

# MATTHEW

## Chapter 4

### *The Temptation of Jesus*

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But he answered, “**It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’**” <sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple <sup>6</sup> and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, “**Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’**” <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup> And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “**Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’**” <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

**4:1–11** The significance of Jesus’ temptations, especially because they occurred at the outset of his public ministry, seems best understood in terms of the kind of Messiah he was to be. He would not accomplish his mission by using his supernatural power for his own needs (first temptation), by using his power to win a large following by miracles or magic (second temptation) or by compromising with Satan (third temptation). Jesus had no inward desire or inclination to sin, for these in themselves are sin (Mt 5:22, 28). Because he was God he did not sin in any way, whether by actions or word or inner desire (2Co 5:21; Heb 7:26; 1Pe 2:22; 1Jn 3:5). Yet Jesus’ temptation was real, not merely symbolic. He was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Heb 4:15). He was confronted by the tempter with a real opportunity to sin. Although Jesus was the Son of God, he defeated Satan by using a weapon that everyone has at his disposal: the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6:17). He met all three temptations with Scriptural truth (vv. 4, 7, 10) from Deuteronomy. (CSB)

The narrative of the divinely arranged temptation in the desert of Jesus, God’s Son, should be read in the closest possible connection with the preceding material, especially the baptismal account in 3:13–17. Just as the chapter break between 2:23 and 3:1 was misleading, so is the one here. Matthew simply writes: “And, look, there was a voice from heaven that was saying, ‘This one is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.’ Then [τότε] Jesus was led up into the desert by the Spirit in order to be tempted by the slanderer” (3:17–4:1). (CC)

Both 3:13–17 and 4:1–11 display the Spirit of God, Jesus’ identity as the Son of God, and the typological parallels between Jesus and OT Israel. This combination creates a tight context for interpretation. As the true Son, the nation of Israel reduced to one, Jesus receives John’s baptism as the representative and substitute for the people. He passes through the water and comes out as God’s Chosen One, and in this humble form he hears the Father’s pleasure. As the true Son, the nation reduced to one, Jesus is led into the desert, just as Israel of old was after its watery “baptism” and “adoption” through the Red Sea. Jesus enters the desert to play the role of champion for Israel. Israel was *tested* by God, but the sin of the people led them astray. In their place, it is God’s will that Jesus, the Son, be *tempted*, and so prove himself to be the one who will overcome Satan in the place of—and for the sake of—God’s people. As we attempt to

display the theology of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, this "Jesus in the place of Israel" typology is the most important feature to keep in mind. (CC)

The general structure of the verses is indicated clearly enough by the presence of three temptations, with the third temptation in the climactic position. Scholars seem almost instinctively to join 4:2 to 4:1 as part of an introduction or setting of the scene. I would argue, however, on two counts, that 4:2 properly belongs with 4:3–4 as part of the first temptation. First, the other temptations begin with a narrative statement that sets the stage for that incident and that is then followed by Satan's address to Jesus. So, in 4:5, Satan takes Jesus along and stands him on the pinnacle of the temple, and then in 4:6, Satan speaks to him. A similar pattern occurs in 4:8–9. Therefore 4:2 sets the stage for the first temptation. Second, and more obviously, only the first temptation involves Jesus' hunger. It is never mentioned again, and it plays no apparent role in the temptations for Jesus to throw himself down from the temple or to worship Satan. If this analysis of 4:2 is correct, then the structure of 4:1–11 lays out easily as follows:

1. Introduction: Jesus is led into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted (4:1).
2. The first temptation: "Command that these stones become bread" (4:2–4).
3. The second temptation: "Throw yourself down" from "the pinnacle of the temple" (4:5–7).
4. The third and climactic temptation: "Fall down and worship" the slanderer (4:8–10).
5. The conclusion: The slanderer leaves Jesus, and angels serve him (4:11). (CC)

As is evident from the commentary on 4:1–11, my conviction is that Matthew here is proclaiming Jesus' *work* rather than Jesus' *example*. It is common, in my experience, to hear sermons preached on this text that extol Jesus as the one who shows us how to resist temptation. This hermeneutical move assumes that Matthew presents Jesus as our *model* and that the *method* by which Jesus resists Satan's temptations involves the appropriate use of Scripture to refute the evil one's lies. (CC)

Given the dominant Christology in this Matthean context, it is difficult to conclude that the evangelist wants his audience to view Jesus primarily as a moral example. There is a sense in which 4:1–11 can have that force. However, given Jesus' identity as the Son of God in place of the failed, fallen, sinful nation in both 3:13–17 and 4:1–11, the primary message of 4:1–11 must be that *Jesus is Victor over Satan on behalf of the nation and ultimately on behalf of all people*. (CC)

And yet, "a disciple is not above the teacher, nor is a slave above his master" (10:24). Just as Jesus' own cross is both salvific and exemplary (properly understood, as in 16:21–26), so there is application from 4:1–11 for the disciples of Jesus as they wage war against Satan and his temptations. The application, however, should not be direct, as though each of Jesus' temptations is intended to correspond directly with something that we Christians experience. Rather, read holistically, the attacks of Satan against Jesus call up for review the nature of Jesus' identity as God's Son. Satan tries to get Jesus to misunderstand or contradict what it means for him to live out his mission as God's Son. In other words, it is a question of grasping his identity (CC).

So it is also in the Christian life of temptation and struggle against sin. Mt 4:1–11 does not so much teach disciples that they should "find the right Bible verse with which to combat temptations." Rather, as men and women in Christ, Jesus' disciples of all ages can learn to recognize Satan's temptations as attacks on their identity as the children of God, and on what it means to live out that identity in the world and in our vocations. So the pattern of combat with Satan that Jesus here establishes is not so much "find the right Bible verse," although "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Eph 6:17), is indeed the believer's chief weapon in this battle that will go on until Christ our Victor returns in glory. Rather, Jesus' paradigm is this: "Know from God's Word who you are and how that identity as God's baptized, adopted son or daughter is to be lived out." In that sense, even as he wins the victory, Jesus the Son of God

prepares his disciples for the battle. Just as the Spirit led Jesus into temptation and spiritual warfare with the evil one, so it will be with Jesus' disciples as they serve and follow their Master. (CC)

The hymn writer said, "From vict'ry unto vict'ry His army shall He lead." Following Satan's departure, one might reasonably expect Jesus to head straight into more a victorious conflict with the enemies of God's people. However, the reader of the Gospel's first major section (1:1–4:16) should by this time be expecting that Jesus will do something "unreasonable," unexpected. So he does, as the final unit (4:12–16) in the section relates the Son of God's movement according to the Scriptures. (CC)

**4:1** *led by the Spirit ... to be tempted.* This testing of Jesus (the Greek verb translated "tempted" can also be rendered "tested"), which was divinely intended, has as its primary background Dt 8:1–5, from which Jesus also quotes in his first reply to the devil. There Moses recalls how the Lord led the Israelites in the desert 40 years "to humble you and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands." Here at the beginning of his ministry Jesus is subjected to a similar test and shows himself to be the true Israelite who lives "on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." And whereas Adam failed the great test and plunged the whole race into sin (Ge 3), Jesus was faithful and thus demonstrated his qualification to become the Savior of all who receive him. It was, moreover, important that Jesus be tested/tempted as Israel and we are, so that he could become our "merciful and faithful high priest" (Heb 2:17) and thus be "able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb 2:15; see Heb 4:15–16). Finally, as the one who remained faithful in temptation he became the model for all believers when they are tempted. (CSB)

The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus received at His Baptism (3:16), at once led Him to be tested. (TLSB)

In Judea. The desert was a place associated with demons (cf. 12:43). God also led Israel into the wilderness to wander 40 years (Dt. 8:2). (TLSB)

The introduction is significant. In the first place, this verse closely links 4:1–11 with Jesus' Baptism in 3:13–17, when the Spirit descended upon him and the Father announced, "This one is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (3:17). The Father's good pleasure in his humble Servant-Son-for-the-nation finds immediate expression when the Spirit leads Jesus up into the desert, just as Israel, God's "son," was led up into the desert of old. (CC)

In the second place, God's remarkable purpose in the Spirit's leading Jesus into the desert is "in order" for Jesus "to be *tempted*" by Satan. The Son has come vicariously for the nation, to be in its place and to repeat its history. When Israel went into the desert, God *tested the people for faith and righteousness*. Israel failed, however, falling into sin and gross idolatry time and time again. Now that the true Son has come in the place of Israel, he will be *tempted to sin* by Satan himself. This is the Father's good pleasure, and this Son will show his perfect Sonship by perfect obedience. (CC)

*tempted by the devil.* God surely tests his people, but it is the devil who surely tempts to evil. (CSB)

These temptations were not willed by the devil but by God, whose eternal plan called for the Savior to be tempted and to triumph. Jesus met the test as Israel had not (Ex 15:25; 20:20). As true man, Jesus experienced genuine temptation. As true God, He could overcome temptation. (TLSB)

Means "slanderer." Also called the tempter (v 3) and Satan (v 10), which means "adversary." (TLSB)

πειρασθῆναι—Though πειράζω can have a neutral sense ("attempt"; "test"), Matthew uses it only with a negative force, and Jesus is always the target of the temptation. In 16:1; 19:3; 22:18, 35, people "attempt

to entrap” Jesus (BDAG, 3).<sup>1</sup> The passive here, πειρασθῆναι, “to be tempted,” corresponds to the participle describing the devil in 4:3, “the tempter” (BDAG, 4). (CC)

Significantly, it is God’s will that the slanderer *tempt* Jesus. This involves an important semantic and theological distinction. When God led the nation of Israel into the wilderness after the exodus, it was to “test” them (πῑ, Ex 15:25; 16:4; 20:20; Deut 8:2, 16; 13:4 [ET 13:3]), not to *tempt* them. When the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness, however, it is precisely for Satan to *tempt* Jesus, in order that Jesus may show himself the perfect and perfectly obedient Son of God in and for Israel, God’s flawed and sinful “son.” Because the people of Israel failed the *testing*, Jesus must be subject to the *tempting* in their place. (CC)

The presence of two levels at work in Jesus’ temptation is stylistically reflected through the double use of the personal-agency construction, ὑπό plus the genitive, in 4:1: Jesus was led up into the desert “*by the Spirit* [ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος] to be tempted *by the slanderer* [ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου].” (CC)

διαβόλου—Satan receives three different names in the account of Jesus’ temptation. He is ὁ διάβολος, “the slanderer,” in 4:1, 5, 8, 11. In 4:3 he is ὁ πειράζων, “the tempter,” and in 4:10 Jesus addresses him as σατανᾶ, “Adversary.” Elsewhere in the Gospel, he is ὁ πονηρός, “the evil one” (5:37; 6:13; 13:19, 38), “Beelzebul” (10:25; 12:27), “ruler of demons” (9:34), or “Beelzebul, ruler of demons” (12:24). (CC)

**4:2** *forty days and forty nights*. The number recalls the experiences of Moses (Ex 24:18; 34:28) and Elijah (1Ki 19:8), as well as the 40 years of Israel’s temptation (testing) in the desert (Dt 8:2–3). (CSB)

ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα—Matthew consistently expresses the extent of time using the accusative case, as in classical Greek. The accusative word or phrase for time, such as “forty days,” then functions as an adverb and answers the question “How long did the action (here, the fasting) go on?” (CC)

The typological parallelism in the first temptation (4:2–4) is clear enough. After God led Israel up out of Egypt through the Red Sea, the people became hungry in the wilderness and they murmured against God. In Ex 16:3, they declare that it would have been better to die in Egypt than to starve to death in the wilderness. Although the people try to blame Moses and Aaron for their plight, Moses makes it clear that their grumbling is really against God himself: “What are we? Your grumbings are not against us, but against the LORD” (Ex 16:8). The people’s murmuring was not quieted by God’s provision of manna from heaven. They continued to murmur against God throughout the days of their wilderness wandering. (CC)

In much greater and contrasting measure, Jesus, God’s Son, is led into the desert, and his personal fast of forty days and forty nights corresponds to Israel’s forty years in the wilderness. Whereas when Israel was tested, the people sinned miserably and did not trust God, Jesus does not fail. Though hungry, he does not murmur against God or doubt God’s purposes. (CC)

There are a number of places in Scripture where 40 comes up. Israel’s hunger and temptation for 40 years in the wilderness immediately after their baptism by going through the Red Sea relates to today’s text. Moses fasted for 40 days and nights in Ex. 34:28. Elijah fasted in 1 Kings 19:8. Moses’ fasting was one of glory; that of Jesus, one of humiliation. An angel brought food to Elijah before his fast began; many angels ministered to Christ after his fast ended. All three of Jesus’ replies to the tempter quote Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:13; 6:16) which recount Israel’s failure during that period and stand as a warning example for Christians today. (CC)

*He was hungry* – Israel had also experienced great hunger in the wilderness (Ex 16:3; 24:18). The devil’s first temptation attacked a basic need. (TLSB)

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**4:3** *If you are the Son of God.* Meaning “Since you are.” The devil is not casting doubt on Jesus’ divine sonship, but is tempting him to use his supernatural powers as the Son of God for his own ends. (CSB)

The devil attempted to get Jesus to prove what the Father had just declared (3:17) and so satisfy His hunger. (TLSB)

Satan was aware of who Jesus is but he did not believe. He tries to lead Jesus to doubt his Father just as Satan did with Adam and Eve and tries today to lead us to doubt God’s power and plan. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ—The present particular (or first class) conditional sentence assumes the truth of the “if” clause for the sake of argument. This verse is a good argument against those who wish to translate the protasis of this form of conditional sentence as “since ...” Satan’s rhetoric is precisely designed to leave the question of Jesus’ divine Sonship somewhat open. (CC)

According to Colwell’s Rule, when a predicate nominative (here: υἱός) that precedes the linking verb (here: εἶ) lacks the article (is anarthrous), this does not in itself indicate that the noun is indefinite; that is, Satan is not just calling Jesus “a son of God.” Rather, in the cases of predicate nominatives where other contextual factors indicate that the predicate noun is definite, the absence of the article is the stylistic norm. In light of the baptismal pericope immediately preceding and the use of “Son of God” throughout Matthew’s Gospel, Satan’s temptation centers precisely around what it means for Jesus to be “the Son of God.” (CC)

*Stones to become loaves of bread* – Jesus was tempted to provide bread miraculously for His own needs, just as God had miraculously provided manna for Israel. (TLSB)

εἰπέ ἵνα οἱ λίθοι οὗτοι ἄρτοι γένωνται—After the verb of commanding (the imperative εἰπέ), the object clause with ἵνα uses the subjunctive verb γένωνται. Such object clauses tell *what* is commanded: “Command that these stones become bread.” (CC)

The first temptation consists primarily in Satan’s attempt to get Jesus to use his own power to serve himself in time of need. The slanderer grants Jesus’ identity as “the Son of God” (4:3), but he seeks to lead Jesus into being the wrong kind of Son. He acknowledges that Jesus has the power to turn stones into bread. The later narratives of the miraculous feedings of the five thousand (14:13–21) and the four thousand (15:32–39) show Jesus doing something very much like what Satan tempts him to do here, except that there Jesus will perform the miracles for the benefit of others. Jesus possesses divine power, but how will he use that power? (CC)

The LORD had tried in vain to teach Israel: “He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you the manna ... so that he would make you know that man does not live on bread alone, but man lives on every word that comes out from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut 8:3). Jesus knows well what Israel had failed to learn; unlike Israel, Jesus lives according to the divine Word. Jesus’ life and relationship to God the Father come from what God provides, and especially from what God speaks: “by every word that comes out through [the] mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). (CC)

The Jews demanded a sign as proof of Jesus’ divinity. They didn’t believe He was the Christ. Unbelievers always talk just as does Satan, doubting and trying to cause doubt.

**4:4** Just as God gave the Israelites manna in a supernatural way (Dt 8:3), so also man must rely on God for spiritual feeding. Jesus relied on his Father, not his own miracle power, for provision of food. (CSB)

*It is written* – This is repeated by Jesus in vv. 7, 10. Here, Jesus quoted Moses’ explanation to Israel of why God had let them hunger in the wilderness. Life does not depend on food alone but on the Word of God. Jesus did not exhibit His own glory by performing a miracle but displayed trust in the Word of His Father. (TLSB)

οὐκ ἐπ’ ἄρτω μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος—The negated third person future indicative, οὐκ ... ζήσεται, has a true indicative force (“will not live”), rather than the sense of an imperative. Both in Deut 8:3 and here in Matthew, “will not live” is a statement of fact, not a command (e.g., “should not live”). Greek does employ the *second* person future indicative as the equivalent of an imperative, as in Jesus’ words in 4:7 and 4:10 (see the textual notes there). However, very rarely does the third person future indicative have that force. (CC)

Jesus does not argue or debate. He does not deny that he is hungry nor that he is the Son of God. He does not remind Satan of what the Father said (because he would not have believed it anyway) nor pray for the Holy Spirit. He answers Satan, in great humility, by quoting Scripture. He doesn’t even say “I say unto you.” He sticks to Scripture.

Specifically, Jesus knows that God *has already spoken* and that from his mouth have come the words “This one is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (3:17). Jesus’ time of temptation in the wilderness is God’s will; it is the Spirit’s leading. Jesus will not use his power to murmur or reject God’s will and purpose, as Israel did in the wilderness. The people in their wilderness wanderings did not realize that “as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you” (Deut 8:5), nor did they respond to his discipline as an obedient son should. Jesus, however, overcomes the slanderer, knowing the Father’s Word that declared him to be God’s Son, and living by every divine word, even and especially in his experience of being tempted in the wilderness. Jesus came in humility to his Baptism, and he willingly suffers the time of hunger and temptation, obeying his Father. He lives perfectly and completely by the Father’s Word and will. (CC)

*But – ἀλλ’*—Matthew follows LXX Deut 8:3 in translating the adversative ׀, which after a negative can mean “on the contrary” (*HALOT*, 3a), by ἀλλ’ in presenting the contrast: not that way of living, *but rather* this one. (CC)

*Every word* – *rhema* – The exact utterance from God. Not as preached which passes through the mouth of humans or is summarized by humans. Jesus relies on God’s spoken Word in which the Father promises to sustain him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 2)

**4:5** *took him* – παραλαμβάνει—Matthew’s style employs the historical present tense sparingly, yet it occurs six times in this unit (παραλαμβάνει in 4:5, 8; λέγει in 4:6, 10; δείκνυσιν in 4:8; and ἀφήσιν in

4:11). Apart from the uses of λέγω, the historical present occurs a mere twenty-seven times (based on the text of NA) in the entire Gospel of Matthew. Eight of those twenty-seven, plus six such uses of λέγω—a total of fourteen historical presents—are clustered in two pericopes: Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (4:1–11) and Jesus’ temptation in Gethsemane (26:36–46). These two texts have three more historical presents that are variant readings (ἴστησιν for ἔστησεν in 4:5; λέγει for εἶπεν in 4:9; and εὗρίσκει for εὔρεν in 26:43), which, if read, would increase the number in both texts. (CC)

The devil only seemed to be in charge. Ultimately, it was the Spirit who continued to lead Jesus (v. 1). (TLSB)

Because Matthew uses the historical present so seldomly (except for forms of λέγω), the groupings of this usage in 4:1–11 and in 26:36–46 are significant. In a noteworthy way, Matthew portrays with extra vividness the two accounts of the temptation of God’s Son—in the desert by the great opponent (4:1–11) and in the garden, where Jesus prepares to submit to the Father’s will to drink the cup of wrath for all (26:36–46). Matthew thus highlights stylistically what is also highlighted theologically. To reflect this in translation, I have rendered the historical presents in a somewhat archaic manner with “did,” as here: “Then the slanderer *did take* him ...” (4:5). (CC)

The one historical present verb that Matthew employs often is λέγω, “speak.” Based on the text of NA, thirty-eight times Jesus “speaks” in historical present, twenty-eight times other real persons’ speech is thus described, once Satan’s is, and ten times various characters in Jesus’ parables “speak” in historical present. (CC)

*highest point of the temple.* (Either the southeast corner of the temple colonnade, from which there was a drop of some 100 feet to the Kidron Valley below, or the pinnacle of the temple proper.) (CSB)

The second temptation occurs after Satan takes Jesus to a high location, either on the temple itself or perhaps on the wall surrounding the temple compound. The typological parallelism with Israel is not so clear in this second instance as it was in the first. Jesus’ citation of Deut 6:16 in his reply to Satan directs us to the incident at Massah (Ex 17:1–7), whose name (מַסָּה) derives from the Hebrew verb “to test” (נִסָּה). There the people of Israel quarreled with Moses and doubted whether God’s power was available to provide for them: “They *tested* the LORD, saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’ ” (Ex 17:7). (CC)

Once again, the NT antitype to the OT incident is greater and contrasting. Satan cites Ps 91:11–12 (LXX 90:11–12) in part, though he cites Scripture out of context and omits a key line (see the textual note on Mt 4:6). He fails to include that the LORD promised “to keep you in all your ways” (Ps 91:11b), that is, to protect his people *as they live according to the “ways” he has taught them*. The psalm speaks of God’s “protection from dangers that approach the righteous, not testing God to see if he will really do what Scripture promises.” (CC)

*temple.* The temple, including the entire temple area, had been rebuilt by Herod the Great. The courtyard had been greatly enlarged, to about 330 by 500 yards. To accomplish this a huge platform had been erected to compensate for the sharp falling off of the land to the southeast. An enormous retaining wall made of massive stones was built to support the platform. On the platform stood the temple building, porches and courtyards flanked by beautiful colonnades. (CSB)

When Satan wanted to tempt Job he appeared right in the presence of God (Job 1:6). So he does here as well. Luther said: “Where God builds a church, Satan builds a chapel.”

ἔστησεν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ πτερύγιον τοῦ ἱεροῦ—There is a variant reading here, ἴστησιν, that would place another historical present tense into this unit that already contains so many; see also the variant in 4:9

(λέγει for εἶπεν). Both of these historical presents are found in L W Θ 0233 and the majority of manuscripts. Perhaps, however, the variants arose from the general tendency to harmonize readings to the near context, that is, to harmonize the aorist ἔστησεν to the other historical presents in this unit. (CC)

It is not possible to be certain about the precise location of the temple's "little wing," "extremity," or "pinnacle" (πτερόγιον, a diminutive of πτέρυξ, "wing"). That Satan tempts Jesus in connection with the temple may evoke the temple as the place of God's refuge and protection. Some OT verses speak of people taking refuge under Yahweh's "wings" (כנף, e.g., Pss 17:8; 91:4; Ruth 2:12; cf. Mt 23:37), and in the temple Yahweh himself was enthroned on the winged cherubim (e.g., 2 Ki 19:15 || Is 37:16; Ps 80:2 [ET 80:1]). (CC)

**4:6** *throw yourself down* – Such a rash action would likely result in death or severe injury. (TLSB)

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*It is written* – The devil sought to overthrow Jesus' previous use of Scripture by quoting a psalm in which God promises to command His angels to protect those who trust in Him (though significantly Satan omitted the phrase "in all your ways"). (TLSB)

γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ ἐντελεῖται ...—NA and most English translations take ὅτι as introducing direct discourse and so do not translate it, then set the rest of the verse as a block quotation, indicating that (they believe) the slanderer is directly quoting Ps 91:11–12. However, two factors lead toward understanding ὅτι as introducing indirect discourse, as in the translation above ("for it stands written *that* to his angels he will give orders ..."). The first is that only here in Matthew is γέγραπται followed by ὅτι. Elsewhere in Matthew γέγραπται usually is followed immediately by the OT quotation (as in, e.g., 4:4, 7; 11:10). Thus the form of this "OT citation" is unique, and one might for that reason expect ὅτι to serve another function besides introducing direct discourse (the OT quote). The second factor is that the slanderer actually omits the crucial second line from Ps 91:11, which in both the MT and the LXX (90:11) reads, "For to his angels he will give orders about you, *to keep you in all your ways.*" Not only is the slanderer's citation of Scripture indirect; it is incorrect. (CC)

Satan wants Jesus to test whether God's power is available to protect and save him, just as the people of Israel wondered whether God would provide water for them in their thirst. But Jesus will doubt neither God's promise nor his power. He will not deviate from his Father's "ways." Jesus cites Deut 6:16, a truth that Israel had yet to learn after the people's time in the wilderness: "You shall not test the Lord your God" (Mt 4:7). Jesus, however, knows and holds fast to this commandment. He has no need to learn whether God's power and purposes are guiding him. (CC)

As Genesis 3, Satan twists God's words to suit his evil purposes. Since Jesus had conquered him with Scripture, now Satan tries to use Jesus' method but adds *gar* which Jesus had not used in verse 4. Satan tries to outdo Jesus with Scripture.

This second temptation, then, differs from the first in at least this way. The first assumed that, as the Son of God, Jesus has miraculous power; the question was how Jesus would use it. The second assumes that, as God's Son, God's power is available to protect and sustain Jesus; at issue is whether Jesus would trust that promise. The perfect Son trusts perfectly. He will not put God to the test. (CC)



**4:7** *again it is written* – Jesus met this temptation by quoting Moses’ warning to Israel against testing God as they had done at Massah (cf Ex 17:2–7). Jesus would have been guilty of the same sin had He felt it necessary to prove God’s power by jumping from the temple pinnacle in an attempt to gain personal glory and fame. (TLSB)

*Shall not put the Lord your God to the test* – This quotation reflects the situation of the Israelites described in Ex 17:1–7, how at a place called Massah and Meribah they put Jehovah on trial and rebelled against Moses because of a lack of water. They insolently and provocatively challenged God saying “Is Jehovah among us or not?” Had Jesus thrown himself down, it would have been arrogance and insolence, not trust.

οὐκ ἐκπειράσεις—Here the second person future indicative has an imperatival force: “*You shall not test the Lord your God.*” The Greek is a literal translation of the Hebrew negated imperfect (יִבְחֵן אֱלֹ, Deut 6:16), which likewise has imperatival force. (CC)

**4:8** *showed him all the kingdoms* – Satan was granted the power to show Jesus the vast splendor of all earthly kingdoms. That is incomprehensible to us, but so is Satan’s power.

In this climatic temptation, the devil was permitted to create for Jesus a spiritual vision of “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.” An earthly mountain from which one could see all this does not exist. The highest point likely would have been Hebron in Judea. (TLSB)

**4:9** *worship me* – Though Satan has some dominion in this world (Col 1:13; 1Jn 5:19), here he offered things that were not his to give. Satan demanded that the Son of God worship him rather than do His Father’s will. (TLSB)

ἐὰν πεσὼν προσκυνήσης μοι—This is, literally, “if, falling down, you worship me.” The aorist participle πεσὼν (from πίπτω) preceding the main verb of the clause fits well into Wallace’s important category of an “attendant circumstance participle.” To use Wallace’s phrase, the participle simply “piggy-backs” onto the main verb of the clause and can be translated to match the mood of that main verb. The participle has no independent force, but merely accompanies and attends the main verb of the clause. Matthew’s narrative contains a multitude of such participles. (CC)

In light of the quotation of Deut 6:13 in Mt 4:10, which uses προσκυνέω again, προσκυνέω here too means “worship” in the fullest sense of the term. Like Israel of old in the desert, Jesus is being tempted to commit gross idolatry; he is being tempted to *worship* Satan. (Compare the last textual note on 2:2, which discusses the meaning of προσκυνέω in 2:2, 11.) (CC)

The third temptation brings to the fore the key issue in terms of Israel’s relationship with God. From the very beginning of its identity as a nation, when God led his “son” up out of Egypt into the desert, Israel had struggled to remain loyal to and to worship God alone, having no other gods before him (Ex 20:2–3). In Ex 32:1–35, the incident with the golden calf at the foot of Sinai showed the nation’s apostasy, and the subsequent history of Israel in the land told no substantially different story. (CC)

To be a “son” is to have one “Father,” and one only (see Deut 6:4; Mal 2:10; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6). Israel, the OT type, was a failure. The One who stands in the place of the type does not fail. Satan shows the glories of the world’s kingdoms to Jesus and promises to give them all to him if Jesus will “fall down and worship” Satan (Mt 4:9). Jesus refers to Moses’ words to Israel in Deut 6:13: “You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve him alone” (Mt 4:10). As the people were poised to enter the promised land, Moses had so warned them, but they did not take his words to heart and make them their own (see,

e.g., Judges 2). Jesus is poised to “enter the land,” in order to begin his ministry of salvation in and for Israel (Mt 4:17). As God’s perfect and perfectly obedient Son, he makes Moses’ (and God’s) words his own. (CC)

Satan begins very subtly in verse 3. He becomes bolder and bolder. Luther says that in the first temptation Satan showed himself as a black devil, in the second as a white devil. But in this third temptation he displays himself as a divine, majestic devil, who comes right out as though he were God himself. He drops his mask and appears as the prince and ruler of this world. His statement is based on a lie. He is not the owner of the world and its kingdoms. He is a usurper. He has arrogantly caused the world to be sinful. He works through sinful men and thus gives the appearance of owning all. God owns it all. He gives unconditionally. His gifts are followed by worship. Satan owns nothing. He gives conditionally. He expects to be worshiped before he gives.

The last temptation differs from the first two in a remarkable way. In the first, Satan assumed that Jesus has power, and asked how he would use it. In the second, the slanderer acknowledged that God promised to exercise power on behalf of Jesus, but he asked Jesus to doubt that promise or misuse that power. In this final and climactic temptation, Satan presumes that the Son will worship and serve someone, so he seeks to turn Jesus aside from wholehearted worship and service of God his Father. Jesus, however, will not turn aside. His life and ministry will be a perfect act of worship and service to God. (CC)

Notice the remarkable descending Christology in the sequence of the three temptations. This may be Matthew’s way of echoing the theology of Jesus, who, conceived by the power of the Almighty (1:18–25), was baptized as the humble Servant (3:13–17). This also prepares for Jesus’ public ministry in Israel. Here we see not a Messiah of power nor a Messiah who abuses or misunderstands God’s power, but a Messiah of faithful obedience and service to God and to God’s people—to “his [own] people,” whom he will save from their sins (1:21). (CC)

**4:10** *be gone* – hpago means “leave a person’s presence... be gone.”

Jesus had heard enough from Satan and ordered him to leave. This demonstrates the true extent of Jesus’ authority as manifested late (cf. 7:29). (TLSB)

*it is written.* Jesus’ third quotation of Scripture was from a passage where, with similar words, Moses admonished Israel to fear and serve the Lord rather than idols when they entered the Promised Land. If Jesus had worshiped the devil and rejected the way of the cross, He might well have gained earthly glory for Himself. (TLSB)

*worship...lord your God...only* – κύριον τὸν θεόν σου προσκυνήσεις καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις— The second person future indicatives προσκυνήσεις and λατρεύσεις function as imperatives: “You shall worship ... you shall serve.” So too did ἐκπειράσεις in 4:7 (see the textual note there; contrast the second textual note on 4:4). The first verb in Deut 6:13 in both the MT (אָרַת... אַבְדָּת) and the LXX (φοβηθήσῃ ... λατρεύσεις) is “fear,” whereas Matthew records Jesus as saying “worship.” In the OT, “to fear” God usually connotes faith and thus also worship of him (see אָרַת in, e.g., Ex 14:31; 2 Ki 17:36; Is 50:10; Pss 40:4 [ET 40:3]; 115:11). Jesus’ reply picks up on Satan’s temptation that Jesus should “fall down and worship” him (4:9). Moreover, the pair of verbs “worship” and “fear” (προσκυνέω and λατρεύω) occur together often in the OT, including LXX Deut 4:19; 5:9; 8:19; 11:16; 17:3; 29:25 (ET 29:26); 30:17. Most LXX verses with that pair of verbs refer to false worship of false gods, either in prohibitions that Israel should not do so or in statements that apostate Israel did so. (Only LXX Dan 6:27 [ET 6:26], spoken by Darius, uses them for worship of the true God.) So Jesus, in using these two verbs for true worship in Mt 4:10, is being faithful to God in the exact way that Israel was unfaithful to God. (CC)

Wallace cautiously puts forward a distinction between the construction of προσκυνέω plus a dative object and προσκυνέω plus an accusative object. He suggests that the latter construction “may imply either misconception of God on the part of the worshiper ... or worship that is at a distance.” He uses Mt 4:10 as a test case, suggesting that here προσκυνέω plus the accusative (κύριον τὸν θεόν σου προσκυνήσεις) suggests that “a personal application of this text to the tempter is being made. Although only the Lord God is the true God, the devil will have no chance for a *personal* relation with him.” But here Wallace misreads the context, and 4:10 cannot support his conjecture. In each of the OT citations that comprise Jesus’ replies to Satan’s temptations, the OT citation applies to Jesus himself. *He* is the one who lives by every word that comes from God’s mouth, and *he* is the one who will refuse to put God to the test. In 4:10, *Jesus* is the one who will worship and serve the Lord his God alone. (CC)

**4:11** *devil left him* – Satan was forced to depart. The Son of God had vanquished the old evil foe. Cf Jas 4:7. (TLSB)

Satan departs. He will return in subtle ways, seeking to turn Jesus aside from path that leads his to his ultimate act of service (16:23; 27:40). But Matthew’s readers/hearers are confident. Their champion has held the field. He will not falter, as Israel did, and as Matthew’s readers/hearers through all centuries do. He will win the final victory. Only after Jesus has defeated Satan do the angels appear and begin to minister to him. (CC)

The same pattern in 4:1–11 of Jesus overcoming temptation will reappear at the end of the Gospel. Jesus will be crucified precisely because he is the Son of God (26:63–64). The onlookers tempt him to act wrongly as God’s Son, just as Satan did in 4:1–11: “Let him save himself, *if he is the Son of God*” (27:40; see also 27:43). But Jesus will be victorious over that temptation too. Conflict ended and resurrection victory revealed, an angel will reappear, but instead of serving Jesus directly (4:11), he will announce Jesus’ resurrection to the women (28:1–10). (CC)

aphiasin means the leaving is caused by defeat. Satan attacked Jesus again and again in Jesus’ lifetime.

Luke 4:13 “When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.”

*Angels were ministering to him* – Jesus had refused to relieve His hunger with a miracle. Now, miraculously, the angels served Him, probably also with food (cf 1 KI 19:6-7). (TLSB)

**4:1–11** The devil tempts Jesus to seek His own glory. Jesus refuses this path to walk the way of the cross. In love, He “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Php 2:6–8). He did all this for the sake of Israel, who had failed God’s test. He did all this for our sake, because we, too, have failed God’s test. Jesus is our substitute who defeated Satan for us, setting us free from sin, death, and the devil’s power. • Mighty Hero, though devils fill the world, we do not fear because You have won the victory. Amen. (TLSB)

*Jesus Begins to Preach*

<sup>12</sup>Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. <sup>13</sup>And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup>so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: <sup>15</sup>“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—<sup>16</sup>the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region

**and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”<sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

**4:12** *John had been put in prison.* See Mk 1:14. The reason for John’s imprisonment is given in 14:3–4. (CSB)

Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and ruler of Galilee, imprisoned John for condemning his adulterous relationship with his brother’s wife (cf. 14:1-12). (TLSB)

Jesus emerges victorious from his battle in the desert with Satan (4:1–11). What does Matthew mention next? The arrest of John, God’s end-time voice in the desert! This news is not a complete surprise to Matthew’s readers/hearers, for they already know at least the Gospel’s basic message, as the proleptic mention of Judas as the one “who betrayed him” in 10:4 shows. Matthew is not written for “naive” readers who are hearing of Jesus and his work for the first time. Yet this opening dependent clause of 4:12 should have an impact on us as we read. John is the one spoken of in Isaiah 40 (Mt 3:1–3), and he is Elijah foretold in the prophet Malachi (Mal 3:23 [ET 4:5]; see Mt 11:14; 17:10–12; see also the commentary on Mt 3:4). He announces the coming of the Mightier One (Mt 3:11), and he participates with Jesus in fulfilling all righteousness (Mt 3:15). Jesus, announced by John, has emerged victorious from conflict with Satan. The progress of God’s reign in Christ, however, will not be triumphant in normal human terms. Violent men will seek to snatch away the reign of heaven in Christ (11:12). God’s royal ruling will show itself in strange vulnerability and weakness. This should catch our attention: *John* was handed over (4:12). (CC)

*Withdrew into Galilee* – Means that He had been there before. This same verb occurs at Matthew 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.”

The Greek word can mean simply “departed” (2:12), with no idea of escape. As John’s ministry ended, Jesus’ began. (TLSB)

ἀκούσας δὲ ὅτι Ἰωάννης παρεδόθη ἀνεχώρησεν—The verb παρεδόθη in the ὅτι clause after the participle ἀκούσας is a good illustration of relative time with regard to participles and indirect discourse. Because the participle ἀκούσας (“hearing”) is aorist, it will normally be a step in time back from the main verb, ἀνεχώρησεν (“he departed”), which is aorist indicative. Using the English conjunction “after” in the translation of the participle ἀκούσας expresses this “step back in time” well enough: “Now after [Jesus] heard.” Since, then, the *relative* time of the participle is a kind of past tense, the translation of the verb παρεδόθη in the ὅτι clause has to be adjusted one further step back in time; hence even though παρεδόθη is an aorist indicative, it is translated as a pluperfect: “... heard that John *had been* handed over.” (CC)

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew from the region around the Jordan into Galilee, heading northward after his wilderness conflict with the Satan. The language of 4:12–14 strongly parallels the language of 2:22–23. This shows the connection between chapter 4 and chapter 2 as parts of the same major section of the Gospel (1:1–4:16). It also shows that Jesus himself will choose the times and ways to confront the evil men who seek to destroy or hinder the work of God’s gracious reign. (CC)

**4:13** *leaving Nazareth* – καταλιπὼν means that He abandoned it as His home.

καὶ καταλιπὼν τὴν Ναζαρά—Matthew spells “Nazareth” Ναζαρά here but Ναζαρέτ in 2:23 and Ναζαρέθ in 21:11. Jesus’ original residence in Nazareth was for the purpose of fulfilling Scripture (2:22–23). It is noteworthy, then, that “after he had left Nazareth” (4:13) to dwell in another city, the purpose, once again, is to fulfill Scripture. (CC)

*lived in Capernaum* – katokasen means that He took up permanent residence in Capernaum.

Although not mentioned in the OT, it was evidently a sizable town in Jesus' day. Peter's house there became Jesus' base of operations during his extended ministry in Galilee (see Mk 2:1; 9:33). A fifth-century basilica now stands over the supposed site of Peter's house, and a fourth-century synagogue is located a short distance from it. (CSB)

Modern Tel Hum. Fishing village and important garrison on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Home of Peter (8:14) and also the town where Matthew collected taxes (9:9). Capernaum served as Jesus' base of operations. (TLSB)

Most importantly, Jesus withdraws into Galilee and leaves Nazareth, his hometown, in order to take up residence in Capernaum by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali. This happens, Matthew tells his readers/hearers, in order to fulfill Isaiah's words in Is 8:23–9:1 (ET 9:1–2). This OT citation, the fifth and final OT citation formula in the Gospel's first major section, possesses a threefold significance for Matthew. (CC)

**4:14** might be fulfilled – ἵνα πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος—This is the fifth of Matthew's ten OT fulfillment citation formulas. (CC)

**4:15–16** Another Messianic prophecy from Isaiah. Jesus spent most of his public ministry “in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali” (v. 13), which is north and west of the Sea of Galilee. (CSB)

Two of Israel's 12 tribes. Hippolytus: “The two peoples (were) being brought into one fold and under the hand of one chief shepherd, the good (Shepherd) by nature, that is Christ” (ANF 5:165). (TLSB)

**4:15** *land of Zebulun...Naphtali...beyond the Jordan* – γῆ Ζαβουλῶν ... Γαλιλαία τῶν ἐθνῶν—All these nominatives, from “land of Zebulun” through “Galilee of the Gentiles,” stand in apposition to the subject of the verb, which doesn't occur until 4:16: ὁ λαός, “*the people* that was sitting in darkness.” The verb is εἶδεν, “*saw a great light.*” This is quite different from the grammar of the MT, in which “land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali” are not subjects, but direct objects of a prior verb (לָפָּנָי, God “dishonored, belittled” them), which Matthew's citation does not include. (CC)

ὁδὸν θαλάσσης—In the MT, “way of the sea” is the object of the verb תְּכַבֵּד, “he [God] glorified.” However, both Matthew and the LXX lack a Greek equivalent for the MT's verb. In Matthew, the phrase has to be taken adverbially. It is an adverbial accusative of extent, answering the question “How far?”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the translation renders it “*as far as* the way of the sea.” (CC)

It was in and around Galilee that Jesus spent most of his life on earth. 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 the west of these, and extended from north and south along the Mediterranean. Beyond the Jordan indicates the territory east of the Jordan (Perea – location of Luke 15 ministry). 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. Many of the inhabitants had been deported. The people of Galilee were a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, pagan people, by and large. (CC)

In the first place, Matthew declares here that Isaiah's promise of future deliverance and blessing for the northern regions of Israel (the tribal areas of Zebulun and Naphtali), which were ravaged by the Assyrian invaders in the eighth century BC and by others since, has now come true in Jesus. (CC)

Galilee had a significant Gentile population. Here in despised Galilee, light dawned. (TLSB)

**4:16** *the people* – laos – This reminds us that Covenant people still lived among them but it includes also the Gentiles.

*Dwelling* – hamenos (sitting) denotes the spiritual stupor of the people.

*In darkness* – skotos – This denotes the hopeless condition of natural man, sunken in ignorance, unbelief and sin.

ὁ λαὸς ὁ καθήμενος ἐν σκότει—Matthew uses the participle of κάθημαι, “sitting,” which cannot really be a translation for the MT’s participle, ׀ַלְלִי, “the people *going/walking*” (Is 9:1 [ET 9:2]). The LXX is a true translation of the MT with ὁ λαὸς ὁ πορευόμενος, “the people *going*.” Matthew has translated as if the Hebrew had a participle of ׀ַשׁ, “sit; live.” (CC)

*have seen* – eidev – They actually realized that He was the great Light.

*A great light* – phos – This great light reminds us of the Gospel of John, where Jesus is called the Light in the darkness of the world.

In the second place, the promised light will shine in the darkness for those in “Galilee of the Gentiles” (4:15). This probably refers to both Jews and Gentiles living in this northern region of the Holy Land, but the explicit mention of τὰ ἔθνη (“the Gentiles/nations,” 4:15) surely invites a connection with 28:16–20, and to that connection I shall return below. (CC)

In the third place, and perhaps most importantly for Matthew’s Gospel, Is 8:23–9:1 (ET 9:1–2) is part and parcel of *another Immanuel passage*, Is 8:23–9:6 (ET 9:1–7). Matthew had cited Isaiah’s first Immanuel passage in Mt 1:22–23. Now Matthew’s citation of Is 8:23–9:1 (ET 9:1–2) casts beams from its larger context upon the narrative of Jesus, “God is with us” (Mt 1:23). Light has dawned in Galilee (Is 8:23–9:1 [ET 9:1–2]); the joy of the nation in victory over her enemies is greater than the joy at harvest or when dividing the spoils of battle (9:2–4 [ET 9:3–5]). Why is this so? “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5 [ET 9:6]). The “Son of David” (Mt 1:1) will reign on David’s throne, establishing an expanding kingdom that will bring peace without end (Is 9:6 [ET 9:7]). (CC)

The light of the Christ has begun to shine in Galilee. Jesus is about to begin his ministry as Matthew concludes his material preparing for that public ministry of preaching and teaching and healing on behalf of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Just as Matthew’s first OT citation speaks of Isaiah’s Immanuel, who is “God is with us” to save (Is 7:14 in Mt 1:22–23), so now the evangelist’s fifth OT citation forms the ending “God is with us” bracket, thus enclosing his narrative’s first major section with references from the Immanuel section of Isaiah. (CC)

*Shadow of death* – They could not rescue themselves from sin and its penalty.

καὶ τοῖς καθημένοις ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου—I have translated τοῖς καθημένοις as a dative of advantage, “for the ones who were sitting in the region and shadow of death.” The MT has the participle of ׀ַשׁ, which can mean either “live,” as the LXX rendered it (οἱ κατοικοῦντες, “O you living ...”), or “sit,” as Matthew translates. Both the LXX and Matthew translated ׀ַלְלִי ׀ַשׁ (“in a land of shadow of

death”) as ἐν χώρῃ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου, “in (the) region and shadow of death,” perhaps to avoid a double genitive construction (“of ... of ...”). (CC)

*light has dawned* – φῶς ἀνέτειλεν αὐτοῖς—In 5:45, ἀνατέλλω plus the preposition ἐπί and an accusative means “to rise upon” someone. This is the only NT example of the verb ἀνατέλλω taking the simple dative case. In the LXX, the simple dative after ἀνατέλλω can mean either “to rise upon” (Gen 32:32 [ET 32:31]; Wisdom 5:6) or “to rise for” (Ezek 29:21; Ps 96:11 [MT/ET 97:11]). The MT’s אָרָא (Is 9:1 [ET 9:2]) normally would mean “upon them” (see BDB, s.v. אָרָא, II 1) but could also mean “for them” (see BDB, s.v. אָרָא, II 1 f (c)). The LXX has φῶς λάμπει ἐφ’ ὑ, “a light will shine upon you.” If Matthew is translating from the MT’s Hebrew, the verb ἀνατέλλω is somewhat unexpected, for the LXX never uses that Greek verb for the Hebrew verb אָרָא. (CC)

Jesus the Light rose over them and dispelled it. When a person 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.

Not only is the OT citation in 4:15–16 important in itself for Matthew’s teaching about Jesus, but this final unit (4:12–16) that concludes the Gospel’s first major section (1:1–4:16) also anticipates the ending of the entire Gospel in at least three ways. The first anticipation is the repetition that Jesus is “Immanuel,” “God is with us.” Matthew’s first Immanuel affirmation was 1:22–23, and now this first section of the Gospel ends in 4:14–16 with another “God is with us” reference. That same ending is implicit in Jesus’ promise that accompanies the making of disciples: “Look, *I am with you always*” (28:20). This Gospel proclaims the Good News that in Jesus, God is with us to save us from our sins (1:21), now and to the end of the age! (CC)

Second, 4:12–16 anticipates the end of this Gospel also by emphasizing that the light of salvation is dawning upon and “for” Galilee even as the light himself is now moving *into* Galilee. The connection is fairly obvious: Jesus’ public ministry gets underway in Galilee, the same place from which his ministry will be extended when the risen Lord Jesus sends the eleven disciples from Galilee to make other disciples (28:16–20). (CC)

Third, 4:12–16 is part of a larger anticipation as the first major section of the Gospel (1:1–4:16) draws to its close. Consider this sequence of texts: 3:13–17, followed by 4:1–11, and then by 4:12–16. Jesus is declared to be the Father’s “beloved Son” and receives his approval, for he comes to stand in the place of sinners, receiving their baptism as the representative of the “son” (see 2:15), the nation (3:13–17). Next comes the great conflict with Satan over what kind of Son of God Jesus will be. Jesus emerges victorious, choosing humble and perfect obedience to the Lord his God. Victory won, the angels appear and minister to Jesus (4:1–11). Following that conflict and angelic visitation, Jesus hears of those who oppose the reign of God, and he returns to the north, where the eschatological light of salvation dawns for Galilee of the Gentiles (4:12–16) through the coming of Immanuel, “God is with us” (1:23). These three texts at the end of the first major section of the Gospel proclaim the Son of God in place of sinners (3:13–17), Satan’s testing and Jesus’ victory attended by angels (4:1–11), and the light of Immanuel in Galilee (4:12–16). (CC)

Now compare that sequence with the end of the Gospel. There Jesus, the Son of God, is crucified precisely *because* he claims to be the Son of God (26:63–64; 27:40, 43). He is crucified in the place of sinners, giving his life as the ransom in the place of the many (ἀντὶ πολλῶν, 20:28). The passersby keep on blaspheming him and challenging him *with the very words of Satan himself, taunting him to show what kind of Son of God he is*: “Let him save himself, *if he is the Son of God*, and let him come down from the cross. ... He trusts in God; let him rescue [him] now if he delights in him, for he said, ‘*I am the Son of God*’ ” (27:40, 43). But Jesus overcomes that temptation too and dies victorious, choosing perfect

obedience and drinking the cup that is the Father's will (26:36–46). Conflict ended and resurrection victory revealed, angels appear again—not to minister to Jesus, but to announce his resurrection to the women (28:1–10). Following the angelic visitation, there are still those who oppose the reign of God, which has now been manifested in Jesus' victorious death and resurrection (28:11–15). Yet the Son of God returns to the north, and his eschatological mission of salvation extends from Galilee to the Gentiles, until the consummation of the age (28:16–20), because Jesus will be with his disciples as Immanuel. (CC)

The pattern in 3:13–4:16 seems too close to that in chapters 26–28 to be accidental. Here at the end of 1:1–4:16, the evangelist offers in miniature form the pattern for the salvation that Jesus will accomplish and the mission to all the nations, beginning in Galilee. (CC)

The Good News, however, is a narrative of unfolding events, things that God's royal rule in history and on the earth actually accomplishes in Jesus. The stage is now set, and the evangelist will turn now to the narration of that public ministry as it begins to unfold in Israel. (CC)

**4:17** *from that time* – Jesus wasted no time in getting going.

ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς κηρῦσσειν καὶ λέγειν—This asyndetic clause marks the first of the two most important turning points in the movement, or plot, of the entire Gospel's narrative. (The other is 16:21.) Here in 4:17, the actual events of Jesus' public ministry in, among, and for the lost sheep of the house of Israel begin to take place. (CC)

In Matthew's presentation of the Good News of Jesus, 4:17 stands as one of the two most important transitions in the entire Gospel (the other one being 16:21). The evangelist has introduced the person of Jesus the Christ, royal "Son of David" (1:1) and Son of God (2:15; 3:17; 4:3, 6). Matthew has also anticipated the way that Jesus will carry out his ministry of saving his people from their sins (1:21): through conflict with Satan (4:1–11) and through lowly vicarious standing with them (3:13–17). Only in 4:17, however, does the evangelist set his hand to describe, by the Spirit's guidance, the deeds and words of Jesus for us and for our salvation. With "Jesus began ..." Mt 4:17 marks a true beginning. Now the Messiah begins to speak and to minister in the land of Israel. (CC)

Matthew provides a summary of Jesus' preaching, and it is precisely that of the Baptizer: "Repent! For the reign of heaven stands near!" (the wording is identical in 3:2 and 4:17). John proclaimed such a message as the one who had come to prepare the Lord's way, playing his own unique part in God's plan to fulfill all of God's saving deeds. Jesus proclaims the same message as the Lord himself who has come to free the people from their exile in sin and to bring God's end-time salvation already now into the present. (CC)

*To preach* – karussein – To announce and speak formally and constantly. Each of us can announce and proclaim the good news constantly in our daily lives.

*Repent.* † Jesus began his public ministry with the same message as that of John the Baptist (3:2). The people must repent because God's reign was drawing near in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Matthew distinguishes between the two calls to repentance by means of the Scripture he cites; John's is preparatory (3:3), while Jesus' combines word and act. (CSB)

metanoete – Means to constantly acknowledge and confess your sins. Confession goes on constantly in the life of a Christian.



Without repeating all of the commentary on John’s message in 3:2, the following points can be emphasized. First, Jesus (like John) addresses the lost sheep that are the house of Israel. Though there were certainly members of the faithful remnant, who had never lost true faith in the God of Israel, the spiritual condition of the whole nation is essentially one of “lostness.” The call “Repent!” is then a call to conversion, to move from sin and unbelief to repentant faith and salvation. (CC)

The church proclaims this same message today. (TLSB)

*For – gar* – This 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.

*Kingdom of heaven* – Both John and Jesus announced the presence of “the kingdom of heaven” lest it be misunderstood as a physical, earthly or political kingdom. It could be a subjective genitive because it comes from God in heaven through the incarnate Christ. God does the acting. This is purest Gospel.

*Has dawned* – *aggiken* – punctiliar-durative perfect tense and is best said “is at hand” or “is here” rather than “is near.”

μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν—These are the identical words that were preached by John the Baptizer. (CC)

Second, when Jesus of Nazareth (like John) grounded his call to repentance in Israel with the declaration that “the reign of heaven stands near,” he was proclaiming that the kingly ruling deeds of God, expected on the Last Day, were beginning already now on the earth. The “reign of heaven” is not primarily a place. It certainly is not a group of people or an organization. The reign of heaven is the *reigning* of God, what God the King is doing—in Jesus, in history. As we shall see in the course of Matthew’s narrative, there is an eschatological “already” and “not yet” quality to God’s reign breaking into history. As I argued in the textual note on 3:2 regarding “stands near,” the perfect indicative active verb form ἤγγικεν captures well this “both present and future” of the reign of heaven. The reign of heaven has not yet fully arrived, with all of its power and salvation. At the same time, however, Jesus, the Son of God, is already here, and he is bringing a salvation that will avail *on the Last Day*. The time is urgent, and those who refuse what Jesus offers will also seal for themselves a judgment *on the Last Day*. The horizon that defines and looms large over all of Jesus’ teaching and ministry, his death, and his resurrection, is the Last Day. (CC)

*The Calling of the First Disciples*

**<sup>14</sup> to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: <sup>15</sup>“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—<sup>16</sup>the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”  
<sup>17</sup>From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”**

**4:18** *Sea of Galilee.* παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας—“The Sea of Galilee” is a freshwater inland lake, about thirteen miles by eight miles at its largest dimensions. It is known by several names in both biblical and extrabiblical sources, including Gennesaret, Tiberias, and Taricheae. (CC)

It was 682 feet below sea level. It formed a kind of bowl which allowed for storms to come up quickly and unexpectedly. (TLSB)

*net.* A circular casting net used either from a boat or while standing in shallow water. (CSB)

εἶδεν δύο ἀδελφούς ... βάλλοντας ἀμφίβληστρον—The predicate position participle βάλλοντας could be translated adverbially, with a temporal force: “He saw two brothers ... *as they were throwing* a casting net.” However, the following explanatory γάρ clause (ἦσαν γὰρ ἀλιεῖς, “because they were fishermen”) invites a supplementary participle translation, understanding the verbal adjective more strongly as an adjective: “He saw two brothers ... *throwing* a casting net.” (CC)

auphiblastron – Casting their “casting-net.” 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. They were professional fishermen.

In light of the nearness of God’s reign, which even now has come into the world in his own person, Jesus calls his first disciples. Four men are specifically named. Mt 4:18–20 and 4:21–22 exhibit such a strong parallelism that the two pairs of fishermen should not be regarded as separate in any way. Rather, the verses offer the first example of Jesus’ call to discipleship, and they function as a paradigm for discipleship. (CC)

**4:19** *follow me* – δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου, καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων—The word δεῦτε is usually used as a hortatory particle with other verbal forms in the plural. Here it functions on its own as an imperative: “Come!” (BDAG, s.v. δεῦτε). (CC)

The object of the verb ποιήσω is the plural pronoun “you” (ὑμᾶς). The second accusative, ἀλιεῖς (“fishers”), is the predicate accusative or, as Wallace labels it, the complement in an “object-complement” construction, hence, “I will make you *to be* fishers ...” The noun “fishers” (ἀλιεῖς) has a verbal root, “to fish” (ἀλιεύω), and so the genitive noun after it (ἀνθρώπων) is objective: “fishers of men” means that people will be the object of the disciples’ activity of fishing. (CC)

The most prominent feature of these verses is the overwhelming authority of the call of Jesus. In 4:19, Jesus speaks, “Come on after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men.” In 4:20, they immediately leave their nets and follow him. The pattern of Jesus’ powerful call is repeated with James and his brother John; again, they immediately respond (4:21–22). Some, concerned to show how such a dramatic response by the four could be more reasonably understood, have taken refuge in the historical information provided in the Gospel of John. There we learn that at least some of Jesus’ first disciples had come already into close contact with him in Judea before he returned to Galilee (Jn 1:35–51). However, to try to make the fishermen’s sudden response to Jesus more humanly reasonable or understandable runs the risk of lessening Matthew’s point. No one becomes Jesus’ disciple by his own initiative. Jesus calls, and only then can and do people respond. Many have underscored this point by contrasting Jesus’ call with what was apparently the normal procedure for a first-century rabbi, who gained disciples *when they sought him out*. Jesus breaks this pattern, and in that sense he is operating with the freedom of God, who calls human beings to trust and serve him. (CC)

John 15:16, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

*Fishers of men* – An important question arises for Matthew’ hearers/readers from 4:18–22: For whom do the four fishermen stand? If this first calling of disciples is a paradigm, the natural question is, A paradigm of what and for whom? Matthew’s narration suggests that the four fishermen possess both a generic, “believer” quality as well as a more narrowly focused “apostle” quality. Three features of 4:18–22 and its context support this both/and approach. (CC)

In the first place, these four fisherman possess a unique quality in that they will become members of the group of Jesus’ apostles. Thus the fisherman do not just stand as a paradigm for “every Christian.” Rather,

in some ways they show the nature of apostolic ministry, which is distinct from Jesus' call to every disciple. Three features of 4:18–22 support this distinction. The first feature is the prominence of the personal names and especially the phrase “Simon who was called Peter” (4:18). Given the prominence of Simon Peter as first in the list of the apostles (10:2–4) and as the representative of all of the Twelve in 16:13–20 and elsewhere, Matthew's readers/hearers will inevitably think of Peter and the others as those who would become Jesus' unique apostles. (CC)

The second apostolic feature is the promise “I will make you to be fishers of men” (4:19). Not all of Jesus' disciples will function in his service in the same way. The future tense, in addition, should also be taken seriously. Jesus will not make them into fishers of men until he gives them authority and sends them out in chapter 10. As the commentary especially on that chapter will highlight, throughout the centuries only some of Jesus' disciples are “sent” in the narrow sense of the term, although surely all of his disciples, through all manner of good works, will reveal the Father to the world around them (5:13–16). If one could expand the metaphor a bit, some Christians will steady the boat, some will repair the nets, and others will actually cast the nets and gather the precious catch of human lives for Christ. Sermons today should not apply this text to Christians generally as if to imply that all participate in Christ's mission to the world in the same way. (CC)

The third unique feature about the call of the fishermen in 4:18–22 is that they began literally to follow Jesus around. Now the verb “to follow” itself (ἀκολουθέω, 4:20, 22) does not indicate that the persons who are thus following are Jesus' disciples. The crowds often follow Jesus, but Matthew's narrative makes it abundantly clear that the crowds do not, as a rule, attain to the status of disciples. So not all who physically follow Jesus are his disciples. (CC)

Nor do all of his disciples literally follow him around. The most notable example here is Joseph of Arimathea, whom Matthew describes in this way: “and who himself had become a disciple of Jesus” (27:57). The commentary also argues that the various persons who emerge from out of the crowds with faith in Jesus' authority, especially in chapter 8, should be regarded as Jesus' disciples. (CC)

The twelve apostles, however, once they are constituted in chapter 10, seem virtually always to be physically with Jesus, either as an entire group or in part. Thus Matthew here in 4:18–22 wants his readers/hearers to regard the fisherman not merely as Christians, but as those Christians who will become apostles. The promise that the fishermen will become fishers of men, then, connects to the teaching office of the *apostles* through which the one holy catholic and *apostolic* church will reach out to draw others to Christ, who calls all people to be his own. (CC)

The evangelist, however, also describes the calling of the four in ways that allow his readers to learn important truths about the calling of all Christians to be Jesus' disciples. Two specific features of this account have connections to other passages in Matthew, and these connections frame these four fishermen also as “typical” disciples or Christians. The first specific feature occurs in 4:21, where Matthew writes concerning James and John, “And he called [ἐκάλεσεν] them.” Mt 9:9–13 is an important parallel passage that combines these elements of calling an apostle and calling believers. There, after Jesus calls Matthew to follow him (as he did the four fishermen), Jesus describes his *general* ministry to tax gatherers and sinners with these words: “I did not come to call [καλέσαι] righteous people, but sinners” (9:13). The use of the same verb in the same general way in 22:3, 4, 8, 9 (and perhaps also in 20:8) lends a “general” quality to the events of 4:18–22. Jesus “called” the fishermen. That is, he called them to be disciples, to be believers. (CC)

A second textual item supports the first, and that is “Come after me” (δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου) in 4:19. With this clause, Jesus summons Peter and Andrew. Elsewhere in the Gospel, Christ offers his general invitation to all to come to him and be saved with the imperative δεῦτε, “Come!” (11:28; 22:4; cf. 25:34). The life of

coming to and following “after” Jesus (ὀπίσω μου) applies in a general way to all Christians in 10:38 and 16:24. Thus, when Jesus calls the fisherman, he is calling them to the same life of faith to which the Lord calls all believers. (CC)

**4:20** *immediately...followed* – They had acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah a year earlier (John 1). This explains their immediate compliance at this time. They were not blind followers, but were believers.

These brothers responded at once to the overwhelming authority of Jesus’ call. Their priorities would never again be the same. (TLSB)

To what are the four fishermen responding? What do they know and believe? Although the evangelist does not tell us specifically, the context provides a strong indication, so obvious that it might be missed. Jesus has just begun to proclaim, “Repent! For the reign of heaven stands near” (4:17). The four believe, even if only with faltering faith, that Jesus’ preaching is true! They have begun to acknowledge their *need* for conversion, their *need* to be saved, and they have begun to believe that through Jesus, the promised kingly saving deeds of God have broken into Israel’s history. This point will be crucial in understanding rightly the Beatitudes, the opening to the Sermon on the Mount (5:3–12). To speak in overtly Lutheran categories, the Law of God has already begun its alien work in those who are Jesus’ disciples (as it had also in those who responded to John’s preaching by confessing their sins as they were baptized by him [3:6]). They have begun to repent and to believe. (CC)

The fishermen leave their former lives and follow Jesus. It is easy to find either too much or too little significance in this aspect of their response. On the one hand, commentators at times almost speak as if the disciples clearly understood at this point who Jesus was and what discipleship might personally cost them, and were willing to pay that price. A quick reading of this Gospel (or any of the Gospels) shows how wrongheaded it is to make that much of their response. The disciples do not yet understand fully who Jesus is or what he has come to do, and they understand neither what Christian discipleship nor (in their case) apostolic ministry will eventually cost them. Nor do they completely abandon everything in the sense of having nothing to do with their former lives. They still have houses and mothers-in-law (8:14–15), mothers (20:20–28), and presumably other relationships as well. (CC)

On the other hand, there can be no doubt that just as Jesus had begun to preach and to call disciples to himself, so these disciples are given, through his preaching and call, the *beginning* of the understanding that none of their old priorities and relationships will ever be the same or will ever again possess primary importance. But the four do not know the implications of this as yet. There will be many occasions, even within the brief course of Matthew’s Gospel, when Jesus’ disciples show that they have not grasped or appropriated all the ramifications that his call will have for their lives. Nevertheless, the circumstance that defines the beginning of discipleship with Jesus, and that will go on characterizing that relationship for the fishermen (and for Jesus’ disciples of all times and places), is the authority and primacy of his call to come to him, to follow him. (CC)

**4:21** *sons of Zebedee* – One commentator thinks that Zebedee was a prosperous fisherman with connections in Jerusalem.

*preparing their nets.* Washing, mending and hanging the nets up to dry in preparation for the next day’s work. (CSB)

Getting ready to go fishing again. God often calls people for a specific work while they are hard at work in their profession.

**4:22** *immediately they...followed him* – Without debate or stipulation concerning reward. Mark says that James and John left their father 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.

An important general observation also prevents us from seeing the fisherman in 4:18–22 *only* as apostles: the overarching shape of Matthew’s narrative. For this Gospel (like all the Gospels) *is* a narrative, and its shape cannot be ignored. The smaller, specialized, authorized group of the twelve apostles is not constituted until chapter 10. At that point only, after exhorting the general group of his disciples to pray for workers in the eschatological harvest, Jesus summoned his *twelve* disciples and gave them authority to extend his own ministry to Israel’s lost sheep (10:1–6). At this early point in the narrative in 4:18–22, the fishermen are *believers* who *will become apostles*. (CC)

It is as believers, however, that they, along with other disciples who are not named, will approach Jesus and be the primary audience as he teaches the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–2). It, the first of Jesus’ great teaching discourses, expounds with authority the divine revelation of God’s blessing in Jesus to his disciples and enunciates important truths about their calling in this world. Matthew will offer a brief yet important summary of Jesus’ ministry (4:23–24) before bringing his readers to the mount where Jesus speaks. (CC)

#### *Jesus Heals the Sick*

**23** And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. **24** So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. **25** And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

**4:23–24** Mt 4:23–24, the substance of which is repeated in 9:35, summarizes Jesus’ early Galilean ministry. I have not included 4:25 as part of this summary for three reasons. First, unlike 4:23–24, Matthew does not in 4:25 actually describe what Jesus is doing, but rather what the many crowds did. Second, 4:25 belongs very closely with 5:1. The crowds that Jesus sees before he goes up on the mountain (5:1) are the very crowds that are first mentioned in 4:25. Third, 4:25–5:2 forms the precise opening narrative bracket for the Sermon on the Mount, the mate of which Matthew offers in 7:28–8:1, ending with the clause, “Many crowds followed him.” The commentary below on 4:25–5:2 displays the *inclusio* for the Sermon on the Mount more fully. (CC)

**4:23** *went throughout* – *periagen* – This suggests a continuous action.

*teaching ... preaching ... healing.* † Jesus’ threefold ministry. The synagogues provided a place for him to teach on the Sabbath. During the week he preached to larger crowds in the open air. For an example of Jesus’ teaching and preaching see Lk 4:14–30. (CSB)

καὶ περιῆγεν ... διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας καὶ θεραπεύων—The imperfect *περιῆγεν* is inceptive: “He *began* to go around.” After a main verb of coming or going (*περιῆγεν*), the present tense participles (*διδάσκων ... κηρύσσων ... θεραπεύων*) probably express purpose. Hence both here and in 9:35, they are translated, “*in order to* teach ... preach ... heal.” There is a strong analogy in 11:1, where, in another general summary description of Jesus’ Galilean ministry, a genitive articular infinitive construction (*τοῦ διδάσκειν καὶ κηρύσσειν*) after a verb of going (*μετέβη*) certainly does express purpose. Since 11:1 is the third summary passage in the subsection of the

Gospel (4:17–16:20) wherein 4:23–24 is the first such summary, this strong parallel encourages the view that these participles function adverbially to express the purpose of the main verb. (CC)

Matthew does not draw sharp distinctions between “teaching” (διδάσκω) and “preaching” (κηρύσσω). He uses “teach” (διδάσκω) fourteen times and “preach” (κηρύσσω) nine times. Three times the two verbs are paired (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). Perhaps “preaching” is more narrowly focused on those in need of conversion; see especially 3:1; 4:17; 10:7; 24:14; and 26:13, which are explicitly missionary contexts. Jesus’ activity of “teaching” is directed at different groups, some of which consist of believers (disciples, 5:2), and others of those who need conversion: the crowds (those variously disposed toward Jesus but not yet believing in him; see especially 7:29; 26:55) and the religious leaders (those who clearly and consistently oppose Jesus [21:23, 45]). In Matthew, those who “preach” are John the Baptist (3:1), Jesus (4:17, 23; 9:35; 11:1), and his disciples (e.g., 10:7, 27; cf. 24:14; 26:13). Others besides Jesus may also “teach,” both for good (5:19 [second occurrence]; 28:20) and bad effect (15:9; 28:15). Matthew, then, employs “teaching” as a broad term, the specific contents and effects of which are determined by context. (CC)

This is the first of sixteen occurrences of θεραπεύω, “to heal,” in Matthew. On the theological significance of Jesus’ healing ministry, see below, as well as on 8:17. (CC)

The synagogue is an institution of Second Temple Judaism, though its origins are obscure. The majority of scholars seem to hold that the synagogue developed, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, after the exile and especially after the time of Ezra. Although synagogues probably performed a number of functions for a local Jewish community, they were primarily an opportunity for the reading and study of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Archaeological evidence indicates that during the time of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee there were few buildings dedicated solely to use as “synagogues.” “Synagogues” could very well often have been meetings in private homes. (CC)

Matthew describes Jesus’ ministry in Galilee as one of word and deed. Jesus’ word consists of “the Good News of the reign” of God (4:23). After the verbal noun “Good News” (εὐαγγέλιον), the genitive “of the reign” (τῆς βασιλείας) is objective: Jesus “good news-es” the reign of heaven. God has begun to break into history in a new way, a way that links the present to the final Day of history. God has begun to break into history *in Jesus*; this is what Jesus announces. It is Good News—Gospel—because of what God is doing in Jesus, namely, saving his people from their sins. (CC)

It is a ministry of word and *deed*, because Jesus has come not only to *forgive* sin, but to *save* his people from their sins (1:21). By expressing it in this fashion, I intend in no way to downplay the importance of God’s verbal declaration of forgiveness. That pronouncement through and in Christ Jesus was and is the heart of the Good News; without it, there is no Good News. However, sin has poisoned God’s creation and God’s people in many ways, as is evident by the catalogue of maladies that Jesus is healing in Palestine in the first century (4:23–24). Jesus comes to “save his people from their sins” (1:21), and Jesus’ ministry is one of preaching and teaching and forgiving sins and of *healing* “every disease and every ailment in the people” (4:23)! When God’s reign breaks into history, it comes to drive back Satan and undo all of the consequences of his slanders and temptations. Satan’s seduction of Adam and Eve into sin brought physical maladies and death upon the human race (Genesis 3). Both Matthew’s citation of Is 53:4 in Mt 8:17 (see the commentary there) and Jesus’ answer to the Baptizer in 11:2–5 show that the one who brings the reign of heaven will also bring healing with him. (CC)

At all times, modern readers must hold fast to the eschatological character of Jesus’ proclamation and manifestation of the reign of God. The very reason why there needs to be a Last Day is because of the ongoing conflict between God and his enemies, chiefly Satan himself. The judging and saving power of that Last-Day reign has already begun in Jesus himself. Just as Jesus, the Son of God, immediately engaged in “hand-to-hand combat” with Satan in the wilderness after his Baptism (4:1–11), so in his

Galilean ministry, as Matthew summarizes it in 4:23–24, Jesus heals those who were brought to him. In 4:24 a single article governs the various words describing the differently afflicted people whom others were bringing to Jesus (see the second textual note on 4:24). Some people suffer from disease or are afflicted with pain. Others are demon possessed, moonstruck, or paralyzed. It is not as though there are no distinctions between these various kinds of maladies; there clearly are, and the ancient world knew about purely medicinal cures. Matthew, however, brings these different troubles together under one theological category. These are afflictions in the people that the reign of heaven in Jesus has come to remove. The salvation that Jesus brings encompasses all of human need that finds its origin in sin and Satan. (CC)

The Last Day stands near! That nearness, however, is also preliminary and limited in scope. Jesus healed only those whom they brought to him, not everyone in the land. Moreover, it is reasonable in every way to suppose that all of the people whom Jesus healed in his ministry later died, many from illness or disease or some other “natural” cause. Jesus’ miracles were signs, a foretaste, the anticipation of the great and final deliverance that God will effect in him when he comes again in glory. At Christ’s return, all the dead shall be raised, and those in Christ shall enter everlasting life in the new creation and never again be susceptible to any bodily affliction (1 Cor 15:20–57; Rev 20:11–15; 22:1–2). Jesus’ healing miracles point to that final restoration. They are not merely “parables” that stand for the forgiveness of sins. They are miracles in which the Son of God drove back the power of Satan, sin, and sickness for the needy in the land. (CC)

The church today must avoid extremes in order to interpret faithfully Jesus’ healing miracles and exorcisms. One extreme element in modern Christianity sees demonic forces as directly responsible for every physical and mental health ailment. But Jesus cast demons only out of some of the sick people whom he healed (4:23–24). Another extreme is represented by faith healers who promise God’s physical healing now for all who will simply believe hard enough. They have neither read the Scriptures carefully nor understood their eschatological, “already *but not yet*” message. Yet another extreme is the naturalistic, “scientific” view that every ailment has a purely medical explanation and hence a potential medical cure, with no room for either demonic activity or supernatural healing. We must not live, preach, and pray as if the kinds of maladies and miracles in our text only happened back then—as if the demonic powers can have no real effect on our lives today, and as if the reign of God could not break in today with miracle and sign and power and healing. All claimed experiences, whether of demonic influence or of miraculous healing, must be subject to scriptural scrutiny, and nothing can violate the great truths of biblical theology. Yet when we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” who knows how the risen and reigning Christ may answer, even as the promised final healing and fulfillment of the Day of the reign of God continue to tarry? (CC)

*Teaching* – didaskon – This reminds us immediately of the Sermon on the Mount.

*Preaching* – karusson – heralding, announcing the Gospel.

*Every disease* – nosmos which denotes a disease of the whole body.

*Affliction* – malakia which points to an infirmity of any particular part of the body attended with pain.

**4:24** *Syria*. The area north of Galilee and between Damascus and the Mediterranean Sea. (CSB)

This refers loosely to the region north of Galilee, where both Jews and Gentiles lived. (CC)

ἀπῆλθεν ἡ ἀκοὴ αὐτοῦ εἰς ὅλην τὴν Συρίαν—After the verbal noun ἀκοή, “report,” the genitive αὐτοῦ, “of him,” is objective. The implied kernel sentence is “They heard (about) him.” “Syria” likely refers loosely to the region north of Galilee. (CC)

*those having seizures.* The Greek word for this expression originally meant “moonstruck” and reflects the ancient superstition that seizures were caused by changes of the moon. (CSB)

*the paralyzed.* A transliteration of the Greek that has come directly into English. Greek physicians were among the best in ancient times, and many of our medical terms come from their language. (CSB)

τοὺς κακῶς ἔχοντας ποικίλαις νόσοις καὶ βασάνοις συνεχομένους [καὶ] δαιμονιζομένους καὶ σεληνιαζομένους καὶ παραλυτικούς—The single masculine plural accusative article τοὺς governs all five of the following adjectival forms: four participles (ἔχοντας ... συνεχομένους ... δαιμονιζομένους ... σεληνιαζομένους) and an adjective (παραλυτικούς). The grammatical effect is to link together the different kinds of suffering into one common group: people healed by Jesus. Thus Jesus healed them all. (CC)

The translation of the first participle and adverb, κακῶς ἔχοντας, is, literally, “having badly.” In the NT ἔχω often is used for “having” an illness or demon (see BDAG, s.v. ἔχω, 7 a α). The second participle is of συνέχω, which in the passive can mean “be distressed, tormented” (see BDAG, s.v. συνέχω, 5) and which takes the dative, ποικίλαις νόσοις καὶ βασάνοις, “with various illnesses and severe pains.” (CC)

The verb σεληνιάζομαι is derived from σελήνη, “moon,” and so the participle literally means “be moonstruck” or (based on Latin *luna*, “moon”) “lunatick” (KJV), though most modern translations relate it to epilepsy or seizures. The only other NT occurrence of σεληνιάζομαι is in 17:15, where a father uses it to describe his lad, whose infirmity Jesus removes by casting a “demon” out of him, so that he is “healed” (17:17–18). This suggests a close connection between being “moonstruck” and being demon possessed. (CC)

**4:25** *great crowds* – An emphasis in Matthew; “crowd” occurs 50 times. (TLSB)

*the Decapolis.* A league of free cities characterized by high Greek culture. All but one, Scythopolis (Beth Shan), were east of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. The league stretched from a point northeast of the Sea of Galilee southward to Philadelphia (modern Amman). (CSB)

ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ Δεκαπόλεως καὶ Ἱεροσολύμων καὶ Ἰουδαίας καὶ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου—Cousland carefully examines the geographical references in 4:25. He concludes that, although Matthew would hold that the “crowds” that followed Jesus could include Gentiles (especially from Syria and the Decapolis), the makeup of the crowds would have been largely Jewish. That would be consistent with Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus as Israel’s Messiah, whose earthly ministry is especially focused on the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That is also supported by the reference to Jesus’ healing ministry among “the people” in 4:23, since Matthew seems always to use ὁ λαός to refer in one way or another to Israel or a portion of it. (CC)

Refers to 10 cities east of the Jordan with large Gentile populations. (TLSB)

*Followed him* – καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ὄχλοι πολλοί—Though the crowds followed Jesus physically, this does not imply discipleship, faith, or understanding. the disciples, whom Jesus called to follow him, and the crowds who followed Jesus. (CC)



Matthew is about to present the first of the five major discourses of Jesus in his Gospel, which has been known for centuries as “the Sermon on the Mount.” With an impressive and deliberate formality, Matthew prepares his readers/hearers to receive Jesus’ words to his disciples. After ascending a mountain, Jesus “sat down” (5:1). “His disciples” (5:1), distinct from the “crowds” (4:25), approached him. Jesus “opened his mouth” (5:2). He “*began* to teach them” (5:2). Jesus will *continue* to teach all the way until the fifth and final discourse, when he finishes “*all* these words” (26:1). Jesus’ five major speeches, all marked by an identical concluding formula whereby they are integrated into the three-part narrative structure (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), are not the major organizing “backbone” of the Gospel’s narrative. Nevertheless, Jesus’ discourses provide crucial truth and revelation, chiefly for the disciples. (CC)

As part of the introduction to the Sermon, Matthew mentions for the first time the figure of the “crowds” who followed Jesus (4:25). As is clear in these verses and throughout the Gospel, the “crowds” never attain to the status of those who believe in Jesus, even if imperfectly. Although 7:28–29 will declare that in some sense Jesus also teaches the Sermon to the crowds, the specific comment in 5:1–2 that “*his disciples* approached him, and he opened his mouth and began to teach *them* and say ...” distinguishes Jesus’ “disciples” from the “crowds.” These crowds hear Jesus’ words. Moreover, they understand his claim to authority and are astonished by it, though they do not show that they accept his claim (see the textual note on ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων in 7:29). However, through Jesus’ authoritative teaching, it is possible for individuals to emerge from the crowds and to *become* disciples. (CC)

**4:12-25** Isaiah described the sinful state of this world: people walking in darkness and the shadow of death, unable to find their way and lacking the ability to help themselves. Into this back hole comes Jesus, the light of the world his great light shines first in Galilee, where he calls disciples, teaches, preaches, and heals. His great light continues to shine in our darkness. The good news of God’s reign continues to be sounded in Word and Sacrament. To sinful, hurting people, Jesus gives life, hope, and deliverance. \* Mya your light shine in us as we share your Gospel with the world, O Christ, our light. Shine on us and through us. Amen (TLSB)