PREVIEW

Following the birth narrative of Jesus in the genealogical record of the Messiah, following the proclamation of the Messiah's arrival by the Elijah figure of John the Baptist, following the inauguration of the Messiah's ministry by the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the waters of the Jordan River, and finally, following the Adam/Genesis – Israel/Exodus typology of the Messiah being tempted to relinquish his mission in loyalty to God in the Judean wilderness, Matthew finishes his introduction to the Messiah by encapsulating the ministry of Jesus in the last few verses of chapter 4. In effect, these verses are a preview of the ministry of the Messiah.

> *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. So a report about him spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.*
> *Matthew 4:23-25*

Matthew is orderly in his construction and presentation of his Gospel record, and he has purposely been directing out theological eyes to the mission of the King as he ushers in his Kingdom.

Thus, his genealogical record of Christ included Gentiles. His record of the visitation of the Gentile Magi reveals they are the first to designate Jesus as *"King of the Jews."* In his narrative of the temptation in the wilderness, he records Jesus being tempted to have dominion over *all* the kingdoms of the world. And in this encapsulated preview of Jesus' ministry, he sets within his record, that Gentiles are included in the list of the large crowds coming to Jesus for healing.

Matthew has thus carefully set the stage for what is to come in his narrative.

The Messiah has been fully prepared through his baptism and the subsequent temptations.

He has moved to the north where Isaiah had placed him 700 years earlier and where Isaiah pronounced that the Kingdom fulfilment would begin.

The Kingdom itself has been announced by both John and the Messiah.

The work of the Messiah's ministry has also been announced.

The disciples have been called.

Today we encounter the program in summary form as to what the ministry of Jesus is going to look like before embarking upon Matthew's detailed account of Jesus' teaching and healing ministry.

Matthew clearly wants his readers to envision the focus of the ministry of Jesus as verse 23 is repeated nearly verbatim later in Matthew's narrative.

And he went throughout <u>all Galilee</u>, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.
Matthew 4:23

And Jesus went throughout <u>all the cities and villages</u>, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.
Matthew 9:35

Note that here Matthew stresses the *teaching* of Jesus, placing it even before the proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom.

The *teaching* referred to here is most likely the exposition of Torah of which Matthew will provide an example in chapters 5-7 in the Sermon of the Mount.

The phrase *teaching in their synagogues* may reveal to us that the community Matthew is writing to may have already distanced themselves from such places of learning given possible rising hostility between Jews and the fledgling sect of Nazarenes.

Teaching of Torah is of course, inseparable from the Kingdom so it is no surprise that Matthew pairs them here as *teaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.* In other words, no distinction or difference should be seen between them here.

The Kingdom is the foundation upon which teaching is founded. The same can be said of healing. Both find their *significance* within the Kingdom itself.

Jesus is inaugurating the Kingdom therefore, *teaching of that Kingdom* and *healing within that Kingdom* should be understood as actions that would proceed organically from the Kingdom.

The words of Jesus in teaching and the actions of Jesus in healing are bound together.

This also is another aspect of the Messiah's fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies that Matthew will quote later.

That evening they brough to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."
Matthew 8:17

Surely he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, stricken by God and afflicted.
Isaiah 53:4

So a report about him spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.
Matthew 4:24

Given that those who came to him following the report were people he healed, it would suggest quite logically that the report about him concerned his healings.

The mention of Syria which was a Roman province could inform us that the Gentiles of that region were possibly coming to him or that its mention, which sems unexpected in the narrative, suggests it to be Matthew's own community.

The list of sicknesses healed by Jesus is comprehensive. It begins with the general:
those who were ill; those tormented with various diseases; those with pains;
then progresses to specific and more spectacular healings:
those who were demon oppressed; those subject to seizures; those paralyzed.

The verb *"to heal"* occurs sixteen times in Matthew which is more than any other New Testament book.

As a note of interest, *epilepsy* in Matthew can be closely associated with demon oppression where the person suffering from this disease is cured of it by the exorcising of a demon.

And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, <u>for he is an epileptic</u> and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him." And Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me." And <u>Jesus rebuked the demon</u>, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly.
Matthew 17:14-18

In this long central verse we again see Jesus the therapist (the word healed in Greek is 'therapeuo') on the whole range of the human problem: he heals those with organic, psychic, and nervous diseases. He heals anyone in torment. Jesus is not only the Savior of the international macrocosm – the Light of the nations – but he is also Savior of the human microcosm down to the most minute cells: he is the Life of the Body. We do not learn here how Jesus heals or even why; we hear only that he heals "all."
Brunner – Matthew, page 147

And large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.
Matthew 4:25

The large crowds refer to the number of people who followed him. This in no way means that all these people were true disciples, but surely some of them became so. It is clear that among the crowds there were true disciples in addition to the Twelve.

The words *"crowds"* and *"follow"* are often used by Matthew in a similar context.

> *When he came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him.*
> *Matthew 8:1*

> *Now when Jesus learned of this, he went away from there. Great crowds followed him, and he healed them all.*
> *Matthew 12:15*

> *Now when Jesus heard of this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.*
> *Matthew 14:13*

> *And large crowds followed him, and he healed them all.*
> *Matthew 19:2*

Again, we see Matthew pointing to the importance of geographic locations and the list given here is comprehensive.

Galilee – where the ministry was centered, is mentioned first.

Decapolis – referring to the area south and east of the Sea of Galilee.

Jerusalem and Judea – the region to the south where apparently, he was already known. *Beyond the Jordan* – echoes the original citation of Isaiah – *"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles."*

If we add Syria to this list which is mentioned a few verses earlier as a region to the north, we have a rather full and symbolic representation of the world where the ministry of Jesus inaugurates the Kingdom of God.

Interestingly, each of the three verses we studied today contain a list. The second and third list point to the rapid growth of the ministry of Jesus.

> *Jesus' teaching and preaching were in the context of a healing ministry that, as will be emphasized later in the Gospel, pointed to the validity of his message. Jesus thus heals the multitudes of every kind of disease, including those stemming from the spiritual world of the demons. Consequently, he gathers a large following, at least initially, from the surrounding, and even somewhat distant, areas. The evangelist wants us quickly to sense the great expectation surrounding Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, where he began to preach "the good news*

of the kingdom," before presenting him in more detail as the master teacher and charismatic healer. *Hagn er – Matthew, page 81*