

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

CAPERNAUM

And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim. Matthew 4:13

We have reason to believe that the earthly ministry of the LORD JESUS covered approximately three years from the time of HIS baptism by John in the River Jordan; until HIS appointed death upon Calvary's mount. In one sense of the word HE began HIS ministry at the point of HIS birth since HE came into the world to fulfill HIS eternal purpose of saving "HIS people from their sins." (see Mat 1:21)

Surely HE ministered to those scribes and Pharisees in the Temple, when HE was twelve years old and also to HIS neighbors and acquaintances as HE grew in favor with GOD and man. HIS whole life from its beginning was a testimony of purity, kindness to HIS fellow man, and obedience to HIS heavenly FATHER as well as that of honoring HIS earthly mother and "father", Joseph. Yet HIS unveiling as the PROPHET of GOD began to be put on display to the world at large, as HE was baptized and shortly thereafter was tempted by Satan without faltering in one jot or tittle; even though this "accuser of the brethren" did everything in his power to confound HIM.

Not many days later, HE performed HIS first recorded "miracle" at the wedding in Cana, yet this "miracle" was actually only known to a select few: those who had poured the water into the waterpots, HIS mother, and HIS disciples who believed on HIM. The multitudes at the wedding reveled in the quality of the wine, yet, were not privileged to see the glory which surrounded its MAKER. Thus HE broke upon the scene in quite a subtle and unobtrusive manner in keeping with the prophet's words; "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth." (Isa 42:2-3)

After Joseph left Egypt with Mary and the CHILD JESUS, he settled in Nazareth, which was necessary to the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah; "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isa 11:1) The Hebrew word which is translated as "BRANCH" in the KJV is "naytser", which literally means "a green offshoot". This is analogous to the Greek word which is here translated (or transliterated) as "Nazarene". Thus Matthew (speaking of Joseph's move from Egypt) said, "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He (speaking of the LORD JESUS,) shall be called a Nazarene." (Mat 2:23) Nazareth was the town in which HE grew up and lived for most of HIS life, probably until around the age of thirty. (see Luke 3:23).

We see the LORD JESUS' identity as the "ROOT" or "BRANCH" confirmed in the Revelation, "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." (Rev 22:16) HE has indeed come, as that NAZARENE; the CHOSEN ONE of GOD, the FIRST and the LAST. Amen

While HE grew up in Nazareth, we see that at some point HE moved to Capernaum. We are not sure of the exact location of Capernaum except that it was on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. This move was also prophesied by Isaiah (9:1,2) and recorded here by Matthew, "The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up." (Mat 4:15-16)

It was here that the LORD began to openly preach saying, "*Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (i.e.; presently unfolded)*" (Mat 4:17) This is a welcome message to those who have been given ears to hear and a seemingly unbearable demand for those who cannot. Religious men may speak of "repentance" but they usually view it in a moral aspect rather than as CHRIST declared it to be the recognition of the spiritual nature of HIS Kingdom and HIS right to rule and reign in that Kingdom as the ONLY BEGOTTEN SON of GOD. Natural men will recognize and embrace many things about this MAN JESUS, but they will not fall down and worship HIM in SPIRIT and TRUTH, having no capacity to do so.

Much of the LORD's public preaching was done in the province of Galilee, of which Capernaum was a prominent city at the time. It was in Galilee that HE preached what has become to be known as "the sermon on the mount." Once again we see that religiously oriented moralists primarily see HIS declaration as the laying down of moral imperatives and duties, when in reality, HIS purpose was to illustrate the contrast between HIS Kingdom and that of the flesh. The principles of HIS kingdom are quite at odds with the natural inclination of men and apart from the grace of GOD, in the new birth, no man can embrace them, rejoicing therein.

It was here, near Capernaum, that HE called Peter, Andrew, James and John as well as Matthew, the tax collector, to become "fishers of men". Little did they know how radically their lives and thinking were going to change, nor might I add, at the time, did they have any understanding of the great privilege that was bestowed upon them by this call. Yet one thing is certain, this MAN from Capernaum would alter their lives forever, and bestow upon them the gift of faith, so that in just a short period of time, their confession of that faith would bind them to HIM like fetters of iron. For when many of those that were mere observers of the Kingdom, fell away and walked no more with CHRIST, Peter declared the reason of his steadfastness, "*Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (John 6:68-69)

These were ignorant and uneducated fishermen, yet, in just a few years, men in the seats of power among the Jews would take notice of the fact that they had companied with this NAZARENE. "*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*" (Acts 4:13) This followed right on the heels of Peter's unwavering testimony to the LORDSHIP of CHRIST in explaining the lame man's healing; declaring, "*Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:10-12)

The LORD did many miracles in and around Capernaum. Here HE healed Peter's mother-in-law, the Centurion's servant, a Nobleman's son, the man who was sick of the palsy and let down through the roof, and even raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. HE healed and delivered a multitude of others. "*And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him." (Mar 1:32-34)*

All of this was done openly in the sight of the citizens of Capernaum. Yet while the evil spirits (i.e.; devils or demons) recognized HIM, the multitude did not believe on HIM nor recognize HIS Kingdom. Thus HE spoke plainly of their destruction, because of their obstinance and rebellion. "*And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.*" (Mat 11:23-24)

Nowhere else in the scriptures, do we have a clearer illustration of the folly of thinking that because men see and even rejoice in miracles and signs, that by these things they will be caused to believe and embrace CHRIST and HIS Kingdom by their own power. The wickedness and impotence of men is so great that, even while they eat of the loaves and fishes, which the LORD provides, they will not come to HIM for LIFE apart from the miracle of the new birth as HE spoke to Nicodemus. "*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" (John 3:3) mam