

## ***GALILEE OF THE GENTILES***

Matthew orchestrates his letter to highlight the truth that Jesus is the prophesied coming Jewish Messiah. Everything up to 4:12 is preliminary to Christ's public ministry. But it all serves to develop a Messianic KING theme. We see this in the genealogy of Christ; the unique virgin-birth of Christ; the recognition of the birth of the King of the Jews by Gentiles; Christ's providential placement as a child in Nazareth; the fulfilled prophecy of a Messianic forerunner in the person of John the Baptist; Christ's baptism as the fulfillment of all righteousness; and Christ's victory over Satan's intense temptation. All of this was preliminary to Christ's public ministry. But now Matthew 4:12 thematically transitions to Christ's public ministry.

Between the end of Christ's temptation by Satan in Matt. 4:11 and the statement in 4:12 is a GAP of about 1 year, namely the first year of Christ's ministry which is sometimes called His "***Judean ministry***". The synoptic gospels largely omit this time period, but it is dealt with by John the apostle in John 1:19-3:36. Therefore, we see that Matthew wrote more thematically at times than chronologically. Again, he is writing to connect certain dots to showcase that Jesus is the promised Jewish Messiah.

### ***Christ's THREE-Year Ministry***

A year of obscurity

***A year of popularity*** (Mt. 4:12-25)

A year of rejection

Matthew, in effect, omits the year of obscurity and begins with the year of popularity. He skips year one of the Judean ministry and begins with the Galilean ministry.

### **Matthew 4:12 (NKJV)**

**12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.**

Jesus did have a public ministry before this, but not an explosively popular one like would happen now. John the Baptist's ministry overlapped a little bit with that of Jesus' ministry. But John being put in prison signaled that his preparatory ministry for the Christ was essentially completed. Now the spotlight was to be on Christ ALONE. The transition was complete.

John the Baptist was put in prison, and Jesus departed to Galilee, which would be the mainstay location of His public ministry.

**Matthew 4:13 (NKJV)**

**13 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali,**

The first stop in the territory of Galilee was Christ's hometown of Nazareth. We read in Luke 4:16-31 that after speaking in their synagogue, these hometown folk tried to kill Jesus, so He left. And we find here that He then went and dwelt in Capernaum, which was about 20 miles north of Nazareth.

Nazareth was a little obscure village (about 400 people), but in contrast, Capernaum was a flourishing town (about 1500 people) on a major trade route. Capernaum means "**village of Nahum**". Perhaps it was named after the prophet Nahum. **Matthew** was from this city (cf. Matt. 9:9), and it became Jesus' headquarters for His Galilean ministry. Matt. 9:1 calls it "**His own city**". It was also the home of **Peter** (see Matt. 8:5-14; Mk. 2:1; 9:33). It is also thought that Andrew (Peter's brother) probably lived there too, as well as James and John.

Note it is specifically says, "**by the sea**" and in "**the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali**". These details are significant because they align perfectly with prophecy.

**Matthew 4:14 (NKJV)**

**14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:**

Jesus relocation to Capernaum in Galilee was in accordance with Isaiah's prophecy. It lines up perfectly with the prophecy in Isaiah 9:1-2. Isaiah 9:1-7 is very clearly a Messianic text involving the promised Child Who would be born to sit upon David's throne and rule forever (see Isa. 9:6-7). Thus, Matthew continues to tether the life and ministry of Christ to the Old Testament Messianic prophecies showing that He is the fulfillment of them.

Matt. 4:15-16 constitute a paraphrased quote of Isaiah 9:1-2. And the level of detailed prophetic precision that is fulfilled is amazing!

**Matthew 4:15 (NKJV)**

**15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:**

**Zebulun and Naphtali** were two of the 12 tribes in the OT that roughly corresponded to the region of Galilee in the time of Christ (cf. Josh. 19:10-39).

Note Zebulun corresponds to where Nazareth was located and Capernaum to Naphtali. The Messiah lived in both places and His Galilean ministry identified with both places.

But note, there are additional descriptive phrases that are of great prophetic significance because they were fulfilled to the letter. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would dwell and identify with ministry 1) “By the way of the sea”, 2) “beyond the Jordan”, and 3) in “Galilee of the Gentiles”. Note that these things all had to synchronize perfectly in order to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy.

Messiah’s Ministry would be identified with...

- 1) Regions of Zebulun and Naphtali (Galilee)
- 2) By way of the sea (Ancient trade route)
- 3) Beyond the Jordan (Probably Area East of Jordan, referring to Perea.)
- 4) Galilee of the Gentiles (Area in northern Israel associated with Gentiles)

**“The Way of the Sea”** trade route ran from Damascus down through Capernaum, then down to Caesarea Maritima on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and then on down to Egypt.

It is fascinating to realize that the Messiah’s ministry would be intricately identified with **“Galilee of the Gentiles”**. Galilee, going way back, was known for its mixed population. This area up north was the first to apostatize in the Old Testament days. In 721 BC the Assyrians took the Northern Kingdom Captive and then transplanted Gentile peoples to live there, resulting in integration with the few Jews left behind (cf. 1 Kg. 15:20; 2 Kg. 15:29; 17:6, 24-27; 1 Chron. 5:26). Galilee was bordered by the Gentile territory of Syria, etc. As such, it was a main route through which Gentiles passed in and out of Israel. Thus, it became a major crossroads for trade and consisted of a mixture of Gentile and Jewish activity.

Someone has said that *“Judea was on the way to nowhere, whereas Galilee was on the way to everywhere.”*

Even way back in Isaiah’s day, some 700 years before the time of Christ, it was already called, **“Galilee of the Gentiles”**. Consequently, the more

racially pure Judea, where Jerusalem was located, looked down with scorn on the Galileans and ridiculed those up north with a Galilean accent. They were considered compromised at best.

In John 7, when some were surmising that Jesus might be the Christ, others recoiled, saying, “***Will the Christ come out of Galilee?***” (Jn. 7:41, see also Jn. 7:51-52). The answer is YES, and the text was right there in Isaiah 9.

“The fact alone that Jesus so completely fulfilled Old Testament prophecy should be enough to convince an honest mind of the Bible’s truthfulness and authority.” – ***John MacArthur***

This emphasis on the Messiah’s ministry being identified with “***Galilee of the Gentiles***” is yet another echo that His ministry had a broader scope than merely that of Israel. It also involved the Gentiles. This was in effect a foreshadowing of Christ’s commission to reach out to all nations as seen in the Great Commission at the end of Matthew.

Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, but He is for all people!