

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 70.8%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: John 4:1 – 4, Luke 3:19 – 20, Matthew 4:12, Mark 1:14, & Luke 4:14

Monday: John 4:5 – 7

Tuesday: John 4:8 – 45

Wednesday: Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:14 – 15 & Luke 4:14 – 15

Thursday: John 4:46 – 54

Friday: Luke 4:16 – 30

Saturday: Matthew 4:13 – 16 & Galilee Overview

Current # of email addresses in the group: 723

It's been since December 13th since our reading program ran out. I appreciate everyone's patience with the delay. You all have been so wonderful and supportive, and it's greatly appreciated.

I am excited to get back to the program! I will do my best to keep it going without many pauses or delays.

I hope you each enjoy this week's reading!

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep>

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH

You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:

<https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists>

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 112

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 757 – SUNDAY: April 26th

John 4:1 – 4, Luke 3:19 – 20, Matthew 4:12, Mark 1:14, & Luke 4:14

Daily Deep Dive:

John 4:2 – I think I spoke about this last week. Clearly Jesus Christ is not baptizing and instead, His disciples are doing it by His authority and therefore these baptisms are attributed to Him. If Jesus Christ had

baptized some people, this would likely have led to division and some people using that to elevate some people over others. We know from Josephus that John the Baptizer's ministry had been highly successful and large numbers came out to him. Here we can see that even larger numbers are coming to Jesus to be baptized.

John 4:3 – God the Father and Jesus had a plan that was meant to climax in the death of Jesus after a ministry of 3 ½ years. Jesus was strategic --- especially early in His ministry --- to try to avoid certain confrontations and the spreading of His fame more quickly than was dictated by that plan. Here Jesus now leaves Jerusalem and heads back to Galilee.

John 4:4 – It's interesting to me that it says "He needed" to go through the country of Samaria. The easier route, which was more level and had plenty of water access, was through the Jordan River Valley, but here He took a windy (twisting) and mountainous route that took Him through Samaria. Not only is this a more difficult route, the Samaritans and Jews had great animosity toward each other, so it's more contentious as well. So again, why did He take this path?

It's clear here that there is tension that is rising around Jesus and His ministry. We see in John 4:1, that Jesus became aware that the Pharisees are receiving reports about the success of His ministry and the large number of people who have come to Jesus to get baptized. Then in Matthew 4:12, we are told specifically that Jesus also heard that John the Baptizer was hauled off to prison. And this --- combined with the conflict He's anticipating with the Pharisees, leads Him to decide to depart to Galilee. But that still doesn't tell us why Jesus decided to travel through Samaria.

One, it was shorter. So, if He wanted to get out of Jerusalem and back to Galilee as soon as possible that would be the shortest route.

However, we need to talk about why John was put in prison, and the likely impact this had on Jesus' route.

You'll remember, after Herod the Great died, that his territory was divided up into four different regions. One of those regions belonged to Herod Antipas, also called Herod "the tetrarch" (ruler of a fourth part). He married a woman named Herodias. Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great, daughter of Aristobulus IV. We learn in Luke 3:19-20 that John the Baptizer had corrected Herod Antipas for marrying Herodias. This is because while she was still married to Philip (aka "Herod II" or "Herod Philip"), she left and married Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Perea. This marriage was adulterous because both were already married. It also broke God's law found in Leviticus 18:6, 16, 20:21. Herod the Great and his family were not Jews by birth, but claimed loyalty to the Jewish religion for political reasons. John the Baptizer exposed Herod Antipas for openly breaking God's law. John the Baptizer not only corrected Herod the Tetrarch because of Herodias, but because of his other evils. This shows that Herod Antipas demonstrated a pattern of wicked behavior. So his adulterous marriage was only one of the terrible things he did.

Matthew 4:12 – The NKJV says that John "had been put in prison". The Greek paredothē (παρεδόθη) means "to hand over", "to deliver up", "to betray", "to give into the hands of another". This same word (although a different form of the word) is also used in Mark 1:14. Scripture doesn't name the prison where they imprisoned John, but Josephus records the following: "Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, thought it best to put him to death. He was sent in chains to Machaerus, the fortress I have already mentioned, and there was slain." (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.5.2)

Machaerus was on the east side of the Dead Sea, in the province of Perea that was ruled by Herod Antipas. Here the mountain top fortress

(the ruins of which still exist today) was used as a royal palace, a fortress and a prison. John was extremely popular among the people, and this location was nearly impenetrable_--- which would discourage any attempt to try to free him.

Apparently, in order to avoid Jesus being arrested before the correct timing of God's plan, He went in the opposite direction to Galilee.

Day 758 – MONDAY: April 27th

John 4:5 - 7

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 5 – The city name that Jesus comes to in Samaria is Sychar. This is the only time this city is mentioned in the New Testament. Many scholars believe Sychar (a Greek name) was simply another name (or a local nickname) for Shechem. Today this is the area of Nablus, a city with about 150,000 people located in the West Bank. It's located between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

Some important events in the Old Testament occurred at this location (special thanks to Scott Ashley for this information):

- Abraham built an altar and was promised the land there (See Genesis 12:6-7)
- Jacob lived there and built an altar (see Genesis 33:18-20)
- After Dinah was raped, Simeon and Levi killed the men there (see Genesis 34)
- Joseph was sold into slavery not far from there, and his bones were buried there.
- The Israelites shouted the blessings and cursings back and forth across this area (Joshua 8:33 & 34) while renewing the covenant.
- Joshua records his last words to Israel there (Joshua 24).
- Ultimately, when the northern 10 tribes broke off and separated, this area became their capital (see 1 Kings 12:25).

Thayer's dictionary says the name Sychar means "Drunken". This may have been an insult name from the Jews to the Samaritans. The Jews and Samaritans had great animosity toward each other, and it could be very dangerous for a Jew to pass through this area.

As we look back at the history of the Northern 10 tribes of Israel, Jeroboam built Shechem and dwelt there (1 Kings 12:25) and is afraid that if the people under his rule go down to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices, they will kill him and return to have Rehoboam be their king (verse 27). He makes two gold calves and said "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" (verse 28). This was sin (verse 30)! You can further read verses 31 – 33 there to see the competing false religion he installed.

These Northern 10 Tribes would never have a good king from this point forward.

Eventually God would use Assyria to take these tribes into captivity (although some fled back to Judah during this time). The Israelites taken into Assyrian captivity would disappear from history and become known as the "lost 10 tribes of Israel". It was a practice of the Assyrian empire to uproot people and move them far from their home and relocate them in their empire. This caused people to lose everything: their homes, lands, identity, etc... It also served as a warning to those considering rebelling against them. So not only did Assyria largely move these northern 10 tribes out of this area (although some modern scholars believe a fairly significant amount of the northern Israelites remained in this area holding onto the false religious practices instituted under Jeroboam), they relocated many others from their empire back into this area. As new people came into this land, they brought their religions and practices with them. They may have also tried to learn about the "gods" of this land and ended up creating a blended religion with aspects of truth with paganism. God does not accept a blended form of worship. The Jews and Samaritans would

have conflicts leading up to the time of Jesus Christ. There was a real and strong hostility between these two groups of people.

Verse 6 – As we just covered in the previous verse, this area has a rich history for God’s people. I appreciate that we get verses like this that show us that Jesus got worn out from travel and life just like we do because He was fully a human being. The count of a day started at 6 AM in the morning, so the 6th hour is 12 noon (the heat of the day).

Verse 7 – Now we come to the fascinating story of the “Samaritan woman by the well”. This story has very little to do with water or Christ’s refreshment, and much more to do with identity, worship, access to God and the breaking of deeply rooted barriers.

Let’s first note that in Jewish first-century culture, it was generally unusual for a man, particularly a rabbi, to engage in extended conversation with a woman, especially one he did not know. We see the reaction of His disciples in verse 27 where they “marveled” at this. Not only was Jesus breaking rabbinic norms in this interaction, they likely were concerned over the reputation of Jesus by doing what many would consider “improper”. Jesus not only spoke with her, but He initiated the conversation. This should teach all of us an important lesson. We have to be careful not to place or be bound by barriers that prevent the sharing of the Gospel message with others. We can become comfortable in our own groups with people who largely think, know and act in ways that align with how we think and act. This can hinder us from sharing or interacting with “others”. Recently, Scott Delamater (Operation Manager, Media & Communication Services for UCG), gave a very good sermon that dives into how identities are formed --- and their impacts on how we judge and interact with “others”.

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/identity-judgment-and-unity-passover>

I would encourage you to listen to this sermon and consider how these tendencies have impacted you --- but also how Jesus Christ cast off that tendency here in this John 4 story.

Why is the time of day recorded as a detail for us? Woman typically came to draw water not in the heat of the day, but instead in the morning or evening (or more likely both) when it was cooler, as hauling several gallons of water in big clay jars was hard work. Why is this woman drawing at noon? One commonly held interpretation is that she is not socially welcome at the other times when the other women are around. Perhaps she has been socially isolated. Or it's possible, she is avoiding the others. Since it is uncommon for a woman to be there to draw water at this time, it seems self-evident, that Jesus is here to meet her specifically by God's design/orchestration.

Let's also notice that here Jesus simultaneously crosses three social barriers. One, He initiates a conversation with a woman. Two, He is with this Samaritan who had a syncretistic (blended) religion. Third, if the commonly held view is true (that she is living with a man she is not married to and committing adultery), then Jesus is here with this woman who was a known sinner. We know she has had five husbands, but is currently living with a man she's not married to, but I will present another possibility of her circumstances when we get to this verse.

There are so many stories and encounters of Jesus Christ that were never inspired to be recorded. So, it's important for us to remember that whatever is inspired to be recorded is never an accident or meaningless. Jesus Christ wasn't afraid to speak with, work with and engage with this woman. He also wasn't afraid of what others might think about this. It's also important to notice that He did not do this in private or behind closed doors, but spoke with her in a public location. There are many important lessons we can draw from all of this. We'll continue to dive into this more as we go verse-by-verse.

Day 759 – TUESDAY: April 28th

John 4:8–45

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 8 – With the disciples gone buying food, having their own interactions and potential thoughts about what in the world they were doing in Samaria, this gives Jesus an opportunity to talk to this woman in a public space, but without their reactions of possible “offense” to the situation, and without subjecting her to possible embarrassment and shame.

Verse 9 – This scripture helps to frame this story in the very real tension that existed between these two groups and how unusual of a conversation this would have been.

Verse 10 – Several chapters later in John 7:37-39, we will come to the very important and profound statement of Jesus where He said: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, [which] those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

Water was very important, it was directly tied to their physical survival. From this simple request for water, Jesus shifts the message from temporary satisfaction to “eternal” life and eternal satisfaction. He moves from a common physical need to her deep spiritual need. He begins a process of bringing her to see her deep “spiritual” thirst.

In Jeremiah 2:13 it says: "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water."

Also later in Jeremiah 17:13 he states: "O LORD, the hope of Israel, All who forsake You shall be ashamed. "Those who depart from Me Shall be written in the earth, Because they have forsaken the LORD, The fountain of living waters."

In Isaiah 55:1 – 3 it says: "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come,

buy wine and milk Without money and without price. Why do you spend money for *what is* not bread, And your wages for *what* does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat *what is* good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you— The sure mercies of David.”

This is what was Jesus was beginning to offer her.

Verse 11 - It's important to understand that we read the term “living water” through the above understanding of the Holy Spirit and it's spiritual meaning. However, the phrase “living water” was understood at the time. This was not something Jesus invented at that moment. It was already a common expression in Jewish and Near Eastern culture. Living water at that time was flowing, fresh water, like you would get from a stream, spring or river. It was a phrase that stood in contrast to “stagnant water” (water that has sat and become stale or contaminated).

When this woman hears Jesus talk about “living water”, she first hears it in the ordinary sense.

She's puzzled, and says you are asking me for a drink from this well, but you clearly don't have anything to even draw water from here. Where are you going to get this “living water” from. She asks “where”. Where is this secret “living water” source?

Verse 12 – She's standing at Jacob's well. It's deep, it's ancient, and it's respected. She asks an important question. And we obviously understand the answer to her question was “Yes I AM greater than our Jacob!”.

Verses 13-14 – People have referred to the concept of a “God-shaped hole”. A metaphorical concept describing that human beings have an

innate spiritual void or emptiness that can only be filled by having a relationship with God. I think this is true. In the absence of filling our lives with true meaning, purpose and fulfillment, mankind (even Christians) can strive to fill the void with things that are temporary and unfulfilling --- and this leads to feeling the unfilled void.

Everything physical is temporary. Filling physical thirst only lasts for a short time, and then we are thirsty again.

At baptism, and through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17, 19:6; 2 Timothy 1:6), we are given God's Holy Spirit. But it's only a small amount of Their spiritual essence. It will spring up throughout life to its ultimate fulfillment of becoming a God-being at the first resurrection (at the second coming of Jesus Christ per 1 Corinthians 15:35–57).

Again, Jesus is striving to bring her to a place where she comes to see her emptiness. I can only imagine the emptiness involved in having 5 husbands and now living with someone else seeking love, fulfillment, stability, safety, etc...

Verses 16 through 18 – Jesus Christ appears to accomplish two things through this command. He is going to cause her to have to consider her life and her current state, and He is going to reveal that she is speaking with someone who “sees” her. He sees her life, her heart and her secrets --- and still is having a conversation and relationship with her.

I do want to share that it's possible that she's not living in adultery with the current man. This has been translated, as brought out in the Adam Clarke's commentary: “There is no husband whom thou now hast - or, less literally, Thou hast no husband now: probably the meaning is, Thou art contracted to another, but not yet brought home: therefore, he is not yet thy husband.” [END QUOTE].

Women at that time in the Jewish world could be divorced for almost any reason. If you didn't bear the husband a son, or were barren, or he simply didn't care for her (looks, cooking, etc.). We assume it was similar, if not the same, in Samaria. A woman divorced, could move back home if that was a possibility, could remarry, could turn to prostitution for money, could become homeless and a beggar, or she could find a man willing to provide the basic necessities of shelter, food and clothing for her to essentially become a personal slave. That's the sad reality for women at that time in a world that had terribly gone astray from God's original design and intent.

I say all of that to say, we aren't given the exact specifics of her situation and we should be careful not to add to God's word. We can wonder, and speculate, but we have to be clear about what we know and what we don't.

Verse 20 – Now with more understanding of who she is talking to, she begins to ask religious questions. As we talked about before, Jeroboam changed worship away from Jerusalem, but she wants to know if the Samaritans or the Jews are doing it right. She may be considering offering a worship sacrifice to God based on this conversation. But where?

Verse 21 – We see clearly that worshiping God the Father is the direction Jesus gives, but that the time was coming in the very near future that WHERE that took place would no longer be centered on a location. The New Testament Church was about to be spread around the world, far from Jerusalem.

Verse 22 – The Samaritans had a blended set of religious practices, like Christian denominations around the world today. And most have no idea why and what they do, and often who they are truly worshiping (see 1 Corinthians 10:20; Revelation 9:20).

The Jews, while having their own problems and human nature, here in the 1st century they offered the prescribed offerings of the Law and worshiped God in Jerusalem and on His Holy Days (although there were obvious periods where they veered off into paganism or syncretism themselves).

It's important to see that Christ does not "wink" at mixing truth, and saying it's all fine. He also clearly teaches her that "salvation" comes from (or through) the Jews. Jesus Christ was Jewish. The Savior of mankind came through the Jews.

Verse 23 – However, there was a large and important shift now taking place. Salvation through Jesus Christ wasn't only being made available to the Jews, but to all of mankind (compare Romans 1:16).

Here Christ makes a delineation between "true worshipers" and those who are not true worshipers. To be a true worshiper, you must worship in both spirit and truth. The Samaritans weren't worshipping in truth, and therefore they were not "true worshipers". That's also true with many today. It doesn't mean that they are "bad" people and don't follow God to the best of their current understanding, but "truth" is "truth". Most today are still blinded by the god of this world and the gospel is still veiled to them (2 Corinthians 3:14; 4:3). For people to understand the truth (aligned with God's Word, reality, and right understanding), God must open their eyes to be able to understand (1 John 5:20).

Her question was about the "correct location" to worship, but Jesus showed that the location (where) wasn't what was important now, but how to worship was what was important! In verse 24, John tells us that God IS Spirit! It's what He IS. It's His composition from the inside out. We are to worship in Spirit. The Greek word pneuma (πνεῦμα), can work on multiple levels, from the Spirit that makes up God, but also, our breath, the inner life of a person, even our heart, mind, and attitudes. For true worship, having the truth is not enough! We must

also worship with truth, with our whole heart, mind, attitudes, actions, etc... That's what God was and is seeking (consider Deuteronomy 6:5; Romans 12:1- 2).

Verse 25 – The woman knew of the coming Messiah, and she knew He would be able to fix or explain what they didn't know and understand.

Verse 26 – This is the earliest and clearest direct self-declarations of Jesus' identity as the Messiah (Christ). In Matthew 15:24, Jesus plainly states "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This Samaritan woman, who had already stated that Jacob was their father, was a lost sheep of the house of Israel. We might say, "you don't get more lost than this." It's a beautiful reminder of God's faithfulness, compassion, mercy and love.

Verse 27 – At this perfect exact moment, in ways that only happen by God's perfect orchestration, the disciples now come.

They have so much to unlearn. They are impacted by the society they live in. As mentioned before, women in Jewish society at the time, are thought of as being lesser than men. We see Jesus treat women, and the Gospel accounts highlight women, in ways that were not common at that time. We should notice this, and it should cause us to question how our society impacts our view of men and women as well, versus God's true design.

Legally, a women's witness testimony was not thought of as equal with men. They had unequal rights (we already talked about the unequal divorce rights). Rabbi's had differing opinions on whether women had any opportunity to be a part of God's Kingdom. Many rabbis wouldn't even speak to their own wife or sister in public.

John Gill's commentary states: "according to the Jewish canons, it was not judged decent, right, and proper, nor indeed lawful, to enter into a conversation, or hold any long discourse with a woman."

As we continue through the Gospels account, try to take notice of how often women are highlighted, elevated, shown for their faith, used their own recourses, etc... It's a very clear counter-culture message woven into the Gospels.

While no one outwardly questioned Jesus here for talking to her, it's clear from it being recorded that these questions weren't verbally asked, but they were thinking it.

Verse 28 – This is one of those moments, that you stop what you are doing (she leaves the jug and water behind and runs to tell everyone she knows what just happened). Compare how early in John 1:41 Andrew did the same.

Verse 32 – It is so very exciting and refreshing to Jesus about His Father's work and to see people who are responding and seeking. It's what He lived for – to share the Gospel message!

Verse 35 – Christ tells them to look and see that while physical harvest of the lands were a ways off, right here before their eyes, there was a harvest of people ripe!

Verses 36 - 38: This section is true for the church today. How many of us became aware of the truth and were drawn to God through some efforts of people who likely lived and died doing God's Work. Maybe those individuals are still alive who God used to plant the seeds of the truth in your heart. We now work in various capacities both scattering seed that God may use to teach others, and/or we have the great joy of helping reap those that germinated from previously scattered seed. We all share in that great joy together, doing our small pieces, to help God with His great harvest of lives.

Verses 40 - 41 – I love this story. Here Christ stays for two days with those who a “typical” Jew would never have stayed with. God used this Samaritan woman to bring many to believe in Christ! This is another incredible Biblical example of God using a woman to advance His purpose in the lives of those He is trying to reach. It's also worth noting that she is never named. In that way, she serves as an example of how God can work through anyone, at any time, as He chooses.

Verse 44 – Compare Matthew 13:57

Day 760 – WEDNESDAY: April 29th

Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15

Daily Deep Dive:

Matthew 4:17 – I covered this in week 108 (week 1 of the New Testament), but Matthew writing to a Jewish audience who didn't like to use God's name (reverential reluctance to avoid breaking the third commandment), uses Kingdom of Heaven to this audience. It means the same as “Kingdom of God”.

What did it mean that the Kingdom “is at hand?” In the Greek this is one word: ēngiken (ἤγγικεν). This word means “to come near”, “to draw close”, or “to approach”. Here in this verse it is in the present tense, meaning, “something has come near and is now present/remains near”.

Listeners in the first century would have understood this to mean that the Kingdom of Heaven was not distant and not theoretical, it's not just getting close, but instead that it's right here – within reach, it's right here on your doorstep, and therefore requires a response right now. It's meant to cause one to have to decide about how they are going to live immediately.

Mark 1:15 – John Mark adds a bit more than Matthew of the words at this time of Jesus. The New Testament uses two different Greek words for “time”.

One is the Greek Chronos (χρόνος). The Greeks commonly used this word when measuring the more quantitative aspects of time --- such as when something happened in order, or how much time is passing by. An example of this is found in Matthew 2:7. I like to think of this as “clock” or “calendar” time. These units are measured and determined.

However, in Mark 1:15, a different Greek word is used for “time”. This is the Greek Kairos (καιρός). While both Greek words are used many times in the New Testament, kairos is used even more. Kairos has to do with something occurring at the “right timing”. Several events possibly coming together to form the “right time” for something now to happen. If you would like to hear more on this, I gave a sermon on these two words entitled “Reading or Misreading Time”.

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/reading-or-misreading-time>

Here in this verse, God had carefully chosen the exact time His Son would be born in the flesh and carry out His ministry here on earth and ultimately give His life for the sins of mankind. We talked in past lessons about the perfect timing of the first century within Rome, and how if Jesus Christ had come a hundred years before or after, how different everything would have been for Him --- and why that was not what God wanted. The timing of Jesus Christ’s first coming was a remarkable intersection of history, culture, politics, and language that all aligned in a way that uniquely enabled the rapid spread of the Gospel. The Koine Greek language was serving as a universal bridge across the Mediterranean world. The Old Testament had already been written into Greek (the Septuagint), and the New Testament would also be written into Greek, making scripture accessible beyond Hebrew speakers. The Bible would not need to be translated into dozens of local languages to be accessible. Rome was in a period of peace (Pax Romana), and had built an extensive road system (allowing efficient travel across vast distances). There was safe sea routes and legal systems that were beneficial to the spread of the Gospel. Synagogues

at that time existed throughout the Roman empire, which would serve as starting points for preaching to both Jews and “God-fearers”. None of this was by accident. The “Kairos” was perfect. God had orchestrated everything to come together at the perfect time (Kairos) for His Son to preach.

Mark’s account also included “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”

This is still the command today.

First, Christ said to “repent”. The Greek here is recorded in the present tense, active voice, imperative mood, meaning this call to repentance was not a one-time emotional moment or a single act, but instead was an ongoing, continuous lifestyle (repeated behavior). Essentially, Christ was saying, “You all repent and keep on repenting throughout your lives”. In all of this is a reorientation of our thinking, a transformation of values, and a redirection of life, on a continuous ongoing basis.

They were to believe in the Gospel. This is belief, faith, trust in action in one’s life for the Good News of God’s Kingdom availability.

Luke 4:14 – Here Luke is inspired to record still different facets than either Matthew or Mark. Luke records that Jesus returned to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit”. This is meant to show us that Jesus is not willy-nilly wondering about in His ministry. Through God’s Spirit working in Christ’s life, He is being led where God wants Him. Additionally, Jesus was empowered by the Spirit. His ability to teach, do miracles, cast out demons, etc., was not by His own abilities, but through God via the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ will clearly teach when we come to John 5:19, 30 that He can “do nothing” of Himself.

Luke 4:15 – As news of His teaching and miracles spreads, Jesus begins teaching publicly. Jesus ministry was very public, not in corners or in secret. At His arrest in Matthew 26:55, Jesus says to them "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me."

He was a teacher, and daily He taught in their public spaces where people would gather to hear scripture expounded. It says through this He was “glorified by all”. This word in Greek carries the meaning of “praised, honored, and celebrated”.

Day 761 – THURSDAY: April 30th

John 4:46-54

Daily Deep Dive:

Verse 46 – The Greek translated here “nobleman”, is likely better translated to “royal official”. NLT & ISV translates it “government official”. Other translations say “official”, “important official”, “attendant”. Thayer’s primary definition states: “of or belong to a king, kingly, royal, regal”. That’s why I prefer “royal official”.

Who was this “royal official”? This area is under the control of Herod Antipas. The same Herod who threw John the Baptizer into prison. It’s likely that this official knows Herod Antipas or Herod’s wife. He also likely knows that Jesus is the cousin of John the Baptizer. It seems he is taking some considerable risk with Herod Antipas by consorting with someone from the same “cause”. However, his son is very sick (“very weak” and “without strength” from the Greek). We learn in the next verse he’s about to die.

Some believe this could be Chuza (from Luke 8:3) or Manaen (from Act 13:1). It does make sense to me that this person would have become a follower of Jesus Christ after this, but ultimately, we don’t know.

Verse 47 – Cana to Capernaum was about 16 to 20 miles (25 to 32 kilometers) away, maybe further depending on how curvy the road was of the day. This was about a full day’s journey for a typical pace, maybe even a day and a half depending on the exact distance. I share that, because this isn’t just a request to walk for an hour and come right

back. In addition, this shows us that this official also spent considerable effort to get to Jesus, not knowing if He would help him.

Verse 48 – These words are not said specifically to the “royal official”, but the Greek words “you see” and “you (not) believe” are plural, meaning “you all”. At this point, Jesus Christ has performed miracles, that’s why the people are here and gathered to Him. But they wanted more and more and more “signs and wonders” before they would have faith in Him. As I consider this, and to try to make this personal, I would ask us to consider how much God has to do in our lives for us to have complete faith in Him? How many times does God have to intervene for us to give Him our whole lives? To trust Him with everything?

Verse 50 – The man initially believes and is expecting to try to convince Jesus to make this long day (day-and-a-half) journey with Him. And yet, when Christ tells him his son lives the man believes, and begins the journey home. This is the type of faith Jesus wanted to see from all those watching in the crowd. They saw nothing --- the man saw nothing --- yet he believed Jesus.

Verses 51 to 53 – Here the man has now traveled into the next day after leaving Jesus, and we learn that the original miracle was done at about 1 PM (the 7th hour). So, after the son’s fever left and he was well, the servant and this royal official both began to travel --- and likely met somewhere in the middle of this journey. This whole household would come to believe in Jesus.

This is often how God uses trials to reach people, and further refine them. If this son never got sick, then the royal official would never have had this faith building moment, and this household wouldn’t come to have faith in Christ.

Where has God used trials in your life to grow your faith and transform you in ways that without that trial, you wouldn’t have grown?

Day 762 – FRIDAY: May 1st

Luke 4:16–30

Daily Deep Dive:

Luke 4:16 – Here we see, speaking to a Gentile audience, is clear to show that Jesus had the practice of going to the synagogues on the Sabbath day. We as Sabbath keepers, say “well of course He would.” But Luke is making sure that everyone in the Gentile world knows Christ did this. This is important --- especially later as the Sabbath controversy grew. Without this, and other such recordings, we might wonder, did He keep the Sabbath, but avoid the Jewish synagogues? Did He just keep the Sabbath with His disciples? But it was His practice, to go to the synagogues on the Sabbath, and at some point, He began participating in reading scripture (possibly around age 12 or 13, but more likely as an older teen or adult).

Luke 4:17-20 - Here we are told that Jesus is handed the scroll of Isaiah, but then He found a certain place in Isaiah and reads what is contained in verses 18 & 19. This is taken from both Isaiah 61:1 and part of verse 2 (and perhaps Isaiah 42:7).

Regarding this section, I would like to copy part of a transcript from a class Scott Ashley taught on this section, as he does an excellent job covering why this section was so impactful: “So this is quoting from Isaiah 61. So, let's see what Jesus read --- and more importantly --- what He did not read --- because that's key to understanding what is going on here. So Isaiah 61 says, ***“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,”*** And Jesus stops there --- mid-sentence, mid-thought --- and doesn't read the rest of this prophetic passage from Isaiah. But let's continue on and see what it says --- and how and what this meant to these devoutly religious Jews

of Galilee (and of Nazareth who were in the synagogue that day). So the part Jesus stops at is this. He “has anointed Me to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” So Jesus reads that and stops. But Isaiah goes on, “***And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.***” And next is a part that really struck a chord with these very religious Jews from Galilee --- because they see themselves in this prophecy. So the prophecy continues from Isaiah, “***And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations.***” And the Jews of Galilee absolutely loved this part --- because that's what they saw themselves as doing. They saw themselves fulfilling this prophecy of Isaiah. In other words, they have moved to Galilee from --- again --- from over in Babylon, or from up from Judah (from Jerusalem, Hebron Bethlehem, places like that) --- up and they've come to Galilee to do what this prophecy tells us --- to rebuild the old ruins. That's referring to the towns and villages that have been wiped out several centuries earlier by the Assyrians when they came through and deported the Israelites. So they see themselves as coming back and rebuilding the land, replanting the land for Israel --- for the Messiah to have a place to come to. So this was very, very important to them. And they just love this because they see them themselves fulfilling this prophecy here. Another couple of thousand years off --- but who's counting? They don't realize that. And now we come to the part that they really, really loved. Verse 5, “***Strangers*** --- And this word “strangers” in Hebrew, the word literally means “nations”. And that's exactly what the word “Gentiles” means. So as far as the Israelites --- the religious Jews here rather --- reading this --- they would read this, “***Strangers [Gentiles] shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the foreigners (i.e., Gentiles) shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.***” So the way

the religious Jews of Galilee read this at the time --- things are finally going to be flipped around and turned right-side-up --- because for centuries the Jews have been under the dominion of the Gentiles (under the Babylonians, under the Assyrians, under the Persians, under the Greeks, and then under the Syrians, and now under the Romans). And they love this prophecy because this prophecy says, "Okay. The time is coming when the Gentiles will be feeding your flocks. And the Gentiles will be plowing your fields --- and taking care of your vineyards, and so on." **But you** (verse six) **shall be named the priests of the LORD. They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast.** So the Jews of Galilee love this prophecy --- because it's describing them coming in and rebuilding the destroyed cities --- and making a land ready for the Messiah to show up. And then they are going to be elevated over the Gentiles --- and the Gentiles are going to be serving them, instead of the other way around. And now they will have the opportunity to oppress the Romans and the other Gentiles --- as the Gentiles had oppressed them all of these centuries. And this is what the people there in the synagogue that day are expecting Jesus to read --- because it's one of their favorite passages of scripture. And they knew the Messiah was coming to establish this Jewish kingdom, and then **they** will be in charge over these nasty, dirty rotten Gentiles (as they see it). But rather than reading their favorite part, Jesus stops halfway through the second verse, "**To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,**" And looking at it from our perspective today, we know why He stopped there. We understand that in His first coming, Jesus would fulfill only the parts of the prophecy that He read there that day in the synagogue. He would not fulfill the remainder of this prophecy until His second coming in glory and power to fulfill this prophecy and many other prophecies. But those who heard Him that day in the synagogue didn't know that. They see Jesus stand up and read from Isaiah --- clearly claiming to fulfill several well-known Messianic prophecies --- meaning that He's claiming to be the Messiah right then and there. And

then He stops just before He gets to what they consider to be the really good part. So, the atmosphere in the synagogue that day in Nazareth is absolutely electric at that part. They know Jesus is performing miracles. They've got to be suspecting --- Is He (they've got to be asking) "Is He the Messiah? Is He not? And then He starts reading from one of the most well-known prophecies about the Messiah. And they want to know --- why did He stop just before He got to the good part --- and what's He going to say next? What's really going on here? And against all expectations, what happens is He rolls up the scroll, hands it back to the attendant, and He sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on Him." [END TRANSCRIPT PASTE FROM SCOTT ASHLEY]

Verse 21 – In English, we might read "is fulfilled" and think it was done and finished. In the Greek, this is written in the perfect tense meaning "a completed action with ongoing, present results".

In other words, something has been brought to its completion, and the effects/or impact of that completion is still in force now.

He is clearly claiming to have brought this well-known Messianic prophecy to its fulfillment and would be bringing all that it entailed to pass, and therefore clearly claiming to be the Messiah/Christ.

Verse 22 – Because of His bold claim, we see people in amazement, but then ask "Isn't this Joseph's son?". In other words, we know this guy, He's a Nazarene, we know where He came from and his parents, He's one of us, how can He be the Messiah? Perhaps, who does He think He is in claiming to fulfill this great prophecy?

Verse 23 – Commentaries bring out that by saying "heal thyself", by the following context, they are meaning that if He's who He is claiming to be, then He should do miracles there and take care of His own place (Nazareth – "Your country").

Verse 24 – Sometimes it's easier for someone to respect someone they just met, just heard a sermon from for the first time, etc... People who know us, have seen us grown up, know our families, can have a harder time accepting what God is doing through someone. They might be less likely to see the gifts God has imparted through His Spirit in someone. If that's true for Jesus, how much would that be true for all of us who God has called and given His Truth?

Is there anyone in our lives, who God is using in an amazing way, yet, because we are so familiar with them, we don't benefit from what God is doing through them due to our own blindness?

Verses 25 & 26 – You can read this account again in 1 Kings 17. We can easily miss the depth of what Jesus was trying to show and teach these people, and why it upset them so much. He is saying, throughout Israel, there were many widows in great need. But that's NOT where God sent Elijah, to any of those widows to do a great miracle and provide for her. Where was Elijah sent? To Sidon! Sidon was not in Israel, it was a gentile city. He was sent to a gentile widow in a gentile land. That's where God worked this amazing miracle!

Verse 27 – If that didn't prove the point, Jesus gives a second example/witness. There were many lepers in the land of Israel, but which leper did God use Elisha to cleanse? Only Naaman the Syrian! His people were enemies of the Israelites, and Naaman was a general in their army!

Now Jesus was healing and doing miracles in Israel, but He is using this example to show them that due to their hard hearts, God wasn't going to do great miracles there in Nazareth. It offends these "chosen people" greatly that God's mercy includes the despised Gentiles around them. This just ticks all of them off (see verse 28).

Verse 29 - I'm going to again include an excerpt from a class Scott Ashley taught: "Jewish law even specified how a person was to be

stoned to death. And it was very specific. It wasn't something that was just done in a haphazard manner. There were specific rules that had to be followed --- and the first rule was that the person who was to be stoned to death had to be brought to the edge of a cliff that was at least 12 cubits high (about 18 feet, or the height of a two-story building). And the person was to be thrown off there. And if there wasn't a cliff handy, you could take the person to the top of a two-story house or a tower or walls around the city --- and throw him off. And then the person would be stunned by the fall --- possibly knocked unconscious --- and then, the rules went on, the two witnesses against the person would be the first ones to throw or drop stones. And we tend to think of people throwing baseball size stones or something --- but actually they could drop any rock as big as they could carry. So if they really wanted to do the person in, they could take an 80-pound rock, walk up to the edge of the wall, and drop it off on the person and crush his skull, or whatever. So the two witnesses would be the first to cast their stones. And then after that, every other person who thought the person was guilty could bring and throw or drop their stones on the person. So if a hundred people thought the individual was guilty, a hundred stones would be thrown or dropped on the person. If 200 thought he was guilty, then 200 stones, and so on. And many would try to pick up the heaviest stone they could carry to drop it on the condemned person --- because he was guilty and deserved to die. So that is what is behind this part about them bringing him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built --- so that they could throw them down the cliff. That was the first step of stoning there. So bottom line --- this dropping and throwing of stones was of course nearly always fatal --- because that was the whole point. And that is what they clearly intend to do to Jesus here. He claimed to be the Messiah. He said a prophet is without honor in his own country and among his own people. And then He told them that God is merciful to Gentiles --- and that God does and will work through the Gentiles (whom they despised) --- and He cited the examples of Elijah and Elisha. And for this

they want to stone Him. But it didn't quite work out that way.” [END OF EXCERPT FROM SCOTT ASHLEY]

Verse 30 – How can Jesus Christ pass through the midst of an angry mob with intentions to kill Him? How did this happen? We don't know. Luke doesn't give us the details. It feels from this verse that a miracle was performed by God to save Jesus Christ --- one that would have left all those in Nazareth with no doubt who Jesus Christ really was, after they had doubted that He could be the Messiah. Did God strike them all with blindness? Did God paralyze them? It's one of those verses that leaves a lot to the imagination, but we just don't know.

Some will place Matthew 13:54-58 & Mark 6:1-6 here with this passage in Chronological order. If that's true, then Jesus would be never shown in the Gospel to ever come back to Nazareth after this event. John Gill's commentary believes he never came back here, but it seems more popular to believe He came again and so we will read these passages from Matthew and Mark in a different chronological spot under the assumption that He does come back one more time to Nazareth.

Day 763 – SATURDAY: May 2nd

Matthew 4:13 – 16

Daily Deep Dive:

Matthew 4:13 – 16: Capernaum (meaning “village of comfort”), a city in Galilee, sat on the Sea of Galilee at the top-west corner. It was in the tribal allotment of Naphtali. Jesus grows up in Nazareth, which was in the tribal allotment of Zebulun. Isaiah had prophesied this back in Isaiah 9:1-2.

Why does Matthew 4:15 reference Isaiah 9:1 “Galilee **of the Gentiles**”?

One, this is part of the Northern tribes where Assyria would bring people of their Gentile empire here after the northern tribes were taken into captivity. But also, this area was the frontier between the

Jewish lands and the external world to the north. They didn't have some of the natural barriers that separated them from the surrounding, often hostile, Gentile nations.

These Gentile people sat in darkness, but have now seen a Great Light (Jesus Christ – compare John 8:12 & 9:5).

Since today's study is the lightest day of the week, I also want to talk for a moment about Galilee. This is the region where most of the events that we read about in the Gospels take place --- not in Jerusalem/Judea. Christ performs most of His recorded miracles here in this area.

It's important to know the history of this area, which is very similar to Samaria in many ways, yet goes in a very different direction, and ends up with a very different identity. Like Samaria, this area of Galilee was originally a part of the northern kingdom of Israel (10 tribes). And like Samaria, this land was conquered by the Assyrian Empire and they hauled off many of the people into other parts of the empire, leaving only a small number of poor and less desirable people behind. This area was eventually re-populated by the Assyrian Empire with foreign people, and like we spoke about with the Samaritans, the people here in Galilee became a group that had a blended Jewish-pagan syncretistic religion. They would be heavily impacted by surrounding Gentile cultures. They would be mixed ethnically. During the Greek Empire, there was an increased Hellenistic influence, and the culture became more cosmopolitan than Judea --- and Greek became a common language alongside Aramaic.

Judea would eventually be taken captive by the Babylonian Empire that conquered the Assyrian Empire, but they would eventually be allowed to return under the Persian Empire, and would rebuild their identity.

But what about Galilee? Why was it more similar to Judea --- and not to Samaria --- at the time of Christ?

After the death of Alexander the Great, the Greek Empire was divided up between his four generals. One of those divisions became the Seleucid Empire. Eventually one of their rulers, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (aka "the King of the North"), would become famous for the Abomination of Desolation in 168 B.C. --- when this leader invaded Jerusalem. History records that he forbade the Jews from keeping the Sabbath and other commandments of God. That he ordered copies of the law to be burned. Historian Josephus records that he would not allow daily sacrifices --- and took away all the temple objects. He put up an idol upon God's altar, and offered swine on it. Circumcision was outlawed. He continued in surrounding cities and areas to force the people to build pagan temples, raise idols and offer swine daily. Those who didn't comply, didn't compromise, went through terrible punishments, including death through crucifixion.

For anyone wanting more information on this past Abomination of Desolation --- and the one to come --- I gave a sermon early in 2025 on that topic:

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/looking-abomination-desolation>

I share all of that, because in 167 B.C., a priest named Mattathias, living northwest of Jerusalem in a city called Modein, became the spark that ignited the Maccabean revolt in response to this intense pressure from Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

When Seleucid empire officials came to Modein, they set up an altar and demanded the local population to offer a pagan sacrifice.

Mattathias, being a respected priest was told to go first to set the example. He refused publicly! When another Jew stepped forward to comply, Mattathias killed the man. He then also killed the Seleucid official and tore down the altar.

It's recorded in historical sources like 1 Maccabees that Mattathias then said "Let everyone who is zealous for the Law and supports the covenant come out with me!" and then he and his sons fled to the hills.

Mattathias would die about a year later in 166 B.C. He appointed his son Judas Maccabeus as military leader and urged his sons to remain faithful.

The revolt under Judas gained momentum and they eventually defeated the Seleucid forces. They cleansed and rededicated the temple, and this is what Hanukkah celebrates.

Judas Maccabeus was a part of this family known as the Hasmoneans. Its dynasty would rule as an independent Jewish state from 140 B.C. to 63 B.C. Their goal wasn't just the survival, but the restoration of Israel. They wanted to restore Israel's ancient boundaries --- and began conquering regions like Idumea/Edom in the south, parts of the Transjordan area and Galilee in the north.

Historian Josephus records that they compelled the inhabitants to become circumcised and to live according to Jewish laws.

Circumcision was not optional. Males had to undergo it to remain in the land. They were required to keep the Sabbath, the food laws, and the Holy Days. Local pagan practices were suppressed. These conquered lands became a part of the Jewish state. From what I could find, they did not slaughter people to force these practices, but required them to convert or leave. Religious identity was tied to citizenship and land rights. This resulted in a new Jewish Galilee, that by the first century, was largely Jewish in practice, observed the Torah, and had synagogues spread throughout the region.

Also, from about the time of the Maccabean revolt to the time of Jesus' birth, about a half-million Jews migrated from Babylon back to the areas of Judea and Galilee and during that previous century before Christ founded many of the cities that we see over and over in the Gospels that didn't exist before (for example Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Gennesaret, and Magdala). Why did so many people migrate during this time? Because of the prophecies regarding the coming Messiah. This migration brought a religious zeal and fervor to Galilee, and explains why Galilee was not like Samaria.

To understand this area, it's also important to understand how Judea viewed Galilee. Due to their mixed background and history, many Jews looked down on Galileans as not being "pure descendants". Their Galilean culture had more Greek/Gentile cultural exposure. Judea (Jerusalem) saw itself as the guardian of the Law and Temple. Galilee was looked at not just through some small-town bias, but through a deep skepticism about their spiritual credibility.

It's here that Jesus Christ begins His ministry!

God choose specifically to start Christ's ministry here, not at the "pure center" (Jerusalem), but at a place that represented restoration after brokenness.

Lastly, before we begin diving into the scriptures for today, it's important to understand that Samaria itself was also conquered by this same Hasmonean dynasty. However, while devastated militarily, they were not forced to convert, and continued to exist as a distinct group. We might ask why? Unlike Galilee and Idumea, the Samaritans had a strong, competing religious identity, and it seems the Hasmoneans chose suppression rather than assimilation. The actions of the Hasmoneans, coming in and destroying the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, helped solidify the deep divide between Jews and Samaritans. All of this led to deepened resentment and separation.

ADJUSTMENT/CORRECTION to Week 108 –

In week 108, I wrote a section on Sunday of that week that said:

"Samaritans:

The Samaritans were not foreign Gentiles transplanted into the land, as was once commonly assumed, but rather a remnant of an ancient Jewish sect that developed around the beginning of the Greek period.

After the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., the Assyrians resettled people from various nations into Samaria.

These settlers intermarried with the remaining Israelites, and their religion became a **mixture of pagan and Israelite beliefs**.

Modern historical research has shown that they are descendants of Israelites who maintained their own worship centered on Mount Gerizim rather than Jerusalem. They still observe the Passover on Mount Gerizim, sacrificing the lambs on the fourteenth day of Nisan, “between the two evenings,” preserving rites that closely resemble ancient Israelite practices from before the destruction of the Second Temple.

By Christ’s time, the Samaritans’ faith was **partly true to the Torah**, but **corrupted by centuries of compromise and false worship**—a blend of truth and error that reflected their mixed ethnic and spiritual heritage. Archaeological findings confirm the existence of their temple on Mount Gerizim, visible from Jacob’s well where Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman (John 4:5–26). These discoveries validate the Gospel account as historically accurate, showing that Samaritan worship was active and distinct in Jesus’ time.”

The sentence I highlighted **red** up above was poorly worded and needs to be revised. I apologize.

After re-reading that section today, I believe I rushed this and meant to say:

“The Samaritans were not **ONLY** foreign Gentiles transplanted into the land, as was once commonly assumed, but rather **INCLUDED** a remnant of an ancient Jewish sect that developed around the beginning of the Greek period.”

I believe I was trying to counter the belief that all the Israelites were hauled off and only foreign Gentiles were brought in.

The Samaritans are best understood as a mixed population that included BOTH Israelite continuity AND foreign influence.

Modern scholarship believes that some Israelites remained in the land, and that foreign settlers were added by the Assyrians. And over time a unique identity was formed.

I will revise the paragraph for later versions of this reading program to state:

“Samaritans:

The Samaritans do not appear to only be foreign Gentiles transplanted into the land, as was once commonly assumed, but rather contained a significant remnant of Israel. After the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., the Assyrians resettled people from various nations into Samaria. These settlers intermarried with the remaining Israelites, and their religion became a **mixture of pagan and Israelite beliefs.**

Modern historical research indicates that some Israelites remained in the land who maintained their own worship centered on Mount Gerizim rather than Jerusalem. They still even today observe the Passover on Mount Gerizim, sacrificing the lambs on the fourteenth day of Nisan, “between the two evenings,” preserving rites that closely resemble ancient Israelite practices from before the destruction of the Second Temple.

By Christ’s time, the Samaritans’ faith was **partly true to the Torah**, but also **corrupted by centuries of compromise and false worship**—a blend of truth and error that reflected their mixed ethnic and spiritual heritage. Archaeological findings confirm the existence of their temple on Mount Gerizim, visible from Jacob’s well where Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman (John 4:5–26). These discoveries validate the Gospel account as historically accurate, showing that Samaritan worship was active and distinct in Jesus’ time.”

