KINGDOM'S ARRIVAL

Now when he heard that John was taken into custody, he departed into Galilee. And he left Nazareth, an he came and dwelt in Capernaum beside the sea, in the region of what had been Zebulun and Naphtali, in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those sitting in the realm and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
Matthew 4:12-17

This passage serves as a transition and as an introduction to the Galilean ministry of Jesus. For Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the ministry of Jesus in Galilee is the central point and location of his mission.

Matthew is consistent in giving the readers the geographic locations throughout his narrative.

The transition Matthew gives us is as follows:

1) We move from John's ministry to the ministry of the One John proclaimed. In that sense, we move from the prophesied word of the Old Testament to the incarnate word of the New Testament.

2) The arrest of John ends the preparation period Matthew has led us through.

3) By using another quote from the Old Testament, Matthew is revealing to his readers that the Old Testament foreshadows, types, and prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus.

In fact, the Isaiah quote acts as a statement of purpose, a direction for the entire Galilean ministry.

Here we can also see that Matthew intentionally uses phrases in order to prepare us for the uses of those phrases as his narrative continues.

<u>From that time Jesus began</u> to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
Matthew 4:17

<u>From that time Jesus began</u> to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.
Matthew 16:21

Matthew has been keen to direct the attention of the readers to the inauguration of the Kingdom through Jesus the Messiah and to the inauguration of Matthew's church. He does so again here.

Now when he heard that John was taken into custody, he departed into Galilee.
Now when he heard that John was taken into custody, he turned aside into Galilee.
Matthew 4:12

Matthew tells us that Jesus heard that John was taken into custody. It is only when John is arrested that Jesus *departs* or *turns aside* to the region of Galilee.

Matthew here gives no explanation as to why John was arrested leading us to speculate that perhaps to the early group of believers, this information was so familiar that no explanation was needed.

The question could be asked if John's arrest prompted Jesus to go to Galilee, and if so, why. Matthew gives no answer here which leaves us to speculate.

By omitting any explanation, Matthew avoids the tension of the Judean ministry that the Gospel of John invites us into.

After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison). Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness – look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.
John 3:22-28

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee.
John 4:1-3

By using John's Gospel, we can fill in the backdrop as to why Jesus turns aside to Galilee. By doing so, he avoids any contention between he and John the Baptist which the Jewish leaders would like to exploit to cause division.

Matthew may also be using the wording of

Now when he heard that John was taken into custody, he departed into Galilee,

to draw a parallel between the suffering of the Baptist and the suffering that Jesus was soon to face, since Matthew's wording after the news of John's death reaches Jesus is nearly verbatim.

Now when Jesus heard this, he departed from there into a boat to a desolate place,

What is clear is that Jesus did not go to Nazareth just to return home. This is revealed in the following verse.

And he left Nazareth, and he came and dwelt in Capernaum beside the sea, in the region of <u>what had been</u> Zebulun and Naphtali,
Matthew 4:13

Again, we are not told why Jesus departs from Nazareth. Luke's Gospel has him being rejected prior to his leaving for Capernaum.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which was their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff, but passing through their midst, he went away.
Luke 4:16, 29

Despite the event at Nazareth, the soil in Galilee was more conducive to productive ministry than was the hard ground in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was under the controlling influence of the Pharisees as it was their seat of power. Galilee, therefore, not only being prophesied as the place where the Messiah's light would shine, had a more tolerant atmosphere for his Kingdom work.

he came and dwelt in Capernaum beside the sea

Note that Matthew deliberately describes Capernaum as *beside the sea.* He does this in anticipation and support of the Isaiah quote he is going to use in this passage.

"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea,"

The final event of Jesus' preparation for ministry that Matthew finds significant enough to narrate is his move from Nazareth to Capernaum as his Galilean residence. Matthew sees in this move an explicit fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, who is again mentioned by name. Mark and Luke acknowledge this move (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:31), but only Matthew describes the change of residence and refers to it as fulfilling Scripture. Zebulun and Naphtali were the Old Testament territories closest to first-century Galilee. Jesus obviously is the light dawning on the peoples of those regions, presumably including Gentiles as well as Jews.
Craig Blomberg – Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament, page 18

in order that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people sitting in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those sitting in the realm of the shadow of death, on them, a light has dawned.
Matthew 4:14-16

Matthew again uses an Old Testament quote with intention. He desires his readers to understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy from Isaiah. Isaiah may have been referring to something different, but Matthew's intention is that his readers see the connection that Jesus is the future hope spoken of in the passage and that their present day is the "latter time" that has come in Jesus.

The question of Jesus' messiahship will become the subject of much debate during his ministry. Matthew is using this quote from Isaiah to confirm that Jesus's ministry in Galilee, far from being proof *against* his Messiahship, is actually the proof *for* it.

Living in the region of Galilee, taking up residence right on the Sea of Galilee, and choosing his first disciples from that seashore, Jesus is truly fulfilling what the prophet spoke.

What is the significance of Zebulun and Naphtali and their being described as *"the way of the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles?"*

And who are the people *"sitting in darkness, sitting in the realm of the shadow of death?"*

To understand what Matthew is saying in regards to Jesus fulfilling Isaiah's word, we need to go to the Old Testament and see what events took place regarding this northern region of Israel.

Solomon had good relations with Hiram, king of Tyre. Hiram was the Gentile who helped build the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem. To honor Hiram, Solomon sold him twenty cities, in the norther part of Israel (1st Century Galilee).

> *At the end of twenty years, during which Solomon built these two buildings—the temple of the Lord and the royal palace— King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had supplied him with all the cedar and juniper and gold he wanted. But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the towns that Solomon had given him, he was not pleased with them. "What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?" he asked. And he called them the Land of Kabul, (worthless) a name they have to this day.*
> *1 Kings 9:10-13*

Galilee is mentioned again in the Book of the Kings.

> *In the time of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maakah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria.*
> *2 Kings 15:29*

Given the history of these two passages, is it any wonder that the region of Galilee was considered a place of darkness. Towns had been sold to King Hiram and pronounced *worthless*. This region, being the northernmost boundary of Israel's kingdom, also were the first be deported to Assyria in 722 BC. At this same time the Assyrians resettled Gentiles into the land.

In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel. And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities.
2 Kings 17:6, 24

Isaiah captures the exile of the Galilee region well and writes of it in chapters 8-9. Note that though the exile and captivity is conducted by Assyrians, it is brought upon the land of Galilee and its people in judgment by God, so too, are they to experience the release from captivity.

Thus, the Galileans are compensated at the end of the exile in the 6th Century BC as recorded by the words of Isaiah 8-9, but Matthew sees the true fulfillment of Isaiah's Word comes when the True Light takes up residence in Galilee in the Person of Jesus Christ.

3 And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then
the Lord said to me, "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz; 4 for before the boy
knows how to cry 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the
spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria."
5 The Lord spoke to me again: 6 "Because this people has refused the waters
of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of
Remaliah, 7 therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters
of the River,[c] mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will
rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, 8 and it will sweep on into
Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread
wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel."
Isaiah 8:3-8

But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time
he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the
latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.
Isaiah 9:1-2

Galilee of the nations (Gentiles) was the moniker given to Galilee since so many Gentiles were resettled there by the Assyrians.

Jesus is coming to minister where ethnic Israel touches Gentile paganism,
where the nation of Israel intersects the Gentile nations,
where light meets darkness.

Matthew shows that Jesus' move to *"Galilee of the Gentiles"* demonstrates God's amazing initiative toward those who had never been considered before. Like the four Gentile women in the genealogy of Jesus and the Gentile Magi at the birth narrative, the Gentiles stand in Matthew's Gospel as a part of the focus in the ministry of Jesus.

What Matthew wants his readers to see is that the Light has dawned in the northern region of Galilee, in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, far away from the land of Judah and Jerusalem:

also the inclusion of the Gentiles at key points in the birth narrative,
the reception by the Magi and the rejection of Jesus by the chief priests and scribes as well as Herod,
the rejection of the Christ child in Jerusalem contrasted against his acceptance in Egypt,
the language of the Baptist against the representatives from Jerusalem,
and now the fulfillment of Isaiah's dawning light upon those in the *"Galilee of Gentiles"*,

could reveal to us that judgement has indeed come to Judah.

Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.
Isaiah 9:7

Given Matthew's use of Isaiah, the throne of David is going to be reestablished, but the glory of that throne will first be apparent in *"Galilee of the Gentiles."*

This is why Jesus has moved to the region of Capernaum in Galilee by the sea.

The way of the sea was the Roman road called the *via maris* which connected Damascus with Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, a branch of which went along the west bank of the Sea of Galilee through Bethsaida and Capernaum which were key towns in the ministry of Jesus.

Beyond the Jordan – refers to the Gentile regions that lie to the east of the Jordan and outside of Jewish jurisdiction. Capernaum does not reside in this region but Jesus' ministry from Galilee does extend into the east region of the Decapolis *beyond the Jordan*.

In this sense, the *Light that has dawned in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali* is indeed going to move outside the boundaries of Israel. This connects us back to Matthew's genealogical focus of the mission of Jesus targeting the Gentiles even before his mission ever begins.

The key aspect to note in Matthew's narrative is that he does not refer to a mission of Jesus to the Gentiles, but Matthew's readers may have seen in the words below, a foreshadowing of what would take place after the resurrection.

"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.
Matthew 24:14

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.
Isaiah 9:1-2

the people sitting in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those sitting in the realm of the shadow of death, on them, a light has dawned.
Matthew 4:16

Note Matthe's intentional alteration in the underscored above. Matthew uses *"sitting"* 2 times in place of Isaiah's *"walking"* and *"dwelling."*

Possibly this is done to reveal the plight of the people in the land of Galilee. Despite its large Gentile population, Matthew's word of people,

ὁ λαὸς ὁ καθήμενος,
the people sitting

Most likely refers to Jewish people (**λαὸς** *"people"* is used elsewhere in Matthew only for Israel).

For the Jews in Galilee, frustration and despair from living in darkness – living among a large and pagan Gentile population – are the first to be privileged to see the fulfillment of God's promise from Isaiah.

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
Matthew 4:12-17

When Matthew writes, *"From that time Jesus began"* he signals a turning point in the narrative. He will use it again later in his Gospel at another major turning point.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things . . .
Matthew 16:21

Jesus and John have continuity in their respective ministries as both are heralds of the good news of the Kingdom.

This theme of the proclamation of the gospel is heard throughout Matthew's narrative and is a responsibility that is given to the disciples as well.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
Matthew 10:7

What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetop.
Matthew 10:27

This passage serves as a transition, bringing Jesus to Galilee where his ministry is to have its formal beginning. Jesus has been prepared by the baptism and the temptation in the wilderness, the stage is fully set, and now comes the word that John has been arrested: the work of the forerunner is complete. Jesus comes to Nazareth and to Capernaum beside the sea, and in these regions, so significant in their correspondence to the prophecy of Isaiah, Jesus begins to proclaim the presence of the kingdom by word and deed: a great light appears to those who sit in darkness.
Hagner – Matthew, page 74

The loveliest lake of Palestine remains the place where God's redeeming power appeared to men for the first time on earth in a new guise, like a light, and thus was the prophetic word (Isaiah 8:22-91) concerning the great light in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali abundantly fulfilled.
G. Dalman – Sacred Sites and Ways, page 183

Here we see the essence of the Gospel. It is the proclamation that the dawning of God's rule has commenced with the coming of Kingdom of God and its Incarnate King.