**Monday Evening Bible Study**

**January 16, 2023**

**Matthew 4:12–23**

**Immediate Context**

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| Matthew 1:1-17 The Genealogy of Jesus | Matthew 3:13-17 The Baptism of Jesus |
| Matthew 1:18-25 The Birth of Jesus the Messiah | Matthew 4:1-11 The Temptation of Jesus |
| Matthew 2:1-12 The Visit of the Wise Men | **Matthew 4:12-17 Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee** |
| Matthew 2:13-15 The Escape to Egypt | **Matthew 4:18-22 Jesus Calls the First Disciples** |
| Matthew 2:16-18 The Massacre of the Infants | Matthew 4:23-25 Jesus Ministers to Crowds of People |
| Matthew 2:19-23 The Return from Egypt to Nazareth | Matthew 5:1-7:29 The Sermon on the Mount |
| Matthew 3:1-12 The Proclamation of John the Baptist |  |

**Helpful Scriptures**

**Isaiah 9:1–7 (NRSV)**

*1 But there will be no gloom for those who were 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 will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. 2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. 3 You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. 4 For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. 5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. 6 For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

**Isaiah 58:8–10 (NRSV)**

*8 Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. 9 Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, 10 if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.*

**Isaiah 60:1–3 (NRSV)**

*1 Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. 2 For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. 3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

**Malachi 4:1–3 (NRSV)**

*1 See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. 3 And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.*

**Matthew 8:22 (NRSV)**

*22 But Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”*

**Matthew 10:38 (NRSV)**

*38 and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

**Matthew 11:28–30 (NRSV)**

*28 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

**Matthew 16:24 (NRSV)**

*24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

**Matthew 19:21 (NRSV)**

*21 Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”*

**Key Words/Phrases**

**John** – John the Baptist is the first “John” mentioned in this text. John’s arrest and execution isn’t mentioned until Matthew 14:1-12.

**Galilee** –Γαλιλαία – The region north of Judea just above Samaria. Since Herod Antipas ruled over both Perea (where John would have been arrested) and Galilee, the withdrawal is not from Antipas’s territory, but rather from the area in which John the Baptist had been active and, ultimately, apprehended.

**Nazareth** –Ναζαρά – Nazareth appears in Matthew 2:23 when Joseph takes the family there and makes his home there (“so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, ‘He will be called a Nazorean.’” But now Jesus will make his home in Capernaum. It’s interesting that Matthew appears to have a different spelling for Nazareth in each of his three uses (Matthew 2:23; 4:13; 21:11).

**Capernaum** –Καφαρναούμ – Located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum is identified as ‘by the sea’ in anticipation of ‘way of the sea’ in v. 15.

**The prophet Isaiah** – Matthew’s gospel quotes prophets ten times and the first several come from the Prophet Isaiah (see 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; 15:17).

**Zebulun** –Ζαβουλών – Nazareth is in Zebulun. Zebulun was the sixth son of Jacob and Leah (Gen. 30:19–20). When he was born, his tragically unloved mother (cf. 29:31) is said to have named him Zebulun, because she thought, “Now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons” (30:20). Thus, the name was a pun on the Hebrew word zabal, which means “to honor.” Zebulun had three sons—Sered, Elon, and Jahlee—and he and his three sons went down to Egypt with the family of Jacob (46:14). Jacob’s blessing of Zebulun implies that his descendants would live along or near the Mediterranean coast and maintain close relations with the Phoenicians (49:13).

The territory allotted to this tribe was in south-central Galilee (Josh. 19:10–16). Their southern boundary corresponded roughly with the southern edge of the hills of Lower Galilee and their northern border reached the Beth Netophah Valley. The land of Zebulun thus extended from just north of Mount Carmel on the west to Mount Tabor on the east. Zebulun was something of a hinterland, almost entirely mountainous, with the exception of the broad valleys on its western and northern edges. Its only towns of note were Hannathon (modern Tell el-Bedeiwiyeh), known from the Tell el-Amarna letters; Shimron, a Canaanite city conquered by Thutmose III and also mentioned in the Tell el-Amarna letters; and Gath-hepher, hometown of Jonah (2 Kings 14:25). But Zebulun was not isolated; some of Canaan’s most important highways passed along its boundaries, and the tribe had easy access to the sea (cf. Gen. 49:13; Deut. 33:19). Jesus’s hometown, Nazareth, was located in the heart of Zebulun (cf. Isa. 9:1; Matt. 4:15).

**Napthali** –Νεφθαλίμ – Capernaum is in Napthali. The second son of Jacob and Bilhah (Gen. 30:7–8). The story of his birth is told against a backdrop of competition between Leah and Rachel, Jacob’s two wives. Although Rachel was clearly Jacob’s favorite wife, she remained infertile for a time during which Leah bore four sons. Then Rachel gave her slave Bilhah to Jacob as a surrogate wife, and Bilhah bore two sons (Dan and Naphtali). Rachel gave this second boy his name, because she said, “With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed” (30:28).

Naphtali’s territory was bounded on the west by Asher, on the south by Zebulun and Issachar, and on the east by the river Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. This territory Naphtali shared with Canaanites (Judg. 1:33). Its northern location is reflected in the position it occupied along with Dan and Asher on the north side of the tent of meeting (Num. 2:25–31). In the period of the judges, Barak, son of Abinoam, from Qedesh in Naphtali, successfully led a force of ten thousand against the army of Sisera (Judg. 4:6–10, 12–16), and twice the tribe of Naphtali answered the call of Gideon to battle invading Midianites (6:35; 7:23). During Solomon’s reign, the administrative officer in charge of Naphtali was son-in-law to the king; and Hiram of Tyre, the son of a widow from the tribe of Naphtali, is credited with the manufacture of the bronze/copper work commissioned by Solomon for the temple (1 Kings 7:13–47; but according to 2 Chron. 2:13–14 it was Huramabi of the tribe of Dan). In the period of the divided monarchy, Naphtali was invaded by Ben-hadad of Syria at the request of Asa of Judah during the course of the war between the latter and Baasha of Israel (1 Kings 15:16–20). Later, during the reign of Pekah of Israel, Tiglath-pileser III invaded Naphtali and deported its population to Assyria (2 Kings 15:29). In the course of the Maccabean wars, forces of Demetrius of Syria, intent upon removing Jonathan from office, reached Kedesh (Naphtali) in Galilee and were met by Jonathan, who managed to turn a near defeat into victory (1 Macc. 11:63–64, 67–74).

Naphtali is referred to in a number of poetic or literary passages. The Blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:21) describes Naphtali as “a doe let loose who bears many fawns.” The poet thus contrasts Naphtali’s prior state of independence with its state of political dependence. The Blessing of Moses (Deut. 33:23) describes Naphtali as “sated with favor, full of the blessing of the LORD” and prophesies that Naphtali will “possess the west and the south [Heb. darom].” The final word of this verse is suspect in so early a poem, for it is found otherwise only in the late books of Ezekiel, Job, and Ecclesiastes. It has been suggested that the manuscript may originally have read marom, “highland” (cf. Judg. 5:18), in which case the blessing would refer to the tribe’s well-favored territory from the Sea of Galilee to the Galilean highlands. The Song of Deborah (Judg. 5:18) lauds Naphtali along with Zebulun for its participation in the war against Sisera. Finally, the book of Tobit presents the tale of the sufferings and healing of a pious member of the tribe of Naphtali (1:1–2, 4–5; 7:3).

**Gentiles** – ἔθνος – in Matthean usage ranges from a strongly Jewishly ethnocentric designation for those seen as outsiders (translated ‘Gentiles’)10 to a universalistic perspective in which the relevance to all peoples of what has happened in Christ is in view (translated ‘nations’, except in 10:18, where, although a universalistic perspective is in view, there is separate handling of Jews and non-Jews).

The basic meaning seems to be “non-Jew,” as is apparent from the instances in which Jews and Gentiles (or Jews and Greeks) are referred to in a sense that seems to connote “all humanity” (Acts 14:1, 5; 19:10, 17; 1 Cor. 1:22–24). In other instances, however, the word ethnos seems to mean “nation”—and it is usually translated that way in the NRSV (e.g., when Rom. 4:18 calls Abraham the father of many ethnoi, he is obviously the father of “nations,” not “Gentiles”). But in certain passages. the meaning is ambiguous. In Matt. 28:19, does Jesus commission his followers to make disciples of all nations (as in the NRSV) or of all Gentiles? Another meaning of “Gentile” is found most prominently in the teachings of Jesus, where the term does not seem to indicate an ethnic identification so much as a “pagan” or a person who does not believe in or worship God (cf. Matt. 5:47; 6:7, 32; 18:17; 20:25; cf. Eph. 4:17; 1 Thess. 4:5).

**Repent** –μετανοέω – a word covering several biblical ideas that range from regret to reversal, from changing one’s mind about something to a complete moral or ethical conversion. Thus in the Bible, God can repent (Heb. *nakham*) in the sense of regret: God regrets having made Saul king (1 Sam. 15:11). The more profound notion of repentance in the sense of “reversal,” however, is expressed through the Hebrew word *shub*, which expresses the idea of turning back or retracing one’s steps.

In the NT the notion of repentance as turning to God (Heb. shub) is expressed by the Greek verb metanoein. The idea includes the concept of changing one’s mind, coming to a new way of thinking. John the Baptist calls the people to repentance and demands proof of authentic conversion (Matt. 3:9–10). Yet John’s message differs from that of the prophets in that his call for repentance is connected to the imminent arrival of God’s kingdom and the coming of the Messiah (Matt. 3:2, 11–12; Luke 3:15–17). Moreover, John seals this repentance with a baptism of water for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3).

Jesus’s call to repentance is also closely linked to the arrival of God’s kingdom (Mark 1:14–15). His summons to conversion, moreover, is associated with his own person, so that a decision for or against him signifies a choice for or against repentance (Matt. 11:20–24; 12:41–42). He comes to call sinners (Luke 5:32), and he tells parables that promise God’s forgiveness to those who recognize their sinfulness (Luke 15; 18:9–14).

**Simon** –Σίμων – Simon Peter, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

**Peter** – Πέτρος –peter was a Galilean and one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. His given name was Simon, but Jesus bestowed upon him the nickname “Peter” (GK., “rock”; Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14). He is sometimes referred to as Cephas, the Aramaic version of that name, which Jesus would no doubt have actually used (John 1:42). Peter is variously identified as the “son of Jonah” (Matt. 16:17) and “son of John” (John 1:42), though some interpreters regard the former designation as metaphorical (indicating, perhaps, a relationship to the prophet Jonah; cf. Matt. 16:4). The Gospel of Matthew is notable for containing several stories about Peter not found anywhere else. First, the story of Jesus walking on water is greatly expanded in Matthew’s Gospel to include an account of Peter’s also walking on water, though his success is only momentary; his fear and doubt cause him to sink and require rescue by Jesus (14:28–31). Another story presents Jesus instructing Peter to catch a fish that has a coin in its mouth sufficient to pay the temple tax for both of them (17:24–27). And in another instance, Peter is presented as asking Jesus whether it is appropriate to forgive someone as many as seven times, prompting Jesus to respond, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times,” and to tell a parable illustrating the need for forgiveness (18:21–35). Most significant, however, is Matthew’s considerable expansion of the story in which Peter confesses Jesus to be the Messiah. In this Gospel, Jesus responds by blessing Peter as one who received this knowledge directly from the Father in heaven (16:17). Further, he identifies Peter as the rock on which he will build his church (16:18), and he promises to give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, so that whatever he binds on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever he looses on earth will be loosed in heaven (16:19). The precise meaning of this latter sentence is unclear, but it probably refers to possessing the authority to unlock or reveal God’s will by interpreting Torah, binding commandments in situations where they apply and relaxing them in contexts where they do not apply. Matthew’s Gospel indicates that this authority would ultimately be given to all of the apostles and, perhaps, to the whole church (18:17–20), but Peter is nevertheless recognized as possessing a status that was somewhat unique among the twelve.

**Andrew** –Ἀνδρέας – one of the twelve apostles, identified as the brother of Simon Peter (Matt. 4:18; Mark 1:16; John 1:40). Andrew is among the first persons named in the apostolic lists (Matt. 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16; Acts 1:13), perhaps an indication of his early selection to Jesus’s inner circle of disciples; in Mark 13:3, he appears to belong to a select group of four. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark both relate a story in which Andrew and Peter were fishing when called to follow Jesus. In John’s account, Andrew is said to be from Bethsaida (1:44) and to have been a disciple of John the Baptist. He ends up following Jesus and then finds his brother, Simon, and brings him to Jesus saying, “We have found the Messiah” (1:35–41). Elsewhere, Andrew appears only in John 6:8–9; 12:20–22. Extracanonical traditions credit him with preaching in Scythia and suffering martyrdom (crucifixion) in Achaia.

**James** –Ἰάκωβος – the son of Zebedee (Matt. 4:21; 10:2; Mark 1:19; 3:17) and brother of John (Matt. 17:1; Mark 3:17; 5:37; Acts 12:2), with whom he was called by Jesus to be one of the twelve (Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19–20; Luke 5:10–11). Jesus nicknamed James and John “Boanerges,” meaning “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). The two are prominent in the various lists of the twelve (Matt. 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16; Acts 1:13). With Peter, they were present when Jesus raised Jairus’s daughter (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51), at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28), and in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33). The brothers (or their mother) request special places beside Jesus at the time of the messianic kingdom (Matt. 20:20–23; Mark 10:35–40). Acts 12:2 reports James’s martyrdom by decapitation at the command of Herod Agrippa I.

**John** –Ἰωάννης – the son of Zebedee and brother of James. Along with James, John was called by Jesus to be one of the twelve (Matt. 4:21–22; Mark 1:19–20; Luke 5:10–11) while they were fishing. His name appears in each of the apostolic lists (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:17; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13). Some think that Mark’s reference to “hired servants” indicates a prosperous family background (Mark 1:20). John and James received from Jesus the nickname “Boanerges,” meaning “sons of thunder” (3:17). Their prominence among the twelve is indicated by their presence, along with Peter, at the raising of Jairus’s daughter by Jesus (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51), at the transfiguration of Jesus (Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28), and with Jesus in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33). According to Luke 22:8, John and Peter were instructed by Jesus to make the preparations for the Passover that was to serve as his final meal with his followers. All of this indicates that John was close to Jesus. Perhaps for this reason, a number of texts present him as saying or doing things that warrant correction or that earn him a rebuke from Jesus. It is John who complains about an exorcist who does not belong to their circle (Mark 9:38; Luke 9:49), and it is James and John who request that the unresponsive Samaritan village be destroyed (Luke 9:54). James and John (or their mother) ask for special consideration upon the advent of the messianic kingdom (Matt. 20:20–23; Mark 10:35–40). Paul attests to John’s prominence by referring to him as one of the “pillars” of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:6–10). In spite of these and a few other references to John in the New Testament, the data necessary for a fuller sketch of his life, character, and activities do not exist.

**Zebedee** –Ζεβεδαῖος – A fisherman and the father of Jesus’s disciples James and John. Little is known of him, but his sons became two of the most prominent members of the twelve, and his wife also played a significant role in the Gospel story. Zebedee apparently employed “hired men” (Mark 1:20) and owned a boat, which may mark him as at least a moderately wealthy man. Comparison of Matt. 27:55–56 with Mark 15:40 leads to the plausible suggestion that the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John was named Salome, one of the women who accompanied Jesus and witnessed his crucifixion. If the reference to her as one who “provided for Jesus” is understood in a financial sense (Matt. 27:56; cf. Luke 8:1–3), it might be conjectured that Zebedee and his wife were patrons of Jesus’s ministry. It has also been suggested, however, that his wife and sons may have left him in order to follow Jesus; this would correlate with the biblical tradition that devotion to Jesus sometimes divided families (cf. Matt. 10:34–37).

**Synagogue** –συναγωγή – Gk., “a gathering of things” or “an assembly of people”, a congregation of Jews who gather to pray, read scripture, and hear teaching and exhortation based on scripture and the place where such a congregation assembles. Synagogues are not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible or in any of the apocryphal/ deuterocanonical writings produced during the Second Temple period. The New Testament, however, presents synagogues as prominent throughout Galilee, Judea, and the Mediterranean world. Jesus is described as teaching throughout the synagogues of Galilee (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:21, 39; Luke 4:15, 44; John 6:59; 18:20), including the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth (Matt. 13:54; Mark 6:1–2; Luke 4:16). The Gospel of Mark recounts an episode in which he exorcises a demon from a man in a synagogue (1:21–27). He also raises a girl from the dead who was the daughter of a synagogue ruler named Jairus (5:22–43). Elsewhere, Jesus enters into disputes with Jewish authorities over questions raised by his healing the sick in synagogues on the sabbath (Mark 3:1–5; Luke 13:10–17). He criticizes hypocrites who blow trumpets when they give alms in the synagogues (Matt. 6:2) or who like to stand and pray in the synagogues in order to be seen by others (6:5). He likewise chastises people who like the best seats in synagogues (23:6). Jesus also warns his disciples that they will be flogged or beaten in synagogues (Matt. 10:17; 23:34; Mark 13:9; cf. Luke 12:11; 21:12; cf. Acts 22:19; 26:11).

**Kingdom** –βασιλεία – The references to the kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels receive the most attention, because the concept seems so central to Jesus’s message and because the phrase encompasses an ambiguity that has intrigued interpreters. Jesus’s sayings about the kingdom of God seem to fall into at least three different categories.

First, Jesus talks about the kingdom of God as a *reality that is already present.* He points to his exorcisms as signs that the kingdom of God has come, i.e., that it is already present through his ministry (Matt. 12:28). He tells people who want to know when the kingdom of God is coming that it is already among them (Luke 17:21).

Second, Jesus also talks about the kingdom of God as an *imminent future reality.* Its arrival is at hand (Mark 1:15; NRSV: “has come near”), and he insists that some people who are currently alive will not die until they see that the kingdom has come with power (9:1).

And, third, Jesus sometimes speaks of the kingdom of God as the *culmination of all human history*, as something that comes into existence only when heaven and earth pass away. He urges people to pray for God’s kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10) and tells them to watch for signs of its coming (Luke 21:31). They must beware of those who say “The time is near” (21:8), for there will be wars and disasters and tribulations galore before the kingdom is finally revealed (Matt. 24:3–18). Often, Jesus speaks of the kingdom in ways that do not make clear whether he is describing God’s present, imminent, or ultimate reign (e.g., Luke 4:43; 9:11).

Many scholars have noted that the English phrase “kingdom of God” does not do justice to the Greek *basileia tou theou* that is employed throughout the nt. The English phrase connotes a physical space or location (the place where God rules), whereas the Greek can refer to an action (i.e., the phenomenon of God ruling). Many scholars suggest “reign of God” or “rule of God” as more appropriate translations for *basileia tou theou* than “kingdom of God” (which is used in the NRSV and almost all other English Bibles). In some cases, Jesus certainly does seem to be referring to a location (Mark 14:25; Luke 13:28). But in other cases he seems to be speaking of something more experiential; people strive for the kingdom of God when they seek to have lives ruled by God (i.e., to live in accord with God’s will, Matt. 6:33). Jesus often speaks of “entering” the kingdom, without making clear whether doing so was understood to be a present possibility or something that would only become possible in the future. To enter God’s kingdom might mean to enter a realm of life beyond death or it might mean to enter into the sphere of God’s present-day power and influence—or it might mean some combination of the two (since these thoughts are not mutually exclusive). When a crucified thief pleads with Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom,” and Jesus responds, “Today, you will be with me in Paradise,” the kingdom that is mentioned obviously seems to be a realm beyond death (Luke 23:43). In John’s Gospel, however, entering the kingdom definitely seems to be a present possibility, albeit one that involves a transformation of life analogous to a new birth (3:3–5).