

Detailed Prophecy! 11-23-03

Matthew 4:12-17

12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali-- 14 to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 15 "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- 16 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." 17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (NIV)

We are working our way through Matthew, digging for treasure as we go. You'll recall that last week we saw Jesus' example on how to deal with temptation. His ministry had just begun, and for a period of time, his disciples baptized people in the Judean wilderness. They had been John the Baptist's disciples, but John had told them that Jesus was the One to follow. There were only 5 disciples at that time. There was a slight overlap of the end of John's ministry preparing the way for Jesus, and the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Shortly after Jesus' baptism, Herod Antipas arrested John and put him in prison. This was a signal to Jesus. John's work of preparation was done. It was time for Jesus' ministry to take its own direction.

Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth first. He was invited (or perhaps it was his turn) to speak in the synagogue there. Opening the scroll, He found His place to read was Isaiah 61. It was a prophecy about the Messiah. *1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn...* Isaiah 61:1-2 (NIV)

Once He finished reading the passage, He told them the prophecy was fulfilled. That caused the people to marvel. But He went on to tell them a dangerous truth. They would reject Him, and the Gospel would go to the Gentiles. Furious at that remark, they attempted to throw him over a cliff, but He miraculously walked through the crowd and moved to Capernaum. (Luke 4:28-30)

Matthew tells us He went there in fulfillment of the words of Isaiah 9. This is an incredibly detailed prophecy that should really strengthen our faith. Our faith is based on credible witnesses and detailed prophecies. It isn't, as Peter suggests some were saying, cleverly invented stories. (2Peter 1:16) If someone was going to try to rise in power and influence the Jewish nation, the logical place to minister would be in the capital, Jerusalem, but that isn't where the prophecies pointed. Remember, Matthew is trying to convince the Jews that Jesus is the promised Messiah. First, Matthew 2:4-5 showed us that the future ruler of Israel, who was from ancient times, would be born in Bethlehem, according Micah's prediction. (Micah 5:2) Now we see that His area of ministry is to be the region of Zebulun and

Commented [notes1]: 28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Luke 4:28-30 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 2 Peter 1:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 ""But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.""

Matt 2:5-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Micah 5:2 (NIV)

Naphtali, but in both cases, Matthew almost downplays the original prophecy. Look at the actual passage that Matthew quotes just a portion of: *1 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan-- 2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. 4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. 5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.* Isaiah 9:1-7 (NIV)

Isaiah was predicting the same thing as Micah, the eternal One would be born a man and will rule on David's throne forever. But when does Isaiah say this will begin. When is the burden of sin lifted? When is the Mighty God to be born to us? It will happen when the people walking in darkness see a great light, when the people living in the shadow of death have a light dawn, there in Zebulun and Naphtali. (see map) The tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali include most of the major cities of Jesus' ministry. Capernaum, where Jesus moved His base of operations, is in Naphtali, and so are the hills where the Sermon on the Mount was taught and the cities of Bethsaida, Chorazin, Magdala, and Gennesaret. Cana and Nazareth were in the ancient region of Zebulun.

You have to understand how highly illogical this was when Isaiah predicted it. This region was a part of the northern tribes, the idolatrous North that went into captivity, humbled 100 years before the Southern tribes. Zebulun and Naphtali were never the spiritual center of the nation. Isaiah received a revelation from God and made some seemingly outlandish predictions. But here in Matthew, we see them coming to pass. Both the city of the birth of the eternal King and the region of His ministry were predicted hundreds of years before His birth. They were at opposite ends of the nation!

Now I'd like you to see some of the amazing detail in this prediction. First, Isaiah promises no more gloom for the people in this region, for those in distress. He calls the region darkness and the shadow of death. Around the time Jesus was born, the zealot movement took hold in this region. Its origin was in Gamla, a city on the slopes overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The Galileans were stirred up to be a part of this revolt. The Romans came in and crushed them ruthlessly. Along the roads of this very region, they crucified anyone caught resisting. Jesus may have seen such sights as a child.

In Capernaum, archeologists unearthed a first century Roman army headquarters. This tells us that the Jews of the region always lived with constant threat. The zealot movement continued undercover, creating a constant state of tension.

There was also the gloom and shadow of death of the impossible demands of the Law. In Jesus' day the religious leaders had added so many rules to the rules that no one thought they could possibly be right with God. Imagine the gloom that this spiritual attitude combined with the physical tension produced. It was a land of darkness in the shadow of death.

Suddenly, on to this scene burst this new prophet, but much more than a prophet. The Scripture which inaugurated His ministry spoke of bringing the prisoners out of darkness. The light was shining. People were seeing the Law as leading them to Messiah, not an unbearable burden. The lame were walking, the blind could see, and people were delivered from demonic oppression in the most unlikely of all places, the former tribal lands of Zebulon and Naphtali. Imagine what joy accompanied those miracles. But there are more details to this amazing prophecy. Isaiah called it Galilee of the Gentiles. There was the Roman Garrison in Capernaum that I mentioned, but there was also the Roman city of Tiberius. Its ruins remain to this day on the western shore of Galilee. Just north of Nazareth was a large Greek city Sephoris. The east coast had Greek cities. This was Galilee of the Gentiles.

"By the way of the sea", Isaiah predicted. The road that ran by the synagogue in Capernaum, right by the house of Peter, where Jesus lived was called by the Romans, *Via Maris, Way of the Sea!* (See the picture) Could God have been anymore specific?

The actual home of Peter has been excavated. We know it was his home because of a fourth century letter that told of a six sided church built over his house. When archeologists found the footings of that ancient church they excavated below it and, sure enough, a typical Jewish first century home was found. Looking further, they discovered the walls of the main room had been plastered, unlike the other homes in the city. The graffiti on the plaster was in multiple languages, but it all declared the creed of the early church. "Jesus is Lord!"

Now, in case you are still in doubt, in spite of the incredible odds against these two specific but diverse prophecies coming to pass in Jesus, consider that Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world."* (John 8:12) Has anyone ever claimed to be the light of the world, who was born in Bethlehem, and ministered in the ancient regions of Zebulon and Naphtali, who healed the sick and raised the dead, bringing great joy, and whose teaching brought great light, and the freedom from oppression? If you are still doubting, it is because you choose to, not because there is lack of sufficient evidence. The Everlasting Father, the One whose goings are from ancient times was born as a child just as the prophets predicted in detail. He came to show us how to live and then died for your sins and mine.

The light has dawned! Listen to the way Jesus described this confrontation of the reality of who He is and our human nature: *19 This is the verdict: Light has come*

Commented [notes5]: 12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
John 8:12 (KJV)

into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." John 3:19-21 (NIV)

In our next verse of Matthew, we have Jesus' message that tells us the same teaching in other terms. *17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."* "From that time on..." Matthew wrote. His message was always the same. It came in different parables and teachings, but you can sum it up in this expression, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."* It was the same message that John preached. Repent! Man needs to get right with God. In trying to appeal to the masses we often leave this essential ingredient behind. Without repentance, there is no salvation. You can come to church and even have an intellectual belief in Jesus without repentance, but it will not change your heart. Without repentance there is no salvation. There is no entering into the kingdom of heaven.

We have to realize that as fallen humanity, we prefer darkness to light. We have to realize that we will justify evil and call it righteousness. We have to realize that if we had the power, without the influence of Jesus, we would be another Hitler or Saddam. Our heart is just as corruptible by power as any tyrant's heart. Once you see that is your nature, once you realize you fall so short of the glory of God, there is conviction and the expectation of justice, of judgment. Once you realize that it was your sins that Jesus suffered and died for, that it was your sins that nailed Him to that cross, then the Holy Spirit can move you to seek the forgiveness of God.

Salvation isn't just about a get out of hell free card! It is the remorse and contrition that comes when you see your nature for what it is. Then we desire the righteousness of God. Then we want to change. Then we see that we need a whole new attitude about life. That is genuine repentance. Then we can seek to be the subjects of the King. Then we can desire to enter the kingdom of heaven, that is, the rule of King Jesus in our lives now and forever. Then God takes us a step further, and makes us part of His family, sons and daughters of the King.

The One who is Life came into the world, fulfilling these amazingly detailed prophecies, and living a sinless life. That alone ought to be enough to convince us. Who else among men could ask, *"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"* as Jesus asked in [John 8:46](#) (NIV). The Author of Life came to offer His life that we might truly live. But we must first repent. There is no hunger for righteousness, no thirst for real life, until we see the subtle destructiveness of sin controlling our lives. Matthew is trying to tell those who read his Gospel that Jesus is the king, reigning over those who submit to Him. He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Have you allowed the light to dawn in your soul? Do you come to the Light that walked and taught and healed in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali in fulfillment of these ancient prophecies? Each of us must choose to walk in darkness or come to the Light of Life. Which will it be for you?

Commented [notes6]: 46 Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?
John 8:46 (NIV)