



Sandro Botticelli, *The Temptations of Christ*, 1480–1482, fresco, 345 × 555 cm, Sistine Chapel, Rome. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

# MATTHEW 4; MARK 1; LUKE 4–5

## COME, FOLLOW ME: NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

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### **Jesus Tempted of the Devil**

The Lord was tempted in all things, but we surmise that Satan’s direct and frontal attacks at the beginning of His ministry were the most grievous temptations. The Hebrew and Greek meaning of *tempt* is to “try, test, or prove.” King Benjamin explained that the Savior would “suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue” (Mosi 3:7). In part, our Savior experienced earth life to develop compassion and empathy so that He could be our judge and advocate.<sup>1</sup>

### *Gospels in harmony*

The Synoptic Gospels each include a section on the devil tempting Jesus. Knowledge of the adversary was one of the things restored by Jesus. Combining mentions of *Satan* and *devil*, the New Testament references the adversary ninety-three times. The Old Testament, however, never mentions the devil and has

only nineteen references to Satan. When we look at the word ratio, the New Testament refers to Satan or the devil seventeen times more frequently than the Old Testament does.

**Mk 1:12–13.** “*immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there . . . with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.*” Mark is the fastest moving and shortest Gospel. Even the vocabulary speaks of haste—we find the word *eutheós*, “immediately, straight-way,” forty-two times. He includes only two sentences about Jesus’s temptations. Mark’s short account includes one unique detail: Jesus was with wild animals in the wilderness.

### *Shared source material*

A careful comparison of Matthew and Luke suggests the two authors wrote from a shared source (often referred to as Q).<sup>2</sup> The KJV of Matthew’s and Luke’s temptation accounts are very similar and have only four significant differences:

1. The order of the second and third temptation is reversed.
2. Matthew 4:4 includes a longer Old Testament citation than Luke 4:4 does.
3. Some slight word differences exist in Matthew 4:6–7 compared to Luke 4:10–12 (in Greek and English).
4. Additional differences are found in Matthew 4:8–10 compared to Luke 4:5–8 (in Greek and English).

*Table 1. Comparison of Mt 4:4 with Lk 4:4 and Mt 4:8–10 with Lk 4:5–8*

#### **Mt 4:4**

It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

#### **Lk 4:4**

It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

#### **Mt 4:8–10**

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written . . .

#### **Lk 4:5–8**

And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written . . .



## *JST changes*

Major changes to the biblical texts are found in the Joseph Smith Translation (JST; see the Bible Appendix). In particular, the Prophet Joseph Smith felt inspired to add three doctrinal changes to the temptation accounts:

1. The Spirit took Jesus and went into the wilderness not to be tempted of the devil but to “*commune with God*” (JST, Mt 4:1–2; Mk 1:12). Jesus didn’t go looking for Satan (and neither should we).
2. After the forty days of instruction and fasting, Jesus “*was left to be tempted of the devil*” (JST, Mt 4:2), or “*Satan [came] seeking to tempt him*” (JST, Mk 1:13). Satan sought Jesus at His weak point. Temptations often come after spiritual experiences, not during them.
3. The Spirit (*not the devil*) can take your spirit to see other places (JST, Mt 4:5, 6, 8; JST, Lk 4:5, 6, 9). We see this other places in scripture too.<sup>3</sup> Where has the Spirit led you?

## *Matthew and Luke on Jesus’s temptations*

**Lk 4:1 (also Mt 4:1).** “**Jesus . . . was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.**” After His baptism, Jesus was “full of the Holy Ghost” (Lk 4:1), which led Him to commune with God in the wilderness (*erēmon*, elsewhere translated as “solitary, secluded, or desert place”). Like many other prophets (for example, Enoch, Moses, Elijah, Nephi, the brother of Jared, Paul, Joseph Smith), Jesus spent time in the wilderness. We are not told what Jesus learned while in the wilderness, but we know that He grew “from grace to grace” (D&C 93:13). We also know Heavenly Father taught Him many things because later Jesus explained, “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me” (Jn 8:28).

**Mt 4:2.** “**when he had fasted forty days and forty nights.**” The number forty saturates the Bible as a number symbolizing a purification period:

- A woman’s purification lasted forty days after delivering a son (seven days plus thirty-three days equals forty days; Lev 12:1–4). The purification period was twice as long after the birth of a daughter (Lev 12:5).
- Noah’s flood was forty days of rain, forty days of flood, and forty days of waiting to open the window (Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6).
- Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah; Esau was forty when he married Judith and Bashemath.
- Jacob’s body was purified and embalmed for forty days after his death (Gen 50:3).
- Moses on Sinai fasted from bread and water for forty days and nights (Deu 9:9).
- Moses’s spies searched out the land of Israel forty days (Num 13:25).
- The children of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years eating manna (Ex 16:35; Deu 8:4).

- Goliath taunted Saul’s army forty days before David arrived (1 Sam 17:16).
- Elijah fasted for forty days when he went to Mt. Sinai (Horeb) through the wilderness (1 Kng 19:8).
- Jonah prophesied that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days if the people did not repent (Jonah 3:4).
- Jesus fasted forty days (Mt 4:2; Lk 4:2).
- Jesus’s post-Resurrection ministry spanned forty days (Act 1:3).

**Mt 4:2 (JST).** “and had communed with God, *he was afterwards an hungered, and was left to be tempted of the devil.*” The JST adds significantly to our understanding of Jesus’s temptations in the wilderness. God had left, and Jesus was in great physical need. Yet even in His weakened state, Jesus was able to remain loyal to God and detect the adversary’s counterfeits and deceptions.

### **Mt 4:1–11; Mk 1:12–13; Lk 4:1–13. Three Temptations**

The temptations Jesus faced are prototypes for all temptations. The purpose of Satan’s temptations is to turn one from God and toward Satan, who is the adversary of God and the great counterfeit and usurper of Christ.

Each of Satan’s three recorded temptations addresses a prophecy that the Messiah should fulfill. This suggests that Satan knew the scriptures and what Jesus should do as our Savior. Yet Satan wanted Jesus to fail. He tempted Jesus as he did Adam and Eve, suggesting they fulfill prophecies on his timing by following his direction. The devil wanted Jesus to succumb to selfish desires rather than to bless others. Lucifer’s goal is to destroy God’s plan and keep us out of heaven.

#### *Temptation 1: Appetites*

**Mt 4:3; Lk 4:3.** “*If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.*”

- Satan appeals to Jesus’s appetites. Our natural needs—food, water, shelter, and so on—are in place and should be met. What is wrong with eating? In this case, the food is not the problem; the problem is taking the food from the wrong hand. It is also the wrong time for Jesus to miraculously make bread. Later God will allow Jesus to multiply bread to bless thousands, but temptations appease self-centered appetites. God gives bounds for all our appetites, and our bodies should follow our Creator’s direction.
- In 1982, Brigham Young University president Jeffrey R. Holland described Jesus’s temptation as getting His bread the easy way.<sup>4</sup>
- Soon Jesus will feed a crowd of more than five thousand and then another of more than four thousand and turn water into wine, but only if He obeys God. By obeying Satan, Jesus would “prostitute his powers” because it is self-serving.<sup>5</sup>

- The question is not when Jesus can eat bread but rather whether He is going to submit to Satan and His own appetites or to God. As disciples who partake of the bread weekly, we covenant to obey the Lord and submit our will to His. Sometimes Satan, as the great counterfeit, tries to get us to go against God’s timing to invalidate God’s blessings (for example, with intimacy before instead of after marriage). This is just like what happened in the Garden of Eden, where Satan tried to usurp God and His timing by intervening to get Adam and Eve to eat from Satan’s hand on his timetable and in his way. Fortunately, the “second Adam” (1 Cor 15:47) did not fall for it.
- Following God includes accepting His schedule for feeding our appetites.
- Jesus answers Satan by quoting scripture, a good pattern for all who confront temptations (Deu 8:3; see also D&C 98:11).

### *Temptation 2: Pride*

***Mt 4:5–7; Lk 4:9–12. “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down.”***

- The JST clarifies that *the Spirit* took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple, and then Satan came to tempt Him (Mt 4:5; Lk 4:9). This change suggests that Satan did not have power to move Jesus.
- Satan pesters Jesus with doubts to raise insecurity: “*If thou be the Son of God . . .*” (Mt 4:6; Lk 4:3; emphasis added). Insecurity can lead to both self-doubt and pride as a means of defending one’s sense of worth.
- The drive to feel noticed, important, and indestructible are Satan’s temptations. God wants us to feel His love by serving Him and others. Jesus will teach that we become greater by serving others (Mt 23:11–12).
- Satan quotes scripture mixed with his deceptive philosophy and asks Jesus to prove His divinity with a sign.
- Satan tries to logically argue that by jumping into the crowded temple courtyard, Jesus could gain a huge following and start His mission off with impressive pageantry. It would also prove to Jesus that God would indeed protect Him as promised.
- Jesus again answers the tempter by quoting scripture, *and so can we* (Deu 6:13, 16).

### *Temptation 3: Power*

***Lk 4:5–8 (also Mt 4:8–11). “All this power will I give thee.”***

- The JST consistently corrects the text to communicate that Satan does not possess Jesus and that the Spirit led Him to a high mountain. The Spirit leaves Jesus, *then* Satan comes to tempt Him.

- Satan promised power and glory (Mt 4:8–9; Lk 4:6)—*which are not his to give!* The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that Satan only has power when we yield it to him.<sup>6</sup>
- Ironically, Jesus is the Creator of the heavens and earth. These are not Satan’s to give. Jesus is the one who will rule and reign—never Satan. From the beginning of time, Jesus has had to endure Lucifer’s efforts to usurp His role and power.
- This temptation festers at the question, “Will you ever really reign, Jesus?” The answer is yes, but not in Satan’s way nor on Satan’s timeline. Our goal is not to take the easy way out but rather to follow God’s plan. Jesus and His followers fought for God’s plan in heaven, and He continues to fight in mortality. Our generation often seeks the fastest way to gain with the least amount of effort. But those who follow Jesus do not selfishly desire riches, power, pleasure, or wickedness. The Lord taught the Prophet Joseph that godly power works “only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41).
- Satan basically asks Jesus, “What is your price?”<sup>7</sup> This is a common temptation. “Satan’s first article of faith,” according to Hugh Nibley, is “You can buy anything in this world for money.”<sup>8</sup>
- Jesus again answers by quoting scripture (Ex 34:14).
- Satan’s time schedule often *appears* easy. With an eternal perspective, God’s plan requires growth, obedience, and patience for maximum reward and development. God’s plan also includes a backup plan that works. This was part of the problem in Eden: Satan lied to our first parents by pretending there was no other way. God’s plan provides another way, one that is rooted in the Atonement of Christ.
- Jesus receives God’s power to avoid temptation and later to exorcise devils (Lk 4:32, 36).
- We will have to wait until the Millennium for Jesus to fulfill the call to reign upon the earth.

### *Why did Jesus face three temptations?*

These three temptations may apply to all temptations. Interestingly, Jesus gave Satan three witnesses of His role in response, and each of the three temptations applies to one of the three periods of Jesus’s mission as our Savior: (1) during His First Coming, Jesus provided physical bread and left us with spiritual bread as a symbol of our covenant with Him; (2) at His Second Coming, He will come down from heaven to the temple; and (3) during the Millennium He will reign over all the earth as King.

What can you learn from your temptations?

## The Beginning of Jesus’s Public Ministry

*Jesus moves to Galilee—Mt 4:11–12; Mk 1:14; Lk 4:14–15; Jn 4:1–3*

Matthew and Mark place Jesus in Galilee upon hearing the news that John the Baptist was imprisoned. The timing is not the same across all accounts. John’s Gospel has Jesus going to Galilee a few months before John the Baptist is imprisoned (which is probably more accurate). Nevertheless, all four Gospels move Jesus to Galilee sometime after His baptism.

**Mt 4:11 (JST).** “Jesus knew that John was cast into prison, and he sent angels, *and, behold, they came and ministered unto him.*” Jesus sent the angels to John the Baptist, and when the resurrected John returned to bestow the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood upon Joseph Smith, John specifically mentioned the role of *ministering angels* as part of that priesthood (D&C 13:1; 107:20). Ministering angels are a blessing to all generations and peoples as a confirmation of truth.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the restored Parchment of John (the Beloved Apostle) reveals that “he has undertaken a greater work; therefore I [God] will make him as flaming fire and a ministering angel; he shall minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation who dwell on the earth” (D&C 7:6). Nine more verses in the Doctrine and Covenants teach about ministering angels and their roles in other kingdoms.<sup>10</sup>

John shares more details, perhaps because he was a disciple of both the Baptist and the Lord. The JST clarifies that Jesus and His disciples baptized as well as John the Baptist. All four Gospels describe Jesus in Galilee.

*Table 2. The four Gospels’ mention of Jesus in Galilee*

Mt 4:12	Mk 1:14	Lk 4:14	JST, Jn 4:1, 34
			When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, . . . though he himself baptized not so many as his disciples; For he suffered them for an example preferring one another.
Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee.	Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.	And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region roundabout.	And he left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.

**Mt 4:13–16. “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken.”** Matthew quotes Isaiah in half of his scriptural citations. This is the seventh of Matthew’s fourteen prophetic fulfillment passages showing that Jesus is the promised Messiah.<sup>11</sup> Matthew includes the old geographical markers that Joshua organized for the twelve tribal lands (Zabulon/Zebulun, Nephtholim/Nephtali). In approximately 950 BC, during the time of Solomon, these tribal family lands were changed to political units where any Israelite could live.

**Mt 4:17. “Jesus began to preach, . . . Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** Jesus continues the call to repent, as John the Baptist had before Him. The same message is repeated by prophets in all dispensations. The standard works include 624 references to some form of the word *repent*. We find the theme of repentance mentioned five times more often in Restoration scripture than in the Bible. (For a chart on scriptural references to repentance, see my commentary on Mt 3:2; Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3.)

### *Jesus preaches in Nazareth—Lk 4:16–30*

**Lk 4:16. “He came to Nazareth.”** Archeologists estimate the ancient population of Nazareth was four hundred. The village and outlying farmlands sit on rocky hillside in central Galilee. The soil could not sustain very many people, but a farm made up of terraces was excavated as well as a winepress and watch tower just outside the village. Luke alone includes the stories from Nazareth—including Mary’s visit from the angel Gabriel, Jesus’s childhood, and His rejection there. Luke’s accounts came from interviewing eyewitnesses, and so we assume that Mary or others shared this account with him (Lk 1:1–3).

**Lk 4:16. “as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.”** During the late second temple period, or the time of the New Testament, Israelite men met each Sabbath to worship in synagogues or houses (depending on the size and wealth of the Jewish community).<sup>12</sup> Women and children were allowed to attend if they were silent and sat in a separate section.<sup>13</sup>

In the last century, archeologists have found more and more synagogues from this time across the Roman Empire. The larger villages and cities used their synagogues as community gathering places, schools, courts of law, and places of worship. The New Testament mentions specific synagogues in Capernaum, Nazareth, Damascus, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus.<sup>14</sup> In addition, some synagogues in Jerusalem were specifically for immigrants, such as the synagogues of the Libertines, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians (Act 6:9).

The Sabbath synagogue service began with singing psalms, and then a rabbi or other educated Jewish man in the congregation stood to read the assigned passage of the day from the Torah (the five books of Moses). If the Jewish community had the means to own their own scriptural scrolls, they most often had scrolls of the Torah and Psalms. If the synagogue or home church had a scroll of a prophet, the service included a reading from that book as well. In the Dead Sea Scrolls and other archeological findings from this time, Isaiah is the most frequently found scroll among the prophetic writings. Even though the Torah had assigned readings for each week at this time, no schedule for reading the Prophets has been found, so Jesus probably was free to choose any section that was available in Nazareth that Sabbath.



**Lk 4:17 (NKJV). “He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. . . . He found the place where it was written.”** The small town of Nazareth seems eager to hear from their local rabbi, who by now has achieved some fame. His reputation as a miracle worker may have reached them as well.

The practice of the day was to stand to read the sacred text and then sit down to discuss it. This change in position signified the higher place of God’s word over humankind’s.<sup>15</sup> The service usually closed with a blessing.

**Lk 4:21. “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”** The messianic hope of the time was vibrant. One well-known text from the first and second centuries BC, the *Psalms of Solomon*, focused on a conquering Messiah:

He will have Gentile peoples serving him under his yoke, and he will glorify the Lord publicly in the whole world. He will pronounce Jerusalem clean. . . . He will have nations come from the ends of the earth to see his glory. . . . He will be a righteous king over them, taught by God, there will be no unrighteousness among them during his reign, because everyone will be holy, and their king will be the Lord Messiah. . . . And he himself will be free from sin, in order to rule such a great people. He will expose officials and drive out sinners by the strength of his word.<sup>16</sup>

Even though the Jews were actively seeking their Messiah, they did not accept Mary’s firstborn as the man who would fulfill that role.

**Lk 4:18. “he hath anointed me.”** Compare Isaiah 61:1–2. The word *anointed* is *messiah* in Hebrew and *Christ* in Greek. This important prophecy was well known as referring to the Jews’ promised Messiah.<sup>17</sup>

**Lk 4:18. “to preach the gospel to the poor.”** The word *gospel* translated literally is “good news” (NIV, ESV, BSB, NASB, and so forth).

**Lk 4:18. “recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty.”** Isaiah’s text describes seven marvelous miracles or responsibilities that the Messiah will perform (Luke cites only five). No one during the history of the world had healed the blind. The hope that the promised Messiah would be able to cure this awful fate was well known.

What can we learn from Jesus’s preaching in Nazareth?

**Lk 4:20–22. “This day is this scripture fulfilled.”** The small-town congregation gave Jesus their full attention as their eyes “fastened on him” (Lk 4:20). Yet, His short and clear declaration was highly offensive in the crowd’s eyes. They had a hard time accepting His declaration since they knew Him from childhood: “Is not this Joseph’s son?” (Lk 4:22). Jesus’s family, including His younger siblings, still lived in Nazareth (see Mk 6:3). Initially “even his own brothers did not believe” that he was the Son of God (Jn 7:5 NIV).

**Lk 4:23–27. “No prophet is accepted in his own country.”** In their disbelief, those of the Nazareth neighborhood ask for a miracle like the ones they have heard so much about. In the next verses we learn that Jesus performs a miracle but that the crowd does not recognize it. They seek a sign to prove Jesus’s claims. In response, Jesus reminds them of the Old Testament stories in which

Israelites lacked faith while Gentiles exhibited great faith. This message was also clear and offensive in the crowd's eyes.

**Lk 4:28–30.** *“they . . . were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out.”*<sup>218</sup> Stoning was prescribed for many sins, including Sabbath breaking, idolatry, being a false prophet, and blasphemy (Lev 24:11–16). The crowd was unable to kill Jesus, however, and He miraculously remained unharmed. The people did not have power over His life.

*Capernaum—Mk 1:21–22; Lk 4:31–32*

**Mk 1:21.** *“they went into Capernaum.”* The name Capernaum comes from *kapar*, a noun meaning “village,” and *nahum*, a verb meaning “to be sorry, to comfort.”

The ruins of the New Testament Capernaum lie on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. At the time of Christ, Capernaum was a Roman tax collection point and a busy commercial center at the crossroads of two important highways. Additionally, a military garrison was stationed there. It had a relatively large population and was one of the more prosperous cities in Galilee. Enough Jews lived there to build at least one large synagogue (made from black basalt and whose foundation still stands) and probably another. This is where Jesus gave His powerful Bread of Life discourse (Jn 6:49). Many of Jesus's miracles recorded in the Synoptic Gospels were worked in the city of Capernaum. It became Jesus's headquarters, and Matthew referred to it as “his [Jesus's] own city” (Mt 4:13; 9:1). Yet, most of the locals did not believe that Jesus was their promised Messiah, so He upbraided them for rejecting His miracles and message (Mt 11:23; Lk 10:15).

**Mk 1:21–22.** *“on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority.”* See my notes on Lk 4:16 for more on synagogues. Mark's Gospel highlights the miraculous nature of the Lord's ministry, with only passing references to Jesus's sermons. Fortunately, the other Gospels also include more of Jesus's teachings.

*Jesus heals a demoniac and Peter's mother-in-law—Mk 1:21–28; Lk 4:31–37*

**Lk 4:33–36 (also Mk 1:23).** *“with authority and power he commandeth.”* Luke carefully selects certain miracles to include in his Gospel and organizes them in the following way to grow in scope and power: being protected through invisibility (4:30), casting out a devil (4:33–35), healing Peter's mother-in-law (4:38–39), having power over the deep (5:4–6), healing permanent conditions of leprosy and paralysis (5:12–13), and forgiving sins (5:20). Each of the Synoptic Gospels uses a different order for the next events.

**Lk 4:38–40 (also Mt 8:14–15; Mk 1:29–31).** “[Peter’s] wife’s mother was taken with a **great fever.**” After the Lord teaches in the Capernaum synagogue and casts out a devil there, He goes to Peter’s home. The family asks Jesus to heal Peter’s mother-in-law. In addition to including more information on women, Luke often includes fine points of family life. In Luke’s account, Peter has heard the Lord preach (possibly twice) and invites the Lord into his home to heal his mother-in-law before he is called to leave his profession behind and become a fisher of men.

*Jesus preaches and heals in Galilee—Mt 4:23–25; Mk 1:35–39; Lk 4:42–44*  
**Mk 1:35 (also Lk 4:42).** “**rising up a great while before day, he . . . departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.**” Jesus regularly chose to be alone in nature to pray. This required a very early wake-up—hours before six in the morning when the Jewish day officially began. It appears He wanted to prepare to call His Apostles. Before Jesus calls Apostles from his growing disciples, He performs two miracles that will bless the Apostles’ families in their absence. The first is healing the matriarch; the second, giving a catch of fish big enough to provide financially for the Apostle’s families for three years.

**Mt 4:23–25 (also Mk 1:39; Lk 4:43–44).** “**Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching . . . preaching . . . healing. . . . And there followed him great multitudes.**” From the outset of Jesus’s ministry, Matthew mentions an international crowd following Jesus. These sections include Jesus’s teaching (Mt 5–7) and healing (Mt 8–9). Parallel verses act as bookends for the text from Mt 4:23 to 9:35:

**Mt 4:23**

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing *all* manner of sickness and . . . disease among the people.

**Mt 9:35**

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing *every* sickness and . . . disease among the people.

Even though the KJV translators use different English words, the Greek uses the same word, *pas*, for “every” and “all manner.”

**Mt 4:23 (JST).** “**among the people which believed on his name.**” The mention of belief in the JST shows that believing is a significant requirement for being healed through the Lord. Faith begins with a desire to believe (see Alm 32:27).

*Jesus calls first disciples—Mt 4:18–22; Mk 1:16–20; Lk 5:1–11*  
**Mt 4:18–22.** “**Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew.**” Even though the details and timing are different in each Gospel, all four Gospels include that among the first to follow Jesus were Andrew and his brother Simon Peter (Mk 1:16). Andrew and the unnamed disciple were originally disciples of John the Baptist, who led them to Jesus (see Jn 1:35–39).

**Mt 4:19 (JST).** “**I am he of whom it is written by the prophets; follow me**” Jesus identifies Himself and testifies of the validity of prophetic messages. Matthew records that the brothers “left their nets” to follow Jesus.

What “nets” in our lives do we need to stop mending to more fully follow Jesus?

It requires great faith to leave all and follow Jesus. I presume the disciples’ decision was hardest on their families. How did they react? The scriptures mention Peter’s wife and mother-in-law as well as James and John’s parents, Zebedee and Salome, but according to the Jewish cultural, each of the Twelve would have been married. Following the Lord required a complete change of life and heart—and the Lord required that these Twelve leave their families for a time. Matthew and Mark stop the story there, but Luke fills it in with a few more details.

**Lk 5:1.** “**the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God.**” In the morning, a crowd followed Jesus to a beach near Capernaum, a prosperous city at the north of the Sea of Galilee (also known in the New Testament as Lake of Gennesaret).

**Lk 5:2.** “**two ships.**” The fishing boats belonged to Peter, Andrew, and their partners, James and John—the sons of Zebedee and Salome. Archeologists found a boat from that time and area that was twenty-seven feet long by seven-and-a-half feet wide and four feet tall. The ship would have had a mast and sail as well.

The men’s fishing nets were very heavy casting nets. The fishermen usually fished at night, when the fish came to the top of the water for warmth. We learn later (Lk 5:5) that the men had fished all night without catching anything. They may have been exhausted from the laborious work of unsuccessful night fishing, and the arduous work of cleaning and folding the threaded linen nets was also physically challenging.

**Lk 5:3.** “**he entered into one of the ships which was Simon’s.**” Because a crowd gathered to hear Him, Jesus chose to speak from a few feet out in the water. Jesus would have sat in the back of the boat while Peter walked beside the front, pushing it out into the shallow waters. Peter and his partners listened to Jesus teach the crowd. Jesus had already visited Peter and healed his family (Lk 4:38), so asking him to use his boat seems reasonable.

**Lk 5:4.** “**Launch out into the deep.**” The use of “deep” echoes many Old Testament themes: first the Creation text in Gen 1:2, then the path for the ransomed in Isa 51:10. The depths of the earth hold the dead who need redemption (Ezk 26:19–20), and depths pose danger (Ps 69:2; Amos 9:3).

**Lk 5:4–6.** “**and let down your nets for a draught.**” After the Lord finished preaching, Peter, a fisherman, meekly received advice on fishing from a builder. Casting nets were usually made from linen threads woven into a circle of about twenty-five feet. When the fishermen obey Jesus, they become part of a miracle over creation. The catch of a lifetime causes their nets to snap and pop under the weight of the fish.

**Lk 5:7.** “**they beckoned . . . and filled both the ships.**” This enormous catch could provide income to sustain the families of the newly called Apostles. Just four and a half miles south of Capernaum



was the town of Magdala (Tarichaea), where the people dried and smoked fish. We assume the Apostles' families guided the boats filled with the fish to Magdala to sell. Imagine the chaos of tugging the nets with all the wriggling fish into the boat. (The Lord performed similar miracles in this dispensation; see D&C 49:21; 118:3). Peter's partners included his brother Andrew and James and John. Their working together foreshadows the unified team of the Apostles as well. The Lord gives them a grand catch before calling them to grander things.

**Lk 5:8. “When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees.”** Both names for Peter are used only here in Luke. Peter is the first disciple Jesus called to be an Apostle, or “one sent.” Luke mentions Peter’s humility as he worships Jesus. This miracle was tailor-made for Peter. This verse also speaks of the need for disciples to be cleansed and live worthy lives to follow the Lord.

**Lk 5:9–10. “He was astonished. . . . Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.”** Luke points specifically to the three chief Apostles—Peter, James, and John—as eyewitnesses. Jesus observes their fear and commands, “Fear not.” This frequently repeated commandment is given in the face of divine miracles.

**Lk 5:11. “they forsook all, and followed him.”** Immediately the fishermen responded to the Lord’s call to serve and left their catch with others. The Lord asks us to forsake our sins to follow and serve Him as well. The fishermen were asked to leave the most amazing catch ever heard of from the Sea of Galilee. The catch was probably sailed on two or more boats by Zebedee and others to the salting factories near Magdala, which was also known in Greek as Taricheae (“center of fish salting”). This name became the brand known for good salted and pickled fish across the Roman Empire.<sup>19</sup>

*Jesus cleanses a leper—Lk 5:12–16.*

**Lk 5:12. “a certain city.”** This phrase suggests that the unclean man had come into an area where he was not permitted, especially in the advanced stage of leprosy. This highly contagious—and treatable—disease is now referred to as Hansen’s disease. The bacterial infection grows slowly, starting in the skin, eyes, nose, and peripheral nerves. The bacteria further multiply to destroy the skin and bones until the infected person dies. However, in the ancient world, many skin rashes were mistakenly referred to as leprosy. Luke, as a physician, probably knew about leprosy. Lepers were segregated to stop contamination, yet this man comes up to the Lord and begs for help. He falls at Jesus’s feet with great faith, as did Peter (Lk 5:8).

Lev 13:1–46 outlines the isolation required after the diagnosis and during the life-long disease of leprosy. The Mosaic law stresses clean versus unclean in Lev 13:45; 14:2–3; Num 5:2; and so on. By the time of the New Testament, rabbis put bans on lepers as the most unclean (after the dead). They could not go into walled cities. If they were on a road, they had to stay at least six feet away from others and call out “unclean” loudly. Leprosy was known as living death.<sup>20</sup> It was believed incurable once in the blood. Rabbis required lepers to dress as mourners, meaning they were to have disheveled hair and wear a black cloak completely covering all their body and most of their face. Some rabbis assumed that eleven specific

sins brought about leprosy, so lepers not only were physically in pain but were also socially viewed as sinners. The man in this story had the worst form of the disease (he was “full of leprosy”; Lk 5:12).

**Lk 5:12–13.** “*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. . . . I will: be thou clean.*” The leper’s desperate state caused the man to develop great faith. His request also shows his meekness and humility.

**Lk 5:14.** “*offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded.*” Jesus honors the law by complying with its finer points regarding purification (Lev 14:2–3). We saw this earlier in Luke’s Nativity narrative, in which he demonstrated that the earliest members of the Christian tradition were respecters of the law of Moses (see my comments on Lk 1–2).

**Lk 5:16.** “*he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.*” The Gospels often describe Jesus going to the wilderness for spiritual rejuvenation or to pray in peace. His example is especially needed in our world.

### *Jesus heals paralysis—Lk 5:17–26*

**Lk 5:17.** “*power of the Lord was present to heal.*” Across Galilee and Judea, teachers of the law and religious, pious men came to meet Jesus. Josephus describes the Pharisees as a group of about six thousand religiously active men who emphasized the ten thousand oral laws, especially the Sabbath observance and dietary laws.

**Lk 5:19.** “*because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling.*” Friends of the paralyzed man had great faith and determination. This story reminds disciples to do all we can to reach God. Small houses in the area were nine feet by twelve feet, medium-sized homes were twelve feet by fifteen feet, and larger homes had enclosed rooms surrounding an open courtyard. In addition to the closed rooms, roof space was used as part of the home in ancient Palestine. The flat roofs were sturdy enough to use as a work area or sleeping space.

Often an outside stairwell led to the flat roof. The roofs of some larger homes had an opening for a ladder to reach down to the main floor. The opening could also be covered by a piece of wood or tile. Whatever rooftop or trap door is described in this story, opening it and letting down the paralyzed man would have caused quite the commotion in the room below.

Luke describes the paralyzed man’s friends lifting tiles made from clay. However, the KJV of Mk 2:4 implies that the friends were more destructive and disruptive. They “uncovered the roof . . . had broken it up.” The Greek word used here, *exorussó*, can be read in two ways: “open up” or “gouge.” As this is Mark’s only use of the word, we don’t have anything to compare it to, but Paul used it in a different context (see Gal 4:15). The NIV translates these two passages thus:

**Mk 2:4**

they made an opening in the roof

**Lk 5:18**

they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling

**Roof structure.** Many Galilean roofs were made with beams, straw, reeds or small sticks, rubble, hard beaten earth, paved brick, stone, or any other clay-like hard substance. Roofs were surrounded by a balustrade at least three feet high. In villages where homes were built adjacent to each other, the rooftop created a “road of the roofs” as another traffic flow.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Romans spread their design of tile roofs across the empire. Archeologists unearthed a few homes with tiled roofs in Palestine dating to the late first century. Luke may have been referring to the tile-roofed houses he was familiar with in Syria, or this may have been one of the few “modern” Roman roofs in Palestine.<sup>22</sup>

**Lk 5:19. “before Jesus.”** This speaks of a sacred setting. In the Greek Septuagint, this word is used “almost as a technical term in temple worship” and when Moses stood before the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

**Lk 5:20. “when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.”** Faith propels this miracle. Jesus heals in a specific order: our spirits must be healed before our bodies can be. This is especially meaningful in a culture that thought illness was a result of a sin. Jesus’s healing spoke of His divine personality as the one who can forgive as well as heal.

**Lk 5:21–22. “Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? . . . Jesus perceived their thoughts.”** Reading the scribes’ and Pharisees’ thoughts is another miracle and sign that Jesus is the Son of God. Luke connects these leaders’ questions about Jesus’s divinity with Satan’s similar question: “If thou be the son of God . . .” (Lk 4:9). Both attack Jesus’s relationship to God.

**Lk 5:23–24 (JST). “Does it require more power to forgive sins than to make the sick rise . . . ?”** The Lord answers His own question to prove that He has power to heal both spiritually and physically. The Greek word translated here as “power” is also translated “authority.” The paralytic’s healing is enough that he has the strength to carry his own stretcher.

*Jesus calls Levi (Matthew)—Mt 9:9–13; Mk 2:13–17; Lk 5:27–32*

**Lk 5:27. “saw a publican, named Levi . . . and he said unto him, Follow me.”** The Lord observed Levi/Matthew possibly at the customs post on the main road just east of Capernaum, on the border of Herod Antipas’s and Philip’s territories (two miles west of where the Jordan River meets the Sea of Galilee). This location was a favorite spot of tax collectors. Luke calls him Levi, but the Gospel of Matthew calls him “Matthew the Publican.” (For more details on this see Mt 9:9–13.)

*Jesus’s early teachings—Mt 9:14–17; Mk 2:18–22; Lk 5:33–39*

In the Synoptic Gospels, try to not get hung up on the order of stories. They are not organized chronologically but theologically. It’s like a patchwork of squares that creates a different overall designs.

**Lk 5:33. “Why do [thy] disciples . . . eat and drink?”** Jesus’s audience here appears in Luke to still be the publicans and scribes, but in the Gospel of Matthew, they are John the Baptist’s disciples. Jesus speaks so that His new disciples will understand that He is intending not to just reform the old law but to completely refresh or restore it. The call for fasting would return after Jesus’s death.

**Lk 5:34–35.** Jesus uses the bridegroom and bride imagery for God and Zion that we find repeatedly in the Old Testament. The wedding allegory runs throughout the New Testament in Jesus’s parables and sermons and in John’s Revelation.

**Lk 5:36.** “*No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old.*” New patches have not yet shrunk, and they pull away as they shrink, tearing or stretching the old fabric at the seams. Matthew uses the word *pleroun*, “to fulfill,” referring to the fulfillment of the law of Moses in the Messiah.

**Lk 5:37.** “*else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled.*” New wine, or freshly squeezed grapes, will expand as it ferments. The liquid was kept in animal skins, which were flexible only when they were relatively new. Christ symbolically is the new wine and must be received with a flexible, soft heart. Old leather cracks and is no longer supple enough to expand as the wine matures. Most wine was diluted significantly with ten parts of water (since it was cheaper and 90 percent of the population was poor, living off the land). The level of wine dilution changed for special occasions like Passover, when it was diluted with three parts water. A strong drink was two parts water, one part wine.<sup>24</sup>

## Notes

1 See, for example, Heb 2:10, 18; 4:15; 5:8.

2 Rebecca I. Denova, *The Origins of Christianity and the New Testament* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2021), 47: “Scholars concluded that Matthew and Luke had a second written source. Unlike the text of Mark, this second written source has not survived independently. German scholars worked on it, and so they named it the ‘Q,’” which is from the German word for “source,” *quelle*.

3 For example, in Act 8:39–40; 1 Ne 11:1, 19–21; Hel 10:16–17.

4 Jeffery R. Holland, “The Inconvenient Messiah” (Brigham Young University devotional, February 2, 1982), [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-and-patricia-t-holland\\_inconvenient-messiah/](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-and-patricia-t-holland_inconvenient-messiah/). Points from this talk continue in my exegesis.

5 Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, vol. 1 of 6 (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1979), 412.

6 *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 213: “Satan cannot seduce us by his enticements unless we in our hearts consent and yield. . . . We can resist the devil; if we were not organized so, we would not be free agents.”

7 Holland, “The Inconvenient Messiah.”

8 Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, ed. Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989), 255.

9 D&C 20:10; Omni 1:25; 3 Ne 19:15; Moro 7:25; 10:14.

10 See D&C 13:1; 20:6, 10, 35; 43:25; 67:13; 76:88; 84:26; 107:20; 130:5–6; 132:16–17.



11 Matthew's fourteen fulfillment prophecies include Mt 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14, 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, 35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9. This use of fourteen points to his Davidic roots is discussed in my notes on Mt 1.

12 Howard Clark Kee and Lynn H. Cohick, *Evolution of the Synagogue* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1999), 91: "The basic meaning of the Greek *synagogue* is 'a gathering, a collection,' and can be used either of people or of things. . . . Jews in antiquity coined the word *proseuche* to designate a place (usually a building) of prayer." See also pages 12, 14, 17, 20. Scripture scrolls were found in the synagogue in Masada. First-century Jews referred to places of worship as *synagogue* and *proseuche*. Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, 277, 290, 295; Mt 9:35; Mk 13:9; Lk 4:16–30; Act 9:20; 13:15; 18:4, 17.

13 *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI MacMillan Reference USA, 2007), s.v. "Synagogue Historical Roots." Later, a separate entrance for women and children and lattice screens were set up in synagogues to keep the women and children unseen and unheard. Archeologists found a lattice separation in a Mesopotamian synagogue from AD 245. Between the third and seventh centuries, additional galleries were built to keep the women on separate floors from the men.

14 See Mk 1:21; Lk 4:16; Act 9:2; 13:14; 14:1; 17:1, 10; 18:8, 19.

15 Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 56.

16 Mark Harding, *Early Christian Life and Thought in Social Context* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2003), 323.

17 Harding, *Early Christian Life and Thought*, 323. The Messianic hope of the time was outlined by the *Psalms of Solomon* (69–40 BC) and focused on a conquering Messiah: "He will have Gentile peoples serving him under his yoke, and he will glorify the Lord publicly in the whole world. He will pronounce Jerusalem clean. . . . He will have nations come from the ends of the earth to see his glory. . . . He will be a righteous king over them, taught by God, there will be no unrighteousness among them in his reign, because everyone will be holy, and their king will be the Lord Messiah. . . . And he himself will be free from sin, in order to rule such a great people. He will expose officials and drive out sinners by the strength of his word" (*Psalms of Solomon* 17:30–32, 36).

18 Stoning was carried out by pushing the offender off a cliff. If that did not kill them, one person was chosen to throw a large rock on them. And if that did not kill the offender, everyone else picked up and threw stones at them.

19 Strabo, *Geography*, XVI.2.45: "At the place called Taricheae the lake supplies excellent fish for pickling."

20 James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 200n1.

21 Talmud, Bava Metzia 88a.

22 Pieter J J Botha, "Houses in the World of Jesus," *Neotestamentica* 32, no. 1 (1998): 37–74.

23 S. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 290.

24 Richard Nietzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 124.