

Epiphany 3 (January 26, 2026)
Matthew 4:12-25 (Series A)
Now, but Not Yet

Two tribes were mentioned in both the Old Testament and Gospel readings; those names were Zebulon and Naphtali. We rarely hear those tribes mentioned though they are significant in a couple of ways. First, these were sons of Jacob, and their family clans were given land as were the other tribes, except for Levi, when the country was first settled after the captivity in Egypt. Second, they were the tribal lands in the northern portion of Israel, with Naphtali touching the Sea of Galilee, but they were the first taken into captivity by the Assyrians. Eventually as Roman took over the region their identity was erased, by and large in the dividing of Israel into our main regions. Their region would be renamed Galilee and be ruled by King Herod. The other regions were named Judea, Samaria, and Decapolis. These regions were first ruled by the children of King Herod the Great but as a couple died governance changed. The high priest largely controlled Judea, where Jerusalem was and Pontius Pilate took care of legal matters, law and order and the like. Pilate only came to Jerusalem during festival times when crowd control was of greater concern,

So, we might wonder why Jesus removed himself to Galilee, but has it mentioned in connection to Naphtali and Zebulon when those names were not really used any more. The reason lies in Isaiah as were heard those tribes mentioned. The problem was that they were the tribes punishment for their unbelief and their lack of faith in God to protect them. Their spiritual darkness left their people physically outside the kingdom and for many of them they were taken off to Assyrian cities. Contributing to their fall from grace was that these tribes existed along heavily traveled roads upon which Gentiles passed but left their pagan influences upon the people, so the Gentiles were a problem too. Spiritually one might say it had been a land of darkness.

But Isaiah had promised that a day would come when the people who walked in darkness would see a great light including the Gentiles and now Jesus who is the light to the world has come there to begin his ministry. John the Baptist had just been arrested, effectively ending his ministry of preparing people for the Messiah and handing it off for the completion of the mission for which Jesus was sent. Disciples of John were switching over and following Jesus, so the ball was in Jesus' court as it was intended to be. Jesus makes his home base for a while along the Sea of Galilee, now to call many of his disciples but especially to begin the casting out of demons, healing their infirmities, and restoring the people to the right relationship with God.

Jesus' words spoke truth as people recognized that He spoke with an authority that the Pharisees and the priests seemed to lack. People were coming from all over Israel but also from lands outside Israel's borders, just as the promise had always been. God loved all the people of the world and had sent Jesus for all of them. It was beginning then and continues to this day.

I have titled my sermon as "Now, but not yet" and this is how it works. Jesus began his rule of restoring the people to His kingdom. He was doing it then but didn't stop there. The work of restoring the people to God continues so what He began is not done yet. It was for those in the darkness of sin and unbelief then and is for us all today as well. The Lord is not done. Amen.

