



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

## **Matthew 4:12-22** **English Standard Version** **March 31, 2019**

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, March 31, 2019**, is from **Matthew 4:12-22**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

**(Matthew 4:12) Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.**

John the Baptist was arrested for preaching about King Herod's immoral behavior. John's preaching of preparation for Jesus' coming ended after he was arrested. Before John the Baptist was arrested, some of John's disciples went to talk to Jesus. He taught them and He would later officially call some of them to become His disciples and fish for men (see John 1:35-42). After Jesus

withdrew to Galilee, He began His public preaching. He did not begin His ministry in Galilee to escape Herod or the possibility of arrest, but as the place where He would fulfill Scripture, officially call His first disciples, preach, work miracles (such as changing water into wine) and heal people of all their diseases.

**(Matthew 4:13) And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,**

Jesus left Nazareth, where people would have known Him only as Joseph's son and presumably a carpenter. He moved to Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee (a large freshwater lake that Luke calls the Lake of Gennesaret—Luke 5:1). Jesus probably made certain His mother would be cared for by His brothers before He left. To fulfill Scripture, Jesus needed to begin His new life and vocation in Galilee of the Gentiles. Capernaum was near the Jordan River, where Jesus may have visited John the Baptist and his disciples more than once during John's ministry, where John baptized Jesus, and where Jesus met Simon Peter and Andrew.

**(Matthew 4:14) so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:**

Jesus conducted His ministry with intention; nothing happened to Him by chance. Jesus chose to fulfill the law and the prophets by beginning His public ministry in Galilee to fulfill the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 9:1,2). In

addition to His powerful preaching and many miracles, one reason we know Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God is from His intentional fulfillment of so many prophecies in the Old Testament.

**(Matthew 4:15) “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—**

The land of Zebulun was named after the tenth son of Jacob. Zebulun was in Galilee and occupied south Galilee between Naphtali and Asher. Jonah was from Zebulun. Many Israelites from Zebulun were carried into captivity and dispersed among other nations by the Assyrians when they conquered the Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC.

Following their deportation, the Assyrians moved people from many other nations into the former Kingdom of Israel until eventually more Gentiles lived in Galilee than Israelites (or Jews). Because of the history of the Kingdom of Israel (the northern kingdom), parts of which became Galilee, many Gentiles lived there, and the people and the area were despised by the Jews who lived in the Kingdom of Judah (the southern kingdom). Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth was located within the borders of Zebulun.

Naphtali was the sixth son of Jacob. The land of Naphtali was located west of the Sea of Galilee, where the city of Capernaum was located. As part of the former Kingdom of Israel, Naphtali also included many Gentiles. During His lifetime, Jesus lived within the borders of both Zebulun and Naphtali.

**(Matthew 4:16) 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.”**

Led by the kings of Israel, the people of the Kingdom of Israel (the northern kingdom) turned to darkness (evil) and idol worship, and the people remained in darkness (a land of evil) until Jesus began to preach. When the ten tribes of Israel were dispersed in 722 BC, those who remained were afflicted and influenced even more by those the Assyrians moved into the former Kingdom of Israel who did evil and worshiped idols. All the people lived in spiritual darkness, for most of them had turned from the worship of the true God many generations earlier. They lived in the shadow of spiritual and physical death. If some true believers lived in Galilee (such as Mary and Joseph and their children), they suffered from the evil deeds and the spiritual darkness created by their pagan neighbors. Even as many believers suffer today in countries that are becoming increasingly spiritually dark. As Isaiah prophesied, when Jesus began to preach, they heard the truth and saw truth in action. Those enslaved by sin and evil powers lived under a sentence of death until Jesus preached the truth about God and God's Kingdom to them and they repented of their sins and turned to faith in Him. Jesus healed all their diseases and cast out their demons as signs that the kingdom of heaven was near. The Light of the world dawned on them.

**(Matthew 4:17) From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached repentance: people should turn from walking away from God to walking toward God in faithful obedience to God. John called people to repent and prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus called people to repent because as the Messiah (King), the Kingdom of heaven was at hand or in their midst. As the Son of God, Jesus performed the works of God and declared the truth of God. Jesus’ kingdom was not a kingdom of this world, but a spiritual kingdom of eternal love, justice, peace, and joy that people could enter when they believed in Him.

**(Matthew 4:18) While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.**

Having spoken to Jesus earlier, after John the Baptist had introduced Peter and Andrew to Jesus, with sound reason they knew enough about Jesus when He called them to follow Jesus immediately—though they did not know all that Jesus meant when He called them into His service. They served Jesus faithfully all their lives and tradition tells us that both Peter and Andrew were crucified because they were followers of Jesus and ministered in Jesus’ Name.

**(Matthew 4:19) And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”**

Though they did not know all that Jesus meant, they knew that they could catch a lot fish with their nets. Therefore, as followers of Jesus, they eventually learned how to “catch a lot of people”—lead them to saving faith in Jesus—by telling them the truth about Jesus. Through their teaching, many repented of their sins and entered the kingdom of God. What Jesus did to, in, and through them far exceeded their expectations.

**(Matthew 4:20) Immediately they left their nets and followed him.**

Without needing to know everything about the future Jesus planned for them, they *immediately* left their past vocation as fishermen behind them and began a new vocation that Jesus planned for them. Though they did return to fishing for fish from time to time. They trusted Jesus to meet their needs as they followed Him, and He did so as He gave them the benefits of eternal life—beginning in this life.

**(Matthew 4:21) And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.**

James and John were fishing partners of Peter and Andrew (see Luke 5:10). They could work together and

catch more fish when they dropped a net between their two boats. Therefore, we know that Jesus chose four disciples who knew how to cooperate and work together to achieve their goals and meet the needs of their families and others. If Peter and Andrew had not led James and John to meet Jesus earlier, they had surely told them all they knew about Jesus after they met Him. They had probably located their partnership businesses close to each other, and they would have had much time to talk about Jesus as they were fishing or mending their nets. They would have discussed Jesus with their families, so their families may not have been too surprised when they left their nets to follow Jesus. As a follower of Jesus, James was eventually beheaded. John would live into old age having written his gospel, three letters in the Bible, and the Book of Revelation

**(Matthew 4:22) Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.**

James and John also *immediately* obeyed Jesus—not as a blind leap of faith without knowledge—but knowing some truths about Jesus before He called them to follow Him. As Messiah (King), Jesus had the divine authority and power to call whomever He chose into His service. In addition to their knowing some truths about Jesus, the loving power and divine authority of Jesus influenced them to obey Jesus immediately. Today, believers follow Jesus for the same reasons (and today believers have the whole Bible) and (though imperfectly) as the direction of

their lives they obey Jesus immediately.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. When and why did Jesus begin His ministry in Galilee?
2. Do you think beginning a ministry in Galilee would be easy or difficult? Give a reason for your answer.
3. Do you think Peter, Andrew, James, and John knew much about Jesus when He called them to follow Him? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think Jesus called some fishermen to follow Him?
5. How was Jesus' preaching like John's preaching? How is preaching different from their preaching today?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly  
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Contact: P.O. Box 1052, Edmond, Oklahoma, 73083 and [lgp@theiblf.com](mailto:lgp@theiblf.com).