

NEW TESTAMENT VOLUME

New Commentary on

Matthew 3 & 4

Based on the classic commentary of
Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown

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Chapter 3

1-12 THE PREACHING AND MINISTRY OF JOHN (SEE MARK 1:1-8; LUKE 3:1-18.)

For the proper introduction to this section, we must go to Luke 3:1, 2. Here, as Bengel well observes, the curtain of the NT is, as it were, drawn up, and the greatest of all epochs of the church begins. Even our Lord's own age is determined by it (Luke 3:23). No such elaborate chronological precision is to be found elsewhere in the NT, and it comes fitly from Luke, who claims it as the particular recommendation of his Gospel, that "he had traced down all things with precision from the very first" (1:3). Thus, the reader should see the comments on Luke 3:1, 2 because they introduce the reader to material that precedes this narrative.

1 In those days—of Christ's secluded life at Nazareth (2:23). **came John the Baptist, preaching**—about six months before his Master. **in the wilderness of Judaea**—the desert valley of the Jordan, thinly peopled and with hardly any vegetation, a little north of Jerusalem.

2 And saying, Repent ye—Though the word strictly denotes “a change of mind,” it has respect here (and whenever it is used in connection with salvation) primarily to that sense of sin which leads the sinner to turn away from his sin to God for salvation. **for the kingdom of heaven is at hand** [or, near]—This sublime phrase, used in none of the other Gospels, occurs in this peculiarly Jewish Gospel nearly thirty times, alluding to Daniel’s grand vision of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of days, to receive his investiture in a worldwide kingdom (Dan. 7:13, 14). John declared that this kingdom was near. This heavenly kingdom may not have been the kind of kingdom the Jews were anticipating, for they were looking for an earthly kingdom in the political domain. Christ’s coming would bring a heavenly kingdom with a spiritual domain—inside the hearts of men. Such a kingdom required repentance from its participants, so that they might receive deliverance from sin’s rule in their lives. John’s great work, accordingly, was to awaken this feeling and hold out the hope of a speedy and precious remedy.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias [Isaiah] saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness—see comments on Luke 3:2. **Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight**—This prediction is quoted in all the four Gospels, showing that it was regarded as an outstanding one, and the predicted forerunner as the connecting link between the old and the new economies. Like the great ones of the earth, the Prince of Peace was to have his immediate approach heralded and his way prepared; and the call here—taking it generally—is a call to put out of the way whatever would obstruct his progress and hinder his complete triumph, whether those hindrances were public or personal, outward or inward. In Luke (3:5, 6) the quotation is thus continued: “Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” Leveling and smoothing are here the obvious figures whose sense is conveyed in the first words of the proclamation—“Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” The idea is that every obstruction shall be so removed as to reveal to the whole world the salvation of God in him whose name is the “Savior” (cf. Ps 98:3; Isa. 11:10; 49:6; 52:10; Luke 2:31, 32; Acts 13:47).

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair [woven of it] **and a leathern girdle about his loins**—the prophetic dress of Elijah (2 Kings 1:8; and see Zech. 13:4). **and his meat was locusts**—the great well-known Eastern locust, a food of the poor (Lev. 11:22), **and wild honey**—made by wild bees (1 Sam. 14:25, 26). This dress and diet, with the shrill cry in the wilderness, would recall the stern days of Elijah.

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan—From the metropolitan center to the extremities of the Judean province the cry of this great preacher of repentance and herald of the approaching Messiah brought myriad penitents.

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing [aloud] their sins—This baptism was at once a public seal of their felt need of deliverance from sin, of

their expectation of the coming deliverer, and of their readiness to welcome him when he appeared. The baptism itself startled them and was intended to do so. They were familiar enough with the baptism of proselytes from heathenism; but this baptism of Jews themselves was quite new and strange to them.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism—presumably, to be baptized by John, **he said unto them, O generation of vipers**—“Viper-brood,” expressing the deadly influence of both sects alike upon the community. Mutually and entirely antagonistic as were their religious principles and spirit, the stern prophet charged both alike with being the poisoners of the nation’s religious principles. In 12:34 and 23:33, the same strong language is applied by the faithful and true Witness to the Pharisees specifically—the only party that had enough zeal to diffuse this poison. **who hath warned you** [given you the hint] **to flee from the wrath to come?** One commentator said that they came to John’s baptism “from a sense of fear like snakes fleeing from a forest fire” (Nixon). However, it seems that John more than suspected it was not so much their own spiritual anxieties as the popularity of his movement that had drawn them there. What an expression this is, “The wrath to come!” God’s “wrath,” in Scripture, is his righteous displeasure against sin and consequently against all in whose lives sin is found. This wrath arises out of the essential and eternal opposition of his nature to all moral evil. This is called “the coming wrath,” not as being wholly future—for as a pronounced sentence it lies on the sinner already, and its effects, both inward and outward, are to some extent experienced even now—although the impenitent sinner will not have sentence publicly and irrevocably passed upon him and will not have it discharged upon him until “the judgment of the great day.” Nevertheless, the unrepentant are storing up wrath for themselves on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgments will be revealed (see Rom. 2:5, RSV). But all true believers are saved from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:10). Doubtless, those coming to John’s baptism did not have all this understanding concerning “the wrath to come,” but those who came to be baptized with all sincerity sensed that they were fleeing from the coming wrath.

8 Bring forth therefore fruits [the true reading clearly is “fruit”] **meet for repentance**—that is, such fruit as befits true repentance. John, now being gifted with a knowledge of the human heart like a true minister of righteousness and lover of souls, here directs them how to evidence and carry out their repentance, supposing it genuine; and in the following verses he warns them of their danger in case it was not.

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father—The Jews believed quite confidently that they would be the heirs of the Messiah’s kingdom because (and only because) they were the children of Abraham. But, as Paul so thoroughly argues in the Epistle to the Romans, the children of Abraham are the children of faith. **for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham**—i.e., “Flatter not yourselves with the delusion that God stands in need of you to make good his promise of a seed to Abraham; for I tell you that, though you were all to perish,

God is able to raise up children to Abraham out of stones.” Though the stern speaker may have pointed as he spoke to the pebbles of the bare clay hills that lay around, John was clearly alluding to the remnant of Jewish believers and vast number of Gentile believers. The Gentiles, at that time stone-dead in their sins, would soon take the place of the Jews in becoming the true children of Abraham (see Rom. 4 and 11).

10 And now also [And even already] **the axe is laid unto the root of the trees**—as it were ready to strike: an expressive figure of impending judgment, only to be averted in the way next described. **therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire**—Language so personal and individual as this can scarcely be understood of any national judgment like the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, in which the chosen people were extruded from their holy land and holy privileges, but John’s warning would serve as a dark shadow, cast before, of a more terrible retribution to come. The “fire,” which in another verse is called “unquenchable,” can be no other than that future “torment” and “everlasting punishment” (Matt. 25:46). The third Gospel here adds several important particulars (Luke 3:10-16).

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance [see comments on Luke 1:16]: **but he that cometh after me is mightier than I**—In Mark and Luke this is more emphatic—“But there cometh the mightier than I,” **whose shoes** [sandals] **I am not worthy to bear**—The sandals were tied and untied, and borne about by the lowest servants. **he shall baptize you**—the emphatic “He”: “He it is,” to the exclusion of all others, “that shall baptize you.” **with the Holy Ghost** [Spirit]—In saying this John demonstrated that, far from thinking that he had any equality with the Messiah, he considered himself to be Christ’s lowest servant. He, the servant, would baptize with water (the outward symbol of purification); the Lord Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit himself, and so dispense the inward, spiritual reality. **and with fire**—To take this as a distinct baptism from that of the Spirit—a baptism of the impenitent with hell-fire—is exceedingly unnatural. Yet this was the view of Origen among the Fathers and among several modern commentators. Nor is it much better to refer it to the fire of the great day, by which the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. The Greek has but one preposition, “in” (*en*), before the two nouns: “Spirit” (*pneuma*) and “fire” (*puri*), which indicates two aspects of one event. Thus, the Spirit-baptism is also a fire-baptism. The expression “fire” indicates the fiery character of the Spirit’s operations upon the soul—searching, consuming, refining, sublimating—as nearly all good interpreters understand the words. And thus, in two successive clauses, the two most familiar emblems—water and fire—are employed to set forth the same purifying operations of the Holy Spirit upon the soul. It was prophesied in the OT that the Messiah would come to purify Israel with the refiner’s fire (see Mal. 3:2-5).

12 Whose fan [winnowing fork] **is in his hand**—ready for use. The winnower would throw the wheat stalks into the air with a winnowing fork. The chaff would be blown away, while the grain, being heavier, would fall to the ground. The grain would be collected for use, the chaff collected and burned; and

thus the threshing floor would be totally cleansed. The image shows how Christ separates the genuine and useful believers from the false and worthless. **and he will thoroughly purge his floor**—that is, the visible church. **and gather his wheat**—his true-hearted saints; so called for their solid worth (cf. Amos 9:9; Luke 23:31). **into the garner** [barn]—“the kingdom of their Father,” as this “garner” or “barn” is beautifully explained by our Lord in the parable of the wheat and the tares (13:30, 43). **but he will burn up the chaff**—empty, worthless professors of religion, void of all spiritual reality and character (see Ps. 1:4). **with unquenchable fire**—the strength of this apparent contradiction of figures: to be burnt up, but with a fire that is unquenchable; the one expressing the utter destruction of all that constitutes one’s true life, the other the continued consciousness of existence in that awful condition. Luke 3:18-20 provides further details of John’s speech.

13-17 THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST AND DESCENT OF THE SPIRIT (SEE MARK 1:9-11; LUKE 3:21, 22; JOHN 1:31-34.)

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him—Moses rashly anticipated the divine call to deliver his people, and for this was forced to flee the house of bondage and wait in obscurity for forty years more (Exod. 2:11). Not so this greater than Moses. He had now spent thirty years in privacy at Nazareth, gradually ripening for his public work and calmly waiting for the time appointed of the Father. Now it had arrived. Luke (3:21) has this important addition—“Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus being baptized . . .”—implying that Jesus waited until all other applicants for baptism that day had been taken care of before he stepped forward, that he might not seem to be merely one of the crowd. Thus, as he rode into Jerusalem upon a colt “which no one has ever ridden” (Luke 19:30, NIV) and lay in “a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid” (John 19:41, NIV), so in his baptism, too.

14 But John forbade him—rather, “was [in the act of] hindering him,” or “attempting to hinder him” (as is indicated by the Gk. imperfect tense). **saying I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?**—The emphasis of his most remarkable speech lies all in the pronouns: I (the servant) need to be baptized by you (the Master), and you (the Master) come to me (the servant)? That this was the emphasis in the Baptist’s words will be clearly seen if it be observed that he evidently regarded Jesus as himself needing no purification but rather qualified to impart it to those who did. And do not all his other testimonies to Christ fully bear out this sense of the words? But it were a pity if, in the glory of this testimony to Christ, we should miss the beautiful spirit in which it was borne—“Lord, must I baptize *you*? Can I bring myself to do such a thing?”

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now—“Let it pass for the present.” **for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness**—i.e., it is fitting for both of us (John and Jesus) to go through with the baptism—John to perform it and Jesus to receive it—because it was God’s will. Jesus was not fulfilling the righteous requirements of the law, for there was no law that required

baptism. Jesus was complying with the Father's demands and thus doing what was right and proper in accordance with the divine will. He did not *need* to be baptized, but by doing so he identified with a humanity that needed repentance and baptism, and presented himself as a model of obedience to the divine will. **Then he suffered him**—i.e., John permitted him to be baptized.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of [from] the water—Mark has “out of the water.” “and,” adds Luke (3:21), “while he was praying”; a grand piece of information. **the heavens were opened**—Mark says, “He saw the heavens, being split open” (Gk.) The “open heaven” is referred to in prophetic visions (Ezek. 1:1; Rev. 4:1; 19:11) and times of heavenly unveilings (Acts 7:56). **and he saw the Spirit of God descending**—that is, he only saw it, with the exception of his honored servant, as he tells us himself (John 1:32-34); the bystanders apparently saw nothing. **like a dove, and lighting [coming] upon him**—The simile of “Spirit” and “dove” primarily indicates here that the Spirit of God's descent was like the descent of a dove; the other meaning (and this is the one made explicit in Luke 3:22) is that the Spirit had a form like a dove's. And the fourth Gospel gives us one more piece of information here, on the authority of one who saw and testified of it: “John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.” And he adds that this last particular was expressly given him as part of the sign by which he was to recognize and identify him as the Son of God: “And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost [Spirit]. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:32-34). This perfectly compares with the predicted descent of the Spirit upon Messiah (Isa. 11:2): “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.” We cannot doubt that it was this permanent and perfect resting of the Holy Spirit upon the Son of God that was here visibly manifested.

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying This is—Mark and Luke give it in the direct form, “Thou art.” **my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased**—The verb in Greek is a constative aorist; it expresses the Father's constant delight and pleasure in his Son. This declaration from the Father to the Son echoes the prophetic statement made by God through Isaiah: “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations” (Isa. 42:1, NASB). Was this voice heard by the bystanders? From Matthew's form of it, one might suppose it so designed; but it would appear that it was not, and probably only John heard and saw anything peculiar about the great baptism.

Chapter 4

1-11 THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST (SEE MARK 1:12, 13; LUKE 4:1-13.)

1 Then—an indefinite note of sequence. But Mark’s word (1:12) fixes what we should have presumed was meant, that it was “immediately” after his baptism; and with this agrees the statement of Luke (4:1). **was Jesus led up**—i.e., from the low Jordan valley to some more elevated spot. **of the spirit**—the Holy Spirit immediately before spoken of as descending upon him at his baptism and abiding upon him. Luke, connecting these two scenes, as if the one were but the sequel of the other, says, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit . . .” (4:1, NIV). Mark’s expression has a startling sharpness about it—“Immediately the Spirit driveth him” (lit. “thrust him out”). (See the same word in Matt. 9:25; 13:52; Mark 1:43; 5:40; John 10:4.) The thought thus strongly expressed is the mighty constraining impulse of the Spirit under which he went; while Matthew’s more gentle expression, “was led up,” intimates how purely voluntary on his on part this action was. **into the wilderness**—probably the wild Judean desert. The particular spot which tradition has fixed upon has hence got the name of *Quarantana* or *Quarantaria*, from the forty days. **to be tempted**—The Greek word *peirazein* means simply to try or make proof of; and when ascribed to God in his dealings with men, it means and can mean no more than this. Thus, Genesis 22:1, “It came to pass that God did tempt Abraham,” or put his faith to a severe proof. (See Deut. 8:2.) But for the most part in Scripture the word is used in a bad sense and means to entice, solicit, or provoke to sin. Hence the name here given to the wicked one—“the tempter” (4:3). Accordingly, “to be tempted” here is to be understood both ways. The Spirit conducted him into the wilderness simply to have his faith tried; but as the agent in this trial was to be the wicked one, whose whole object would be to seduce him from his allegiance to God, it was a temptation in the bad sense of the term. Yet since he was God and could not sin in any way, whether by action, word, or inner desire (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26), we must not think that the devil could have succeeded in the temptation. The temptation, nevertheless, was real, for Hebrews 4:15 says he was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (NIV and NIV Study Bible). Jesus took the position of man, as a true human being, to defeat Satan (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8). Satan tempted him to leave that position and reassume only his divine office. Jesus resisted and thereby defeated Satan for the sake of all humanity. Now, as a trustworthy high priest, he can help all who are tempted (Heb. 2:18). There is an obvious parallel to Jesus’ success in overcoming the devil in contrast to Adam and Eve’s failure in resisting the devil. But the connection between Jesus’ wilderness temptation and Israel’s wilderness trial is even more noticeable. Each of Jesus’ retorts came from the Scripture, specifically from Deuteronomy 6–8. In that part of Deuteronomy, Moses recounted the wilderness trials and gracious provision of God. **of the devil**—The word signifies a slanderer, an accuser—one who accuses another. Hence that other name given him (Rev. 12:10): “The accuser of the brethren, who accuseth them before our God day and night.” Mark (1:13), says “He was forty days tempted of Satan,” a word signifying an adversary, one who lies in wait for, or sets himself in opposition to another. These and other names of the same fallen spirit point to different features in his character or operations.

2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights—Luke says, “When they were quite ended.” **he was afterward an hungered**—evidently implying that the sensation of hunger was unfelt during all the forty days; coming on only at their close. It was apparently so with Moses (Exod. 34:28) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8) for the same period. A supernatural power of endurance was of course imparted to the body, but this probably operated through a natural law—the absorption of the Redeemer’s Spirit in the dread conflict with the tempter. (See comments on Acts 9:9.) Had we only this Gospel, we should suppose the temptation did not begin until after this. But it is clear, from Mark’s statement, that “he was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan,” and Luke’s, “being forty days tempted of the devil,” that there was a forty days’ temptation *before* the three specific temptations afterwards recorded.

3 And when the tempter came to him—Evidently we do not have here a new scene. **he said, if thou be the Son of God**—In the first two tests, Satan said, “If you are the Son of God” not because he disbelieved Jesus’ divine sonship but because he wanted Jesus to act in accordance with his divine prerogatives and thereby fail to pass the test as a man. But the whole point of the test was for Jesus to take a man’s position in submission to God and to thwart Satan’s attacks on his humanity. **command that these stones be made bread**—rather, “loaves,” answering to “stones” in the plural; whereas Luke, having said, “Command this stone,” in the singular, adds, “that it be made bread,” in the singular. The sensation of hunger seems now to have come on in all its keenness—no doubt to open a door to the tempter, of which he is not slow to avail himself.

4 But he answered and said, It is written—in Deuteronomy 8:3. **Man shall not live by bread alone**—more emphatically, as in the Greek, “Not by bread alone shall man live.” **but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God**—Of all passages in OT Scripture, none could have been more appropriate: “The Lord . . . led thee [said Moses to Israel, at the close of their journeyings] these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:2, 3). Now, if Israel spent not forty days but forty years in a wilderness, where there were no means of human subsistence, not starving but divinely provided for, to prove to every age that human support depends not upon bread but upon God’s unfailing word of promise and pledge of all needful providential care, could Jesus depend upon any other sustenance but that which the Father would provide? True, the Son of God was able enough to turn stones into bread; but what the Son of God is able to do is not the present question, rather, What is man’s duty under want of the necessities of life? As man, therefore, Jesus would await the divine supply, not doubting that at the right time it would arrive. The second temptation in this Gospel is in Luke’s the third. That Matthew’s order is the right one will appear quite clearly in the sequel.

5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city—so called (as in Isa. 48:2; Neh. 11:1) from its being “the city of the Great King” (Ps. 48:2), the seat of the temple, the metropolis of all Jewish worship. **and setteth him on a pinnacle** [rather, the pinnacle] **of the temple**—a certain well-known projection. Whether this refers to the highest summit of the temple, which bristled with golden spikes (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 5.5, 6); or whether it refers to another peak, on Herod’s royal portico, overhanging the ravine of Kidron, at the valley of Hinnom—an immense tower built on the very edge of this precipice, from the top of which dizzy height Josephus says one could not look to the bottom *Antiquities*, 15.11, 5)—is not certain; but the latter is probably meant. Some commentators have thought that Satan was tempting Jesus to make a public display of his divinity—perhaps even prove by a sudden descent from the sky that he was the Messiah (a sign for which the Jews were looking—Mal. 3:1). But since Matthew says nothing about any people being present at this scene, the temptation must not have been related to a public manifestation.

6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God—As this temptation starts with the same point as the first—Satan’s determination to get Jesus to leave his standing as a man and seize upon his divine prerogatives—it seems clear to us that the one came directly after the other; and as the third temptation shows that the hope of carrying that point was abandoned, and all was staked upon a desperate venture, we think that the third temptation is thus shown to be the last, as will appear still more when we come to it. **cast thyself down**—“from hence” (Luke 4:9). **for it is written**—in Psalm 91:11, 12. Doubtless the tempter, having felt the power of God’s Word in the former temptation, was eager to try the effect of it from his own mouth (see 2 Cor. 11:14). **He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in** [rather, on] **their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone**—The quotation is precisely as it stands in the Hebrew text and in the Septuagint except that after the first clause the words “to keep thee in all thy ways” are here omitted. Not a few good expositors have thought that this omission was intentional, to conceal the fact that this would not have been one of “his ways,” i.e., of duty. But as our Lord’s reply makes no allusion to this but seizes on the great principle involved in the promise quoted, so when we look at the promise itself, it is plain that the sense of it is precisely the same whether the clause in question is inserted or not.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again—in Deuteronomy 6:16. In essence, Jesus said, “True, it is so written, and on that promise I implicitly rely; but in using it there is another Scripture which must not be forgotten: **Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God**—Preservation in danger is divinely pledged; Jesus would not create danger, either to put the promised security to the test, or to demand a display of it. To do so would be “to tempt the Lord thy God,” which, being expressly forbidden, would forfeit the right to expect preservation.

8 Again, the devil taketh him up [or unto] **an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them**—Luke (4:5) adds the important clause, “in a moment of time”—a clause that seems to furnish a key to the true meaning. That a scene was presented to our Lord’s

natural eye seems plainly expressed. But to limit this to that which the natural eye could take in, is to distort the expression “all the kingdoms of the world.” It remains, then, to gather from the expression “in a moment of time”—which manifestly is intended to intimate some supernatural operation—that it was permitted to the tempter to extend preternaturally for a moment our Lord’s range of vision and throw a “glory” or glitter over the scene of vision: a thing not inconsistent with the analogy of other scriptural statements regarding the permitted operations of the wicked one. In this case, the “exceeding height” of the “mountain” from which this sight was beheld would favor the effect to be produced.

9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee—“and the glory of them,” adds Luke. But Matthew, having already said that this was “showed him,” did not need to repeat it here. Luke (4:6) adds these other very important clauses, here omitted—“for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to” (NIV). Was this wholly false? We answer, Is not Satan three times called by our Lord himself “the prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)? Does not the apostle call him “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4)? And still further, is it not said that Christ came to destroy by his death “him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14)? No doubt these passages only express men’s voluntary subjection to the rule of the wicked one while they live. In this sense he speaks what is not devoid of truth when he says, “It has been given to me.” But how does he deliver this to whomsoever he wants? As employing whomsoever he pleases of his willing subjects in keeping men under his power. In this case his offer to our Lord was that of a deputed supremacy commensurate with his own, though as his gift and for his purposes. **if thou wilt fall down and worship me**—This was the sole but monstrous condition. No Scripture, it will be observed, is quoted now, because none could be found to support so blasphemous a claim. In fact, he has ceased now to present his temptations under the mask of piety, and he stands out unblushingly as the rival of God himself in his claims on the homage of men. Despairing of success as an angel of light, he throws off all disguise and with a splendid bribe solicits divine honor. This again shows that we are now at the last of the temptations and that Matthew’s order is the true one.

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan—Since the tempter has now thrown off the mask and stands forth in his true character, our Lord no longer deals with him as a pretended friend and pious counselor but calls him by his right name—his knowledge of which from the outset he had carefully concealed till now—and orders him off. **for it is written**—in Deuteronomy 6:13. **Thou shalt worship**—In the Hebrew text and in the Septuagint it is, “You shall fear”; but as the sense is the same, so “worship” is here used to show emphatically that what the tempter claimed was precisely what God had forbidden. **the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve**—The word “serve” in the second clause is one never used by the Septuagint of any but religious service; and in this sense exclusively is it used in the NT as we find it here. Once more the word “only,” in the second clause—not expressed in the Hebrew text and the Septuagint—is here added to bring out emphatically the

negative and prohibitory feature of the command. (See Gal. 3:10 for a similar supplement of the word “all” in a quotation from Deut. 27:26.)

11 Then the devil leaveth him—cf. Luke 4:2. **and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him**—or supplied him with food, as the same expression means in Mark 1:31 and Luke 8:3. Thus did angels to Elijah (1 Kings 19:5-8). Several good commentators think they ministered not only food, but supernatural support and cheer also. But this would be the natural effect rather than the direct object of the visit. And after having refused to claim the illegitimate ministrations of angels in his behalf, oh, with what deep joy would he accept their services when sent, unasked, at the close of all this temptation, direct from him whom he had so gloriously honored!

12-25 CHRIST BEGINS HIS GALILEAN MINISTRY. THE CALLING OF PETER AND ANDREW, JAMES AND JOHN. JESUS' FIRST GALILEAN CIRCUIT. (SEE MARK 1:14-20; 35-39; LUKE 4:14, 15.)

There is here a notable gap in history, which but for the fourth Gospel we should never have discovered. If we took the history of the Synoptic Gospels only, we could draw three inferences, each of which would be erroneous according to the testimony of the fourth Gospel: first, that our Lord awaited the close of John's ministry, by his arrest and imprisonment, before beginning his own; next, that there was but a brief interval between the baptism of our Lord and the imprisonment of John; and further, that our Lord not only opened his work in Galilee, but never ministered outside of it, and never visited Jerusalem at all, nor kept a Passover until he went there to become “our Passover, sacrificed for us.” The fourth Gospel alone gives the true succession of events; not only recording those important openings of our Lord's public work that preceded the Baptist's imprisonment—extending to the end of the third chapter—but so specifying the Passover which occurred during our Lord's ministry as to enable us to line up, with a large measure of certainty, the events of the first three Gospels according to the successive Passovers which they embraced. Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian, who, early in the fourth century, gave much attention to this subject, in noticing these features of the Evangelical Records, says (3:24) that John wrote his Gospel at the entreaty of those who knew the important materials he possessed, and he filled up what was lacking in the first three Gospels.

12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison—more simply, “was delivered up,” as recorded in 14:3-5; Mark 6:17-20; Luke 3:19, 20. **he departed into Galilee**—as recorded, in its proper place, in John 4:1-3.

13 And leaving Nazareth—The reason he left Nazareth is explained in Luke 4:16-30; in short, he was violently ousted by his own townspeople. **he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast**—maritime Capernaum, on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee; but the precise spot is unknown. (See comments on 11:23.) Our Lord seems to have chosen it for several reasons: four or five of the twelve disciples lived there; it had a considerable and mixed population, securing some freedom from that intense bigotry that characterized all places where Jews in large numbers dwelt nearly alone; it was central, so that

not only on the approach of the annual festivals did large numbers pass through it or near it, but on any occasion multitudes could easily be collected about it; and for crossing and recrossing the lake, which our Lord had so often occasion to do, no place could be more convenient. But one other reason for the choice of Capernaum remains to be mentioned—the only one specified by Matthew—i.e., Jesus went there to fulfill prophecy. **in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim**—the one lying to the west of the Sea of Galilee, the other to the north of it; but the precise boundaries cannot now be traced out. Matthew names these locations because of the messianic prophecy connected with them.

14, 15 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias [Isaiah] the prophet—see Isaiah 9:1, 2, or, as in the Hebrew text, 8:23 and 9:1. saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea—the coast skirting the Sea of Galilee westward—beyond Jordan—a phrase commonly meaning eastward of Jordan; but here and in several places it means westward of the Jordan. The word seems to have the general meaning of “the other side”; the nature of the case determining which side that was. **Galilee of the Gentiles**—so called from its position, which made it the frontier between the Holy Land and the external world. While Ephraim and Judah were separated from the world by the Jordan Valley on one side and the hostile Philistines on another, the northern tribes were on the direct highway of all the invaders from the north, in unbroken communication with the promiscuous races who had always occupied the heights of Lebanon, and in close and peaceful alliance with the most commercial nation of the ancient world, the Phoenicians. Twenty of the cities of Galilee were actually annexed by Solomon to the adjacent kingdom of Tyre, and formed, with their territory, the “boundary” or “offscouring” (Gebul or Cabul) of the two dominions—at a later time still known by the general name of “the boundaries [coasts or borders] of Tyre and Sidon.” In the first great deportation of the Jewish population, Naphtali and Galilee suffered the same fate as the transjordanic tribes before Ephraim or Judah had been molested (2 Kings 15:29). In the time of the Christian era this original disadvantage of their position was still felt; the speech of the Galileans betrayed them by its uncouth pronunciation (Matt. 26:73); and their distance from the seats of government and civilization at Jerusalem and Caesarea gave them their character for turbulence or independence, depending on whether it was viewed by their friends or their enemies.

16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up—The prophetic strain to which these words belong begins with Isaiah 7, to which chapter 6 is introductory, and goes down to the end of chapter 12. It belongs to the reign of Ahaz and turns upon the combined efforts of the two neighboring kingdoms of Syria and Israel to crush Judah. In these critical circumstances Judah and her king were, by their ungodliness, provoking the Lord to sell them into the hands of their enemies. What, then, is the relationship of this prophetic strain to the passage here quoted? First, Judah shall not perish because Immanuel, the virgin’s son, is to come forth from his loins. Next, one of the invaders shall soon perish, and the kingdoms of neither be enlarged. Further, while the Lord will be the

sanctuary of such as confide in these promises and await their fulfillment, he will drive to confusion, darkness, and despair the vast multitude of the nation who despised his oracles. This carries us down to the end of the eighth chapter of Isaiah. At the opening of the ninth chapter a sudden light is seen breaking in upon one particular part of the country, the part which was to suffer most in these wars and devastations—"the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee and the Gentiles." The rest of the prophecy stretches over both the Assyrian and the Chaldean captivities and terminates in the glorious messianic prophecy of chapter 11 and the choral hymn of chapter 12. This is the point seized on by Matthew. By Messiah's taking up his abode in those very regions of Galilee and shedding his glorious light upon them, the prediction was now fulfilled. The Light of life had come to those who dwelt in the darkness and lived under the shadow of death; in fact, the Light "dawned" (or, "sprung up") upon them. This indicates that the dawning of Jesus' ministry began with the people most alienated from God, the people—both Jews and Gentiles—who desperately needed the Light of life. Jesus had come to give this living light to all men (see John 1:5, 9; 12:46; and especially 8:12 which is nearly a paraphrase of Isa. 9:2 and Matt. 4:16).

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand—Jesus repeated the identical summons of his honored forerunner. Our Lord sometimes speaks of the new kingdom as already come—in his own person and ministry; and he sometimes speaks of a kingdom yet to come. In other words, Jesus' message concerning the kingdom carried with it a sense of "already here but not yet here." On one hand, the kingdom had already come because Jesus had come to be with his people and to call them to himself; on the other hand, the Kingdom in its consummate manifestation was yet to come.

18-22 THE CALLING OF PETER AND ANDREW, JAMES AND JOHN

18 And Jesus, walking—The word "Jesus" here does not appear in any Greek manuscripts; it was inserted by the KJV translators for the sake of continuity in the narrative. **by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter**—for the reason mentioned in 16:18.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me—rather, as the same expression is rendered in Mark, "Come ye after me." **and I will make you fishers of men**—raising them from a lower to a higher fishing, as David was from a lower to a higher form of shepherding (Ps. 78:70-72).

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship—rather, "in the ship," their fishing boat.

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father—Mark adds an important clause: "They left the ship and their father Zebedee in the ship with the *hired servants*"; showing that the family was well-off. **and followed him**—Two harmonistic questions here arise: First, was this the same calling as that recorded in John 1:35-42? Clearly not. For, **(1)** that call was given while Jesus was yet in

Judea: this, after his return to Galilee. **(2)** Here, Christ calls Andrew; there, Andrew solicits an interview with Christ. **(3)** Here, Andrew and Peter are called together: there, Andrew having been called, with an unnamed disciple, who was clearly the beloved disciple (see comments on John 1:40), went and brought Peter his brother to Christ, who then called him. **(4)** Here, John is called along with James his brother: there, John is called along with Andrew, after having had an interview with Jesus; no mention being made of James, whose call, if it then took place, would not likely have been passed over by his own brother. Thus far nearly all are agreed. But on the next question opinion is divided: Was this the same calling as that recorded in Luke 5:1-11? Many able critics think so. But the following considerations are against it. First, here in Matthew the four are called separately, in pairs: in Luke, all together. Next, in Luke, after a glorious miracle: here, the one pair are casting their net, the other are mending theirs. Further, here our Lord had made no public appearance in Galilee, and so had gathered none around him; he is walking alone by the shores of the lake when he accosts the two pairs of fishermen: in Luke, the multitude are pressing upon him, and hearing the word of God, as he stands by the Lake of Gennesaret—a state of things implying a somewhat advanced state of his early ministry, and some popular enthusiasm. Regarding these successive callings, see comments on Luke 5:1.

23-35 FIRST GALILEAN CIRCUIT

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues—These were houses of local worship. It cannot be proved that they existed before the Babylonian captivity; but as they began to be erected soon after it, probably the idea arose among the captives who did not have the Temple to go to. In our Lord's time, the rule was to have a synagogue wherever ten learned men or professed students of the law resided; and they extended to Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and most places of the dispersion. The larger towns had several, and in Jerusalem the number approached 500. In terms of eldership and mode of worship, the early Christian churches were modeled after the synagogue. **and preaching the gospel [proclaiming the glad tidings] of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness [every disease] and all manner of disease [every complaint]**—The word means any incipient malady.

24 And his fame went throughout all Syria—reaching first to the part of it adjacent to Galilee, called Syro-Phoenicia (Mark 7:26), and then extending far and wide. **and they brought unto him all sick people**—all that were ailing or unwell. [those] **that were taken with divers diseases and torments**—i.e., acute disorders. **and those which were possessed with devils**—that were demonized or possessed with demons. **and those which were lunatic**—lit. “moon-struck.” **and those that had the palsy**—paralytics, a word not naturalized when the KJV was made. **and he healed them**—These healings became his credentials and illustrations of “the glad tidings” which he proclaimed. After reading this account of our Lord's first preaching tour, can we wonder at what follows?

25 And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis [lit. “ten cities”]—a region lying to the east of Jordan, so called

as containing ten cities, founded and chiefly inhabited by Greek settlers. **and from Jerusalem and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan**—meaning from Perea. Thus not only was all Palestine moved by Jesus, but all the adjacent regions. But the more immediate object for which this is here mentioned is to give the reader some idea both of the vast concourse and of the varied complexion of eager attendants upon the great Preacher, to whom the astonishing discourse of the next three chapters was addressed. (Concerning the importance which our Lord himself attached to this first preaching circuit, and the preparation which he made for it, see comments on Mark 1:35-39.)