, God finds people who are already working and then changes their occupation.

THE BEGINNING OF JESUS’ PUBLIC MINISTRY (4:23-25)

After the call of the disciples, Jesus begins His public ministry. He goes around Galilee teaching, preaching and healing.

Matt. 4:23 And he went around in all the Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *He went around* some manuscripts read *Jesus went around*.

And he went around in all the Galilee, This is the beginning of His public ministry.

teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease Note the emphasis on teaching and preaching. Matthew will emphasize “their” synagogues.

and every sickness among the people. Nothing was impossible for Him.

Matt. 4:24 And the news about him went out into all of Syria, and they brought to him all the ones ill with various sicknesses and torments, and the demon possessed ones, and epileptics, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.

Note on variant readings: A few manuscripts do not have the word *and* before the demon-possessed one. One Syriac manuscripts does not have *the demon possessed ones, and epileptics, and the paralyzed*.

And the news about him went out into all of Syria, This is probably in the Old Testament sense of the regions bordering Israel on the north and northeast.

and they brought to him all the ones ill with various sicknesses All who were sick were brought to Him.

and torments, This is a general description of diseases.

and the demon possessed ones, Demon-possession is a reality as evidenced by many New Testament examples.”

and epileptics, Literally “moonstruck.

and the paralyzed, Those who could not move certain parts of their body.

and he healed them. A comprehensive list of sicknesses Jesus healed.

Matt. 4:25 And great multitudes followed after him from the Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

And great multitudes followed after him His ministry will always attract great crowds.

from the Galilee This was His homeland.

and Decapolis These are a league of ten cities which were predominately Gentile.

and Jerusalem They came all the way from Jerusalem.

and Judea Includes the area of Jerusalem and Benjamin.

and from beyond the Jordan. It is a symbolic picture of all that region of the world (i.e. the whole of Israel).

SUMMARY TO CHAPTER 4

The Holy Spirit which descended upon Him at His baptism was never to leave Him. After Jesus was baptized by John He was immediately led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

The purpose of this Spirit leading was to be tempted by the Devil. Adam was tested and he failed, now Christ must also be tempted in order that He may undo the results of Adam's failure.

Matthew records three temptations that took place at the end of a forty day fast. Satan began each temptation by saying something to the effect that, "If You really are the Son of God, and let's say for sake of argument that You are, then . . ."

The first temptation consisted of turning stones into bread. Later in His ministry Jesus would feed the multitude with the miraculous creation of bread. Yet this was not the time. The fast was Spirit-led and there was no reason for Jesus to cease fasting. Jesus would not take matters into His own hands and make the bread from the stones. He was here to do the will of the Father and His Father's will called for a fast. Jesus answered Satan with a quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3 which emphasizes that it is not merely bread by which a man lives. God the Father will provide for the needs of His Son.

Satan then tempts Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple. He encourages Jesus to do this rash act by quoting Scripture out of context. Jesus responds by properly quoting Scripture that you do not put the Lord God to the test (Deuteronomy 6:16).

The last temptation consisted of Satan offering to give up his dominion over the world kingdoms and hand them over to Jesus if Jesus would worship him. Jesus would then bypass the suffering and humiliation of the cross. The answer of Jesus was swift, "It is only the Lord God that is to be worshipped."

Satan then left Jesus for a time and the angels came to minister to Him. The temptations of the devil were by no means over.

The next section (verses 12-17) describe the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry. This took place perhaps a year after the baptism and temptation. Jesus said farewell to Nazareth, which had been His home, and settled in Capernaum, located on the Sea of Galilee's northwestern shore. This was done in fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1,2.

John the Baptist had been jailed. Jesus then moved to the Galilee area to avoid a premature crisis with the religious leaders from Jerusalem. His time to die had not yet come.

Working from Capernaum, Jesus ministered to the entire northern territory, teaching, preaching, and healing. The area that was once in the despair of darkness had now seen a great light.

In the next section (verses 18-22) Jesus calls Peter and Andrew to follow Him as disciples. Later He calls James and John to follow Him. All of them immediately obey. The four of them had known Jesus for about a year and had spent some time in His company (we know this from the Gospel of John). Now they are to start training for full-time service.

In verses 23-25 we have the report of Jesus teaching, preaching, and healing, spreading to a wider basis. He goes north to Syria, Decapolis and Perea to the east and as far south as Judea. Huge crowds followed Him wherever He went. He healed all types of affliction. His healing was complete—there was no need for later treatment of these whom Jesus touched.