

Focus Test

“Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.”

(Matthew 15:29–31, ESV)

Parallel Text

“Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.””

(Mark 7:31–37, ESV)



A Place for ALL in the Kingdom of God!

As Jesus finishes with the Canaanite woman, Matthew records that He heads back toward Galilee. Upon a quick read, it would be easy to assume He's headed back home to the Jewish settlements and the places He's comfortable. But Mark's gospel helps us to fill in the blanks here. Matthew's audience would have been familiar with the location and the scandalous nature of the next round of healings, but the context in Mark's account clears up any confusion for us in the 21st century.

Jesus doesn't head back to the Jewish settlements; instead, He's going to the Southeast part of the lake to the Gentile settlements. Mark notes this is the Decapolis, where the Romans have settled. These are roughly 10 cities that report directly to Rome and are independent of the Jewish ruling authority. Yet, when Jesus arrives, they welcome Him with open arms.

In Mark's account, Jesus begins with a private healing and the command to be silent. However, they once again ignore this command, and the more He tells them to “shut up” (my paraphrase), the more they tell others about Jesus. They are amazed at what He can do.

As we point back once again to Matthew's gospel, we are reminded that these pagans are glorying in the God of Israel from whom Jesus comes. These folks aren't Jewish and do not hold sole allegiance to YHWH. Yet, they are amazed and worship God through Christ in these powerful healing moments.

The takeaway, Jesus has come to bring the Kingdom of God, and that was NEVER meant to stay within the Jewish community. God is compassionate over all of His creation. The Jews were the vehicle to reveal God's identity to the world, but the vision of Christ is the salvation of the whole world. We are not told what these people do with the miracles they have witnessed. It would not be foolish to say that some left their pagan gods to worship the God of Israel and the Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus shows us that the Canaanite woman was not being unfairly picked on but that she was acting as the bridge to the Gentile community, and Jesus did not disdain her but loved her. He loves the whole world, desiring to bring all people to Himself. Salvation first came to the Jewish community, and the starting line, the finish line is unknown to us, because Jesus has a desire to see all tongues, tribes, and nations worship at His heavenly throne. So the same healing miracles He's offered to His Jewish counterparts are now starting to happen here in the Decapolis.

Application

This week, who is someone far from God that you can bless? Pray for them to their face. Care for their physical needs.

One of the critical lessons Jesus is teaching us throughout Matthew is that God isn't stingy with His grace or His Power. Jesus heals pagans. Jesus blessed far-off people. Were not told if they all follow Him after this moment. But that's not the concern Jesus has. Too often in my spiritual journey, I have thought, first I must share the gospel with them, and only if they accept can I bless them further. That's incorrect. Jesus doesn't wait. The preaching and healings run hand in hand for Him. Jesus is gracious to the world regardless of how they treat Him. Why? Because that's the nature of Christ! We are called to join in with that care.

So who are you going to bless this week?

Source Notes

“Jesus travels to the east shore of the Sea of Galilee—the Decapolis, a distinctly Gentile region^[1]. Mark's parallel account explicitly identifies this as the middle of the Decapolis territory^[2], making the geographical context unmistakably non-Jewish.

The Gentile identity of the crowd emerges through several textual clues. The crowd's acclamation of “the God of Israel” itself confirms they were not Jewish^[3]—a native Israelite wouldn't need to identify God this way. These people held a polytheistic worldview typical of Greek, Roman, and ancient Palestinian cultures, believing in many gods. They never doubted the God of Israel existed, but now they recognized him as superior to all other deities based on the healing display they witnessed^[4].

Matthew's theological purpose in emphasizing this setting becomes clear through comparison. This healing summary parallels an earlier account of Jesus' ministry among Jews, but Matthew wanted readers to understand that the Lord accepted and loved Gentiles as much as Jews and that Gentiles responded with comparable faith^[4]. Matthew appears anxious that Jesus' initially reluctant response to the Canaanite woman should not be misunderstood as his final stance toward Gentiles^[1].

Significantly, neither this passage nor the following feeding narrative mentions Jesus teaching among Gentiles—only his meeting their physical

5.17.2026 Discover the King “More Healings” Matthew 15:29-31

needs[1]. This restraint suggests Matthew understood Jesus’ primary mission differently. Yet the feeding that follows this healing becomes a deliberate repetition of the Jewish feeding miracle, now for Gentiles, suggesting that if the earlier feeding foreshadowed the Messianic banquet, Gentiles too would share in Israel’s ultimate blessing[3].”¹

“According to the Greek historian Pliny, the ten cities of the Decapolis were Damascus, Dion, Gadara, Gerasa (or Galasa), Hippos (or Hippo), Canatha (or Kanatha), Pella, Philadelphia (the Old Testament Rabbah, present-day Amman, the capital of Jordan), Raphana (or Rephana), and Scythopolis (Beth Shan).[1] Later, other towns such as Abila and Edrei were added to this district.
[1]

However, the precise membership shifted over time. The names of all ten cities cannot be definitively determined, since the lists left by Pliny and Ptolemy differ at least in part, and the members of the confederation changed from time to time.[2] Although the name Decapolis indicates a league of ten cities, there were at least fourteen members, with Damascus an important ally for some time.[2]

Geographically, these cities were scattered south and east of the Sea of Galilee, with only Scythopolis west of the Jordan River.[3] The cities functioned as a confederation of Hellenistic cities settled after the death of Alexander the Great (323 B.C.).[2] In 63 B.C. the Roman leader Pompey gave them independence, and they were placed under the authority of the Roman governor of Syria—a move the Romans made to promote Hellenization in the region and to create a barrier against nationalistic Jewish influence from Judea.[2]”²

¹ [1] R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), [1:251](#).

[2] Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022), [394](#).

[3] Richard T. France, “[Matthew](#),” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), [925](#).

[4] Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), [1:232–233](#).

² [1] Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., in *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995). [See [here](#), [here](#).]

[2] Allen C. Myers, “[DECAPOLIS](#),” in *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), [275](#).

[3] W. Thomas Sawyer, “[Decapolis](#),” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), [408](#).