

Matthew 4:12-17

Verse 12 – See “Outline of Matthew” (pages 6-8)

“So that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled”

This sounds familiar doesn't it? This is now the sixth time that Matthew has quoted or alluded to the Old Testament in order to show how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament (cf. 1:18-2:23). And this is in *addition* to all of the other places where we see in sometimes more subtle ways that Jesus is the goal, end, fulfillment, and telos of all things. (For example, the genealogy of Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham [1:1-17], the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord in fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah [3:1-3, 11-12], the baptism of Jesus in order to fulfill all that God required [3:13-17], and the testing of Jesus in order to demonstrate that He was the “true” Israel [4:1-11].)

We have seen that Jesus “fulfills” the Old Testament in a whole variety of different ways (not just where the Old Testament makes specific, detailed “predictions”). So the only proper way to read and interpret the Old Testament is always in the light of Christ. We can never fully understand the OT until we read “backwards” into it the finished work of Jesus Christ in the gospel. This doesn't mean that we can be fanciful (like much of Jewish Midrash) and invent all sorts of creative pointers to Jesus in the OT. That's called allegorical interpretation. We still have to do good exegesis, which means we must carefully and responsibly study the text. However, we cannot just be content with reading and interpreting the Bible like we would read and interpret a novel or a newspaper article. If we were always to read and interpret the Bible like this, then we'd have to say that Matthew gave us some really, *really* bad examples of how to read and interpret the Old Testament (2:13-18)! But we've clearly seen that while Matthew doesn't always follow the rules of a “literal” hermeneutic, he does follow all the rules of good exegesis (he carefully and responsibly studies the OT in light of its fulfillment in Christ)!

We are ultimately not committed to a “literal hermeneutic” (reading and interpreting the Bible like we would read and interpret a novel or the newspaper). This could lead us into artificial interpretations of the Bible and cause us to miss the full depths and riches of God's Word. But neither are we committed to an allegorical hermeneutic (finding creative “hidden” meanings), because then we could make the Bible say anything we wanted it to say. We are ultimately committed to a “Gospel hermeneutic”. That means that we carefully read and interpret the OT always in light of its fulfillment in the NT through Christ). The lifeblood of every single chapter in the Bible is the Gospel and the center of the gospel is Jesus Christ. We need to learn to read our Bibles in such a way that we always see Jesus as the goal, end, fulfillment, and telos of all things. *Only then* will we see how every chapter in the Bible is wonderfully relevant to us today.

Verses 12-14

According to Matthew, Jesus *had* to minister in Galilee, and *specifically* He had to minister in the original tribal areas of Zebulun and Naphtali around the Sea of Galilee. Jesus *had* to minister in this area in order to *fulfill* the Old Testament! But what's the big deal? Is this just a simple, dry “prediction”? (“When the Messiah comes he will spend time ministering in the tribal areas of Zebulun and Naphtali around the Sea of Galilee.”) Is it just a “proof text” for Jesus? (“Look, Jesus is ministering in the tribal areas of Zebulun and Naphtali around the Sea of Galilee!”)

Or is there more meaning and beauty to this prophecy and its fulfillment in Christ? That's what I want us to discover. My prayer is that we can move beyond bare predictions and proof-text fulfillments to see the glory and grace of God in Jesus' fulfillment of the Scriptures.

Verses 15-16 (cf. verse 17)

Matthew quotes Isaiah 9:1-2, so let's go back and look at these verses in their original context. Basically, Israel and Judah are in a lot of trouble. And the reason they're in trouble is very simple – it's because of their constant sin and rebellion against God. But instead of their trouble leading them to repentance and trust in God, Israel and Judah just hardened their hearts and tried to make their own way out of the mess they were in (like we often do ourselves). They looked for help from other nations. They called on other gods. And they even resorted to divination.

- ✓ Isaiah 8:19-20a – When they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony!

The teaching and the testimony is God's law. *That's* the place where God has revealed Himself, His will, and His ways. It's the *only* place. And so the Psalmist says that the teaching and the testimony is like a *lamp* to the feet and a *light* to the path (Ps. 119:105). Every other source of guidance and help leads only away from the light and into more and more darkness. But the teaching and the testimony was the one and only place that Israel refused to go. So Israel just condemned itself to live in spiritual darkness. Isaiah describes it as a night without any dawn. It's a very vivid and scary picture. It's like the sun sets and never comes up again. Because there's no other source of light. There is no other revelation of God. There is no other way to know anything that is *true*! Apart from the law and the testimony all we have is darkness (ignorance, confusion, pain, grief, and a gnawing emptiness).

- ✓ Isaiah 8:20-22 – To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because ***they have no dawn***. They will pass through the land, *greatly distressed* and *hungry*. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. And they will look to the earth, but behold, *distress* and ***darkness***, the ***gloom*** of *anguish*. And they will be thrust into ***thick darkness***.

That's pretty depressing, isn't it? But even as Israel experiences the terrible results of living in darkness, what do the people do? Isaiah says that they are enraged and speak contemptuously against God and defiantly turn their faces upward! They *still* refuse to go to the light of the teaching and the testimony. They *still* refuse to come to the light of God's revelation. They would *rather* die in spiritual darkness and misery. And they will – because Assyria will soon come from the north and Zebulun and Naphtali will be the very first to fall and be taken into exile. So you see when Matthew talks about a “people dwelling in darkness” and “in the region and shadow of death”, he's not talking about a poor, innocent people who just need a break. He's not talking about people who would naturally evoke *anyone's* sympathy. These people are all sitting in darkness because they turned the lights out themselves – because they didn't *want* to come to the light of God's revelation, to the teaching and to the testimony. They've *tried* to find light (joy, satisfaction, peace, life, and fulfillment) by every other avenue and using every other means, but with no success. And having no success, they've only made matters worse by blaming God – the only true source of light. So do these people deserve a break? No! Do these people deserve to be left to the darkness that *they themselves* have asked for? Yes! And that's what makes the next two verses in Isaiah so astonishingly beautiful.

- ✓ Isaiah 9:1-2 – 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 shined.

That's called pure, free, sovereign *grace*! One day, says Isaiah, God will send His light into the world and shine it upon His people. And it's just like God that the light should *dawn* in the very part of the land that was *first* to fall to Assyria and *first* to go into the darkness of exile: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles." And so with the coming of Jesus to live in Capernaum of Galilee by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, Matthew sees that Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled. God graciously and sovereignly took the initiative to reveal Himself to His people not just through the written teaching and testimony but through the living Word – His only Son. God chose to let His glorious light dawn on a people who had already decided that they would rather dwell in the region and shadow of death than to come to the light of God's testimony. God's people are being given another chance to repent because for some miraculous and totally incomprehensible reason, the kingdom of heaven is now at hand (verse 17)! We would say "out of the blue", totally unexpected, even unwanted, and uncalled for... and yet here it is. After pinching themselves and blinking and rubbing their eyes in disbelief, those who had chosen to live in darkness cannot deny the fact that the sun is rising!

- ✓ Luke 1:76-79 – And you... will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

If the written teaching and testimony was a light, how much *greater* will be the light of the living Word – God's own Son?

- ✓ John 1:4-5, 9 – In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
- ✓ John 8:12 – Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
- ✓ John 12:46 – I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

Think about the light that we have in Jesus Christ! We have life, and joy, and peace, and fulfillment, and satisfaction, and knowledge of the truth. We have in the light of Christ the knowledge of *God* Himself.

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 4:6 – For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The light *reveals*. The light enables us to *see*. The light gives us true *understanding* of the way of life. God did not leave us in our darkness, but sent His great light into the world. The question is, will we come to the light by believing in Jesus and following after Him?

- ✓ John 3:19-21 – And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things

hates the light and *does not come to the light*, lest his works [of unbelief] should be exposed. But whoever does what is true [works of faith] *comes to the light*, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

Will you come to the light by believing in Jesus and following after Him, or will you hate the light and walk in the darkness? For those of us who have come to the light, I'm reminded of Peter's words in John chapter six:

- ✓ John 6:66-69 – After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Where else shall we go? There is light and life nowhere else in the world! There is no other revelation of God. There is no other way to know the *truth*! And yet just like Israel of old, the world keeps looking for other gods, for other sources of light, for other paths to life, for other ways to know what is true, and so they only increase their darkness. They descend deeper into ignorance, and confusion, and pain, and grief, and emptiness because they won't have it any other way.

Conclusion

In light of all these things, I think we ought to be literally shouting out with Isaiah: “To the teaching and to the testimony!” The light of the written Word is ultimately the *same* light that was in Jesus Christ when He came into the world – because the Bible is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, from beginning to end. So I say again: To the teaching and to the testimony!

- ✓ Psalms 119:105 – Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
- ✓ Proverbs 6:23 – For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.

We shouldn't take it for granted that we are no longer in the darkness. We need to come to the light of God's revelation in Christ over and over and *over* again – reading, studying, meditating, memorizing in dependence upon the Spirit of Christ. Apart from God's light we cannot think rightly, or speak rightly, or act rightly. Apart from God's light there is no wisdom, or knowledge, or understanding. Apart from God's light, we *will* gradually lose our ability to discern the things that are true, and honorable, and just, and pure, and lovely, and commendable, and excellent, and worthy of praise (cf. Phil. 4:8). Apart from God's light, we will eventually call the good evil, and the evil good, even if just in subtle ways. The Bible is light because it is the revelation of God in Christ. Apart from this light there is *only* darkness. So let's rejoice every day, and especially every Lord's Day in our privilege of coming to the light – and basking in the light. Let's not spend our lives at the edge of the light, but as close to the light as we can get. We need to immerse ourselves in the light. Indeed, we should be happily and gladly seeking to *walk* in the light (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Jn. 1:5-7; 2:8-10).

- ✓ Ephesians 5:1-14 – Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God

comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

With the coming of Jesus into the world, “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.”
May we be those who joyfully come to the light because we love the light and because we want it to be clearly seen that *all* of our works and deeds are carried out in God (John 3:19-21).

Teaching our Children

- Q.** When the Israelites got into lots of trouble because of their sin, where did they go to look for help?
A. The Israelites looked for help from other nations, idols, and even demons.
- Q.** Where did Isaiah tell the people that they *should* be going to look for guidance and help?
A. ~ “To the teaching and to the testimony.” To the word of God where He shows us His ways and his will.
~ Since God’s Word shows us what is true and right, it brings us life, and joy, and peace, and fulfillment, and satisfaction.
- Q.** Psalm 119:105 says that God’s word is like something we could find in our house. What is it?
A. God’s word is a *lamp* to our feet and a *light* to our path.
- Q.** Since Israel would not go to the *light* of God’s Word, what did Isaiah say that they would fall into?
A. Isaiah said that the Israelites would fall into thick darkness - like a night without any morning.
- Q.** What is this darkness like? What does it feel like? What does it lead to?
A. ~ When we are living in darkness, it means that we cannot know the things that are *true* and right.
~ When we can’t know the things that are true and right, it will bring us confusion, and pain, and sadness, and emptiness. It will lead us in the end to judgment and death.
- Q.** When Israel started experiencing the terrible results of living in darkness, what did they do?
A. They blamed God and rebelled against Him even more. Their world became more and more dark.
- Q.** Did the Israelites deserve any light?
A. *No way!*

✓ Read Isaiah 9:1-2 (see V. D. above). Be astonished and amazed!

Q. How and when did these verses come to be fulfilled?

A. Read Matthew 4:12-17

- ✓ Help your children to see that Jesus is the only true light of the world. Read and reflect on the Scriptures under V. E. above.
- ✓ Help your children to see that the light of Jesus Christ comes to us now through the light of God’s Word – the Bible. Read and reflect on the Scriptures under Conclusion A. above.
- ✓ Think again about what would happen if we didn’t have the light of Jesus Christ in all of God’s Word and we were left in darkness.
- ✓ Read Ephesians 5:1-14 (see Conclusion C. above) and exhort your children to *walk* in the light!

Outline of Matthew*

I. Introducing the Messiah (1:1-4:11)

II. GALILEE: The Messiah Revealed in Word and Deed (4:12-16:20)

- ✓ Matthew 4:17 – *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*
 - Discourse #1 (5-7)
“And when Jesus had finished these sayings...” (7:28)
 - Discourse #2 (10)
“When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples...” (11:1)
 - Discourse #3 (13; cf. Matthew 13:53)
“And when Jesus had finished these parables...” (13:53)

III. From GALILEE to JERUSALEM: The Messiah and His Followers Prepare for the Confrontation (16:21-20:34)

- ✓ Matthew 16:21 – *From that time Jesus began 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.*
 - Discourse #4 (18)
“Now when Jesus had finished these sayings...” (19:1)

IV. JERUSALEM: The Messiah in Confrontation with the Religious Authorities (21-25)

- Discourse #5 (24-25)
“When Jesus had finished all these sayings...” (26:1)

V. JERUSALEM: The Messiah Rejected, Killed, and Vindicated (26:1-28:15)

VI. GALILEE: The Messianic Mission is Launched (28:16-20)

This outline helps us to see that Matthew organized his gospel at the larger scale using *geography* (cf. Mark). After Jesus’ baptism in the wilderness of **Judea** in chapter four, Matthew reports that He withdrew into **Galilee** and from that point on (until chapter sixteen) there is no hint that Jesus ever gave so much as a thought to any trip into Judea. At 16:21, for the very first time Jesus makes mention of going to **Jerusalem in Judea** (where He will die), and chapters 19-20 are set in the context of this journey to **Jerusalem**. Chapters 21-28 all take place in the area of Jerusalem – all except for the last few verses of chapter twenty-eight. At the climax of his gospel (28:16-20) Matthew has Jesus return to **Galilee**, to the place where He began and where He spent the majority of His ministry. So at the level of the forest (versus the trees), Matthew’s gospel follows this progression:

Ministry in Galilee – Journey to Jerusalem – Passion Week in Jerusalem – Return to Galilee

This means that in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus spends only *one week* of His adult life and ministry in Judea/Jerusalem! The reality, however, is that Jesus had already been to Galilee and back again to

* This outline is taken from R.T. France’s commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (NICNT; Eerdmans; 2007)

Judea (where He spent a significant amount of time) *at least once* before the withdrawal into Galilee that Matthew tells us about (see below). And before His final journey to face crucifixion in Jerusalem, Jesus had actually made *at least* two other trips to Judea where again He probably spent a significant amount of time (see below). Finally, Matthew ends his gospel with the Great Commission on a mountain in Galilee, but we know that Jesus later ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives just outside of Jerusalem. **So it seems clear that Matthew has purposefully arranged his gospel so as to have Jesus ministering in Galilee, dying in Judea/Jerusalem, and then returning to Galilee to commission His disciples.** Part of the significance of this geographical “outline” may have something to do with the fact that Galilee and Jerusalem were ethnically, religiously, socially, culturally, geographically, and politically very different and/or isolated from each other (see the message on Matthew 2:19-23). On the other hand, it may only reflect the fact that the books of the Bible are also carefully crafted (and *God-breathed!*) works of literature. So Matthew’s geographical outline provides symmetry (balance) to the book. It increases the sense of tension and drama as Jesus goes up to Jerusalem (16:21; 20:17-19; in 2:1-3 Matthew has already painted Jerusalem as a place of great danger for the Messiah, and during Jesus’ ministry in Galilee “Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem” with hostile intent – 15:1). And finally, there is a wonderful sense of closure at the end as Jesus commissions His disciples at the place where it all began.

1. Matthew 3:1, 13 – In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea... Then **Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan** to John, to be baptized by him.
 - a. John 1:43 – The next day **Jesus decided to go to Galilee**. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.”
 - b. John 2:13 – The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and **Jesus went up to Jerusalem**.
 - c. John 3:22 – After this **Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside**, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.
 - d. John 4:1-3 – 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**.

2. Matthew 4:12, 17 – Now when he heard that John had been arrested, **he withdrew into Galilee**... From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
 - a. John 5:1 – After this there was a feast of the Jews, and **Jesus went up to Jerusalem**.
 - b. John 6:1 – After this **Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee**.
 - c. John 7:1-10 – After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. Now the Jews’ Feast of Booths was at hand. So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing” ... Jesus said to them... “You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.” After saying this, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then **he also went up**, not publicly but in private.

3. Matthew 16:21 – From that time Jesus began 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.
4. Matthew 19:1 – Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, **he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan**.
5. Matthew 20:17-18 – And **as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem**, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death.”
6. Matthew 21:1-2 – Now **when they drew near to Jerusalem** and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me.

7. Matthew 21:10 – And **when he entered Jerusalem**, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?”
8. Matthew 28:7 (cf. 28:10, 16-17) – Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, **he is going before you to Galilee**; there you will see him... Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him.
 - ✓ Luke 24:50-52 – Then **he led them out as far as Bethany**, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.



1. Galilee – Matthew 4-18
2. Journey to Jerusalem – Matthew 19-20
3. Jerusalem – Matthew 21-28
4. Galilee – Matthew 28:16-20