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## THE PROPHET OF GALILEE

- MATTHEW 4:12-25. - JANUARY 16. -

**Golden Text:** – "The people which sat in darkness saw a great light." – V. 16.

PALESTINE at the First Advent consisted of four provinces. Judea was the principal one, with Samaria to the north and Perea to the east and Galilee further north, beyond Samaria. While Jesus preached in Judea and did some mighty works there and in Perea, his principal ministry was in Galilee; so much so that he and his disciples were known as Galileans. Although born in Bethlehem, he was reared in Nazareth, "that he might be called a Nazarene" – that he might not have the honor of the "City of David," but the odium of "a mean city." Compare Luke 23:5,6,49,55. Thus the vast majority of our Lord's miracles and teachings were to the Galileans. And his principal ministries in Judea were in connection with his annual visits to the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. As for Samaria, its people were Gentiles with an admixture of Jewish blood. Jesus warned his disciples not to preach in that province, saying, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 10:5,6.) The Galileans, disesteemed by the Judeans as inferior members of their race, the expression, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" applied to all Galilee.

That the light of the Gospel should first shine in Galilee was intimated through Isaiah's prophecy, "The people which sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them which sat in the region of the shadows of death a light sprang up." [R4557 : page 55] The prophet mentions the boundaries of Zebulon and Naphtali, two of the twelve tribes of Israel, on the Sea of Galilee.

The word Galilee signifies *circle*; hence the prophecy implied that this land would be encircled by the Gentiles. And so it was; the Samaritans to its south cutting it off from Judea. Its people, thus separated from the great religious center of their day, were in greater darkness than their brethren, in the very shadow of the death-darkness that was upon the Gentiles. Nevertheless on this very account they were more amenable to the teachings of Jesus than were many of their more religious, more enlightened and more priest-ridden brethren of Judea.

The great light which flared forth in Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin and Nazareth, the chief cities of Galilee, exalted these places to heaven figuratively, in the sense of bestowing so great honor and privilege upon them. But they were in turn cast down to *hades*, the grave, because they received not the message. (Matt. 11:20-24.) The light shined in darkness and blessed and gathered some, "the elect," and passed onward to bless and gather others, as it has continued to do throughout this Gospel Age. The time for the still greater enlightenment of the whole world is yet future. In the Millennial morning the Redeemer and his elect Church (Malachi 4:2) will shine forth as the Sun of Righteousness with healing in its beams for the enlightenment and blessing of Israel and the whole world of mankind – including the millions who have gone down to the darkness of *hades*, the grave.

## **THE KINGDOM IS AT HAND**

The Galilean Jews, in close contact with the Gentiles, could readily see the need of the long-promised Kingdom of God, and they were more ready to give heed to it than the Judean-Jews. The latter, in contact with the showy formalism of the temple service and an earthly priest with gorgeous garments and a magnificent temple more grand than that of Solomon, were less inclined to hearken to the offer of a spiritual kingdom. To the

latter the outward and showy prosperity of their system was a delusion and a snare which hindered them from seeing. Thus it has always been. The message of God's grace finds some of its most earnest friends amongst the poor and despised. Moreover Capernaum was more closely in touch with the Gentile world – its good and its evil – than was Jerusalem.

The Kingdom of Heaven was at hand in the sense that Jesus was present to make a formal tender of the Kingdom to Abraham's natural seed. When they rejected the King they rejected the Kingdom. He nevertheless blessed all who accepted him and as pre-intended and promised they became the nucleus of his spiritual Kingdom, to complete the number of which consecrated believers from the Gentiles have since been "called." In a word, God's arrangement is first to elect a spiritual class, a "Royal Priesthood," to be associated with Jesus in his Kingdom and then at the end of this age to establish that spiritual Kingdom in power and great glory and to bless Israel with the great light and opportunity, and through her to bless all the families of the earth.

Peter and Andrew, James and John, fishermen, were invited by the great Prophet to be his followers, to be associated with him in his work of calling the "elect" and, if faithful, subsequently to sit with him in his throne as part of the "elect." They left all to follow him. These were his terms, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The Lord does not open the door of opportunity to all of his disciples throughout this Gospel Age to become prominent ministers of the Truth after this manner. Yet he accepts none as his disciples except those who forsake all to follow him. In their hearts they must give up all else. They have the spirit of discipleship and self-sacrifice, and would gladly forsake all actually if the door of opportunity opened to them.

The preaching of Jesus was that of his apostles also – "the Gospel (good news) of the Kingdom." To his apostles he gave the same power over disease that he himself exercised – even to the casting out of demons. These miracles were merely to attract attention to the Prophet and his message. It was not the intention to heal all the sick, nor to awaken all the dead. But those miracles manifested forth beforehand the glorious blessings which the Kingdom, when established, will exercise amongst men. – John 2:11.

Thus the fame of Jesus spread. The sick were brought to him and healed, and amongst his followers were to be found devout men from every province of Palestine. Truly the benighted Galileans were blessed in the great light which shone in their midst. But it tested them as Truth, Light, always does. The few children of the light were manifested and separated from the children of the darkness, the children of disobedience. And similarly we of today, living in the great light now shining as an arc-light upon the Word of God, have increased responsibilities and are taking our stand either as children of Light and its advocates, or as children of darkness in opposing it.

