

Matthew 4:23-25

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Jesus's ministry begins. He not only teaches the gospel in synagogues to Jewish audiences, but also heals disease and demon-possession from among Jews and Gentiles.

The parallel accounts of this event are found in Mark 1:39 and Luke 4:44; 6:17-19.

Matthew “zooms back out” after these events and gives a general account of Jesus’s public ministry: *Jesus was going throughout all Galilee*. His traveling ministry took place in the region of *Galilee*, which spanned from the western shoreline and surrounding hills and towns of the district. His ministry entailed *teaching* and *healing*. Jesus taught *in their* local assemblies or gathering places called *synagogues*. The full origins of synagogues are unclear, but many believe it was brought to Israel by Jews returning from the Babylonian exile. Synagogues were largely the domain of the Pharisees, who used them as Jewish culture centers and places of worship.

The Pharisees sought to maintain a vibrant Jewish identity by keeping the law. Every Sabbath, scrolls from the law were read and expounded on by a master teacher or Rabbi. Every town of size had a least one synagogue. Some had more. (Jewish tradition says that wherever ten Jewish men lived a synagogue should be formed. This tradition would assume a remarkably high degree of literacy among the people).

In order for Jesus to be able to teach in a synagogue He had to be invited to do so by the head of the synagogue. We know from Luke 2:41-52 that even as a young boy Jesus possessed amazing knowledge and insight into the scriptures. As a thirty-year-old man, Jesus would have grown even further in wisdom and knowledge. The ruins of ancient synagogues are observable among the ruins of ancient Capernaum as well as the nearby ruins of villages identified as Chorazin, and Magdala.

The message *Jesus was teaching* inside *their synagogues* and *proclaiming* beyond their walls was *the gospel of the kingdom*. *Gospel* means “good news.” The Good News was spiritual as well as political. It was about *the Kingdom* (of Heaven). *Kingdom* is a political word, and heaven is a spiritual word. *Jesus* was announcing its arrival and describing what it was like. It was good and unlike anything anyone had ever heard. The people “were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:28-29).

In addition to *teaching* and *proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom*, *Jesus* was also miraculously *healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people*. The people that he healed suffered from all manner of afflictions, both physical (*diseases, pains, epileptics, and paralytics*) and spiritual (*demoniacs*). *Jesus* was unlike any typical physician. He simply healed people from their afflictions with miraculous power. These miracles demonstrated the divine authority with which He taught. They were a sign to testify the truth of who *Jesus* was and what He said.

As Jesus taught and healed, *the news about Him spread throughout all Syria*. Syria was a predominantly Gentile region north of *Galilee*. The current Syrian border is roughly fifteen miles from the shores of Galilee, and its capital of Damascus roughly fifty miles. As the *news of Jesus' teaching and miracles spread throughout all Syria*, the people *brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them*. As this continued, the news went viral, spreading further and further until soon, *large crowds followed Him not only from Galilee but also to the Decapolis*.

Decapolis stems from the Greek prefix “deca,” meaning “ten;” and the word, “polis” meaning “city.” There were ten Greek cities, two in what is now northern Israel, and eight in modern Jordan and Syria. The *Decapolis* city of Hippas was located on a hill overlooking the eastern shore of Galilee. From the context it is likely people came from all ten cities, as well as other towns and villages *from beyond the Jordan* (to the east and north). *News about Jesus* also spread such that pilgrims traveled to see Jesus from *Jerusalem*, the capital city located about a hundred miles south, as well as *Judea* (southern Israel, including the region around Jerusalem).

People were coming to Jesus with *various diseases and pains*, as well as spiritual infirmities such as demon possession, and Jesus *healed them*. It seems from the geographic description that people came to be *healed* by Jesus from a two hundred mile radius of *Galilee*. *Large crowds* of people from this extensive area *followed Him*. It is notable that *Decapolis*, as well as the area *beyond the Jordan* were inhabited by Gentiles. Jesus is *teaching in the Jewish synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom* to Jewish audiences. But He is healing all who come to Him, including Gentiles. This would have broken normal protocol for a Jewish Rabbi, who would have exclusively been interested in teaching Jews or possible Jewish converts. Rabbis typically avoided interacting with Gentiles as much as they could.

Biblical Text

4:23-25 Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.