

The theology of restoration as seen through an intertextual reading of Matthew 4:14–16

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Dates:

Received: 13 Mar. 2026

Accepted: 02 Apr. 2026

Published: 19 May 2026

How to cite this article:

Shin, I.C., 2026, 'The theology of restoration as seen through an intertextual reading of Matthew 4:14–16', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 82(1), a11374. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v82i1.11374>

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Matthew 4:14–16 is commonly interpreted as a fulfilment formula validating Jesus' messianic identity through Isaiah 8:23–9:2 (LXX 9:1–2). This article argues that the Isaianic citation functions not merely as proof of prophecy fulfilment but as a narratively enacted restoration that re-inscribes Galilee – marked by imperial humiliation – as covenantal space within Matthew's story-world. The analysis focuses on Matthew 4:12–25, where Jesus' Galilean ministry begins, and the citation frames the movement from darkness to renewal. The study employs a layered intertextual method integrating syntactic analysis, narrative-structural alignment and geo-semiotic interpretation. This approach examines grammatical transformation, narrative progression and spatial markers in relation to Isaiah. The syntactic shift from 'walking' to 'sitting' intensifies darkness as a spatially immobilising condition, while the aorist 'they saw' relocates Isaianic expectation into the narrative present. Narratively, Matthew 4:12–25 mirrors the Isaianic movement from crisis and darkness to proclamation and renewal, culminating in the kingdom proclamation (Matt 4:17) and ministry summary (Matt 4:23–25). Spatially, Isaianic toponyms carry covenantal land memory and imperial trauma into Matthew's Galilean setting, recoding peripheral territory as the locus where divine kingship becomes operative. Fulfilment [πληρῶ] in Matthew is best understood as restoration-through-reinscription, through which covenant identity is reconstituted within contested geography under imperial pressure rather than proved by predictive correspondence.

Contribution: This article reinterprets Matthew 4:14–16 not as a prophecy-fulfilment proof-text but as a narratively enacted restoration that re-inscribes Galilee as covenantal space. By proposing a layered intertextual method – syntactic transformation, narrative-structural alignment and geo-semiotic analysis – it shows how grammatical shifts and spatial markers generate theological reconfiguration and redefine fulfilment as restoration-through-reinscription.

Keywords: Matthew 4:14–16; fulfilment [πληρῶ]; restoration; intertextuality; narrative criticism; spatial theology; geo-semiotics.

Introduction

Matthew 4:14–16 is frequently read as a fulfilment formula, yet such readings tend to underestimate the narrative force by which Isaiah is redeployed to re-map Galilee as a restored covenantal space (France 1981:233–251; Viljoen 2007:301–305). The passage has typically been interpreted within a fulfilment-oriented framework that foregrounds the relationship between the Old and New Testaments (Davies & Allison [2004] 2006:381–389; Hill 1979; Strecker 2000). While this approach has clarified theological claims of fulfilment, it has paid comparatively little attention to the citation's narrative function within the Gospel.

Menken (1998:528, 536–537) argues that Matthew 4:15–16 adapts and abbreviates its source text (Is 8:23–9:2 LXX). Although Matthew draws on the Septuagint, he reshapes its verbal forms, voice and narrative presentation in accordance with his own literary context (Menken 1998:105, 526–545). This comparative line of inquiry has been valuable in identifying Matthean redactional technique. Yet by concentrating on textual form and Vorlage, it has not sufficiently accounted for the theological orientation generated by the citation within the unfolding narrative of the Gospel.

Subsequently, redaction-critical approaches argued that the evangelist reshaped Isaiah 8.23–9:2 in accordance with his own theological perspective. The application of redaction criticism to Matthew's use of Scripture sought to interpret Old Testament citations in explicitly theological terms. Within this framework, fulfilment quotations were understood as editorial meta-commentary inserted by the Matthean author (France 1981:233–251). Viljoen (2007:301–305)

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characterises the fulfilment formula as a redactional introduction employed by the evangelist and distinguishes between its inner-biblical exegetical and apologetic functions. Such studies have compared the interrelationship of texts from a redactional standpoint (Viljoen 2025:1–8).

At the same time, a detailed comparison of Matthew 4.16 with the MT and LXX traditions has led some scholars to argue that Matthew does not directly cite the Septuagint form of Isaiah (Shedinger 2004:449–451). Yet these grammatical and textual analyses have seldom been brought into sustained dialogue with questions of spatial theology.

In addition, a number of studies have approached Matthew's use of Scripture from socio-cultural perspectives. Freyne (2004) situates Jesus' Galilean ministry within its socio-geographical context, highlighting the historical and social dynamics of Galilee. Narrative and semiotic approaches have likewise analysed the structural function of citation within the Gospel (Patte 1987; Viljoen 2025:1–8).

Carter (2000a:503–520) interprets the intertextual relationship between Isaiah 7–9 and Matthew 1.23; 4.15–16 as programmatic for Matthew's soteriological narrative, arguing that the Immanuel and light motifs propel the Gospel's account of salvation. By reading these fulfilment citations within their broader Isaianic context, he connects Jesus' ministry and the Matthean community with the realities of imperial power – first Assyria and later Rome. Whereas redaction-critical studies concentrated on form, origin and authorial intention within a prophecy-fulfilment framework, Carter places greater emphasis on audience reception and communal memory, highlighting the wider theological and socio-political implications evoked by the text.

Although imperial criticism has significantly advanced socio-cultural contextualisation, it has tended to overlook the grammatical and narrative reconfiguration of the citation and has not fully integrated these features into a coherent spatial theology. Whereas imperial readings foreground Rome, the present study contends that the decisive theological move lies in Matthew's narrative-spatial re-inscription of Galilee.

In sum, although diverse intertextual approaches have been applied to Matthew 4:14–16, they have not sufficiently synthesised narrative, syntactic and spatial dimensions into a coherent account of the citation's theological function. Existing readings often isolate textual form, authorial redaction or imperial context. Accordingly, rather than privileging a single methodological lens, this study employs a layered intertextual analysis to clarify the theological significance of Matthew's appropriation of Isaiah in 4:14–16.

Matthew 4:14–16 should be read not merely as a fulfilment citation but as a narratively constructed act of theological restoration, in which geography becomes the medium of covenantal redefinition, and Galilee is re-mapped as a restored

covenantal space. In this study, restoration denotes not an immediate political reversal but the re-inscription of covenant identity within contested geography through narrative and syntactic transformation. This restoration comprises three interrelated dimensions: (1) the proclamation of light to a people in darkness; (2) the theological reevaluation of marginal space; and (3) the reorientation of perception towards divine kingship. Ultimately, restoration refers to God's comprehensive recovery of his people from oppression and alienation, encompassing political, economic and spiritual dimensions; in Matthew, this restoration is manifested in those dwelling in darkness, especially in Galilee of the Gentiles, as they are healed, regathered and reconstituted through Jesus' ministry into a renewed community under God's reign.

To this end, the study briefly outlines its intertextual methodology before proceeding in three analytical movements. Firstly, through an analysis of syntactic transformation, it examines how Matthew's adaptation of Isaiah reshapes the grammar of the source text and thereby signals a deliberate theological reorientation. Secondly, by means of narrative alignment, it investigates the intertextual relationship at the level of plot configuration. Finally, through spatial-semantic reconfiguration, it explores how Matthew constructs Galilee as a theologically charged space within his narrative world. Together, these analytical lenses illuminate how Galilee is re-inscribed not as a marginal territory, but as a restored covenantal space where divine kingship becomes narratively operative.

Research methods and design

Scholarship on Matthew's use of Scripture has moved from fulfilment-oriented and redaction-critical readings towards literary and semiotic accounts of intertextuality (Alkier 2009:7–8; Hays 1989, 2005:34–35). Building on this development, the present study adopts a synthetic approach that integrates narrative, syntactic and spatial analysis. Drawing on Hays's concept of metalepsis and Alkier's semiotic theory, it understands citation as a narrative-semiotic act in which meaning arises relationally within the textual network rather than residing in the cited text alone (Alkier 2009:8; Hays 1989).

This study implements the proposed framework by analysing the source and receiving texts through close syntactic and semantic comparison. As Carter (2000a) has demonstrated, Matthew evokes Isaiah 7–9 through lexical and discourse cues – such as the light and darkness motif, citation signals and narrative progression – thereby activating a wider Isaianic horizon.

While Carter foregrounds lexical and discourse features, the present study shifts the focus to syntactic transformation as the primary locus of theological reconfiguration. Building on Menken's (2004:144–160) observation that minor textual variations function as interpretive framing, and on Moyise and Menken's (2004) demonstration that shifts in tense, voice and connective particles re-contextualise citations, this article

examines how Matthew's adaptation of Isaiah 8:23–9:2 re-inscribes Galilee within his narrative. Particular attention is given to verbal tense, word order and the citation formula as mechanisms through which theological space is narratively reconfigured.

A central concern of narrative criticism is plot. Carter (2000a:503–520) argues that Matthew 4 reflects the narrative structure of Isaiah 8–9. Yet Hartman (1972:131–152) cautions that isolating fragments of a source text to demonstrate intertextuality may distort its narrative logic, and Foley (1991:1–60) similarly urges attention to broader processes of narrative formation rather than discrete traditional units. Accordingly, this study examines how the plot, characters and spatial configuration of the Isaianic narrative are rearticulated within Matthew's account.

Plot may be defined as the patterned sequencing of thematic movements that generate narrative coherence. On this basis, intertextuality may operate at the level of narrative configuration rather than isolated motifs. MacDonald (2023:4–6) contends that when comparable elements appear in similar sequence, such structural alignment may indicate narrative intertextuality and even narrative modelling. While Carter emphasises thematic continuity, the present study treats structural sequencing as the primary indicator of intertextual alignment. It therefore tests whether Matthew 4:12–17 reproduces the Isaianic sequence of crisis, illumination and renewed kingship that structures Isaiah 7–9. As articulated in Isaiah through geopolitical threat (Isa 7–8), deepening darkness (Isa 8:21–22), the dawning of light (Isa 9:2) and royal promise (Isa 9:6–7), this prophetic progression provides the narrative template that Matthew may re-perform in his relocation to Galilee.

A third analytical lens addresses the semiotic and historical dimensions of space. Freyne (1980) reconstructs 1st century Galilee as a socially and politically contested region, providing the historical basis for reading it as a symbolic space where centre and periphery, Jew and Gentile, and empire and locality intersect. Carter (2005:155–157) further shows how the political economy of Galilee – particularly the fishing industry under Roman administration – frames the proclamation of the kingdom of God as a symbolic challenge to imperial order.

Yet in the Gospels, space functions not merely as historical background but as narrative and semiotic construction. As Stewart (2009:14–15) and Moxnes (2001a, 2001b) argue, geography operates within discourse as a carrier of ideological and theological meaning rather than as neutral topography.

Building on this insight, the present study approaches Galilee in Matthew 4:14–16 as a narratively re-inscribed space. The Isaianic citation does more than localise Jesus' ministry; it reconfigures contested territory as covenantal space. Geographical naming thus functions as a semiotic act in

which prophetic memory and narrative relocation converge, transforming crisis into restoration within Matthew's narrative world.

To operationalise this framework, the study defines its textual scope and analytical trajectory. The source text is Isaiah 8:23–9:1 (MT; Eng 9:1–2), read in dialogue with the Septuagint, and the receiving text is Matthew 4:12–17, especially 4:15–16 within its narrative setting. Three interrelated hypotheses guide the analysis: (1) Matthew's citation involves deliberate syntactic transformation as interpretive framing; (2) the relocation to Galilee and proclamation of the kingdom enact narrative alignment with the Isaianic sequence of crisis, darkness, illumination and kingship; and (3) geographical naming operates as a spatial-semiotic act that reconfigures contested territory as restored covenantal space.

An intertextual reading of Matthew 4:14–16

A syntactic approach to intertextuality

The LXX already reflects a translational adaptation, rendering the Hebrew plural participle as a singular in agreement with *λαὸς*, thereby conforming the phrase to Greek syntactic expectations. Yet Matthew does not merely reproduce this form. By replacing *πορευόμενος* [walking] with *κατοικοῦντες* [sitting], he introduces a further reformulation of the expression (Davies & Allison [2004] 2006:374–379; Luz 2007:159–161; Menken 1998:536–537). This shift should not be pressed as a rigid lexical opposition, since the Hebrew and Greek expressions involved allow a measure of semantic overlap, including nuances of walking, dwelling, remaining and living (Bauer et al. 2000:853; Mounce 2006). Even so, Matthew's use of *κάθηναι* remains intertextually significant, for it reshapes Isaiah's wording in a way that redirects attention from movement within darkness to a more settled condition under it (Davies & Allison [2004] 2006:374). The alteration thus functions not merely as a formal adaptation but as an interpretive re-inscription within Matthew's narrative.

Whereas the Isaianic image evokes a people moving in darkness, Matthew's formulation highlights those who dwell within a condition of settled darkness (Luz 2007:159; Menken 1998:536–537). In this respect, the image resonates not only with Isaiah 9:2 but also with other scriptural texts in which those who sit in darkness await divine deliverance, such as Isaiah 42:7 and Psalm 107:10, 14. The same motif appears in Luke 1:79, where light shines upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death (Luz 2007:159). Darkness thus becomes not merely a metaphorical condition but a narratively localised and theologically charged space associated with bondage, death and the need for divine intervention. Within Matthew's narrative world, those who sit in darkness may be read not only as the people of Galilee in the scriptural citation, but also as anticipating the lived experience of the Matthean community itself. As Viljoen (2016:4–5) and Vledder and Van Aarde (1995:400–401)

suggest, the Matthean community understood itself as marginalised, embattled and engaged in the struggle to establish its identity; the image of those who 'sit in darkness' may therefore be read as reflecting, at least in part, the lived condition of Matthew's community. Illumination, therefore, occurs not along a journey but within an inhabited spatial setting (Morris 1992:82). This broader restoration takes narrative form in Matthew 4:16, where divine light dawns upon those in darkness, marginal space is revalued as the site of divine action, and God's people are renewed under his reign. Matthew's reformulation thus reframes darkness as the space in which divine light dawns and covenantal restoration begins.

Whereas most studies of Matthew's fulfilment citations have concentrated on textual correspondence or Christological proof, this study contends that Matthew's primary hermeneutical innovation lies in the relocation of prophetic temporality within narrative discourse. The Hebrew רָאָה [they have seen] functions as a prophetic perfect, announcing a future act as though already accomplished. The Septuagint renders this with ἴδετε , preserving its declarative and anticipatory force. Matthew's use of εἶδεν does not introduce a new grammatical form; rather, it relocates the prophetic declaration within his narrative framework (Menken 1998:536–537). What functions in Isaiah as eschatological proclamation becomes, in Matthew, inscribed into narrative time within the unfolding story of Jesus – a decisive hermeneutical move by which prophetic expectation is reframed. As Menken (1998:536–537) observes, Matthew converts Isaiah's promissory structure into a fulfilment narrative expressed in the aorist tense, presenting restoration as already realised in Jesus. The prophetic future becomes narratively present. In this way, Matthew does not merely cite Isaiah; he re-narrates Isaiah's hope within the story of Jesus.

The narrative declaration that the people 'have seen' [εἶδεν] the light marks the inscription of prophetic promise into the temporal horizon of the narrative. The contrast between structural darkness and decisive light is intensified through Matthew's editorial framing (Menken 1998; cf. LXX Is 9:2). Darkness functions as a condition of historical and theological crisis, whereas light appears as the historical embodiment of salvific promise. The aorist εἶδεν thus signals not mere perception but the situating of the people within fulfilled prophetic time.

The syntax of Matthew 4:16 also warrants attention. In the clause $\text{ὁ λαὸς ὁ καθημένος ἐν σκότει εἶδεν φῶς μέγα, καὶ τοῖς καθημένοις ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου, φῶς ἀνέτειλεν}$ designates Israel. Yet in the parallel expression, $\text{τοῖς καθημένοις ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου}$, the recipients of light are expressed in the plural. This pluralisation, while syntactically subtle, aligns with Matthew's broader tendency to depict restoration as narratively inclusive rather than eschatologically postponed. If so, Matthew's citation of Isaiah 9:2 gestures towards a restoration that embraces both

renewed Israel and those beyond it (Putra 2021:21–23). Such a reading situates Israel's restoration within a broader narrative horizon of inclusion.

The Isaianic background strengthens this theological movement. In Isaiah 9:1–2, imperial power serves as the instrument of divine judgement, yet it does not possess ultimate authority. Assyria executes judgement but remains subject to divine sovereignty. Restoration, not destruction, constitutes the final word for God's people. As Carter (2000a:511–512) argues, the promise of the remnant's return signals not merely survival but the reconstitution of Israel's space and identity.

The foregoing analysis suggests that intertextuality in Matthew 4:16 is signalled not only by lexical correspondence with Isaiah 9:2 (LXX) but by Matthew's *grammatical* handling of the citation. The shift from $\text{πορευόμενος το καθήνοις}$ and the narrative deployment of εἶδεν/ἀνέτειλεν function as syntactic cues that relocate the Isaianic utterance within Matthew's discourse-world. At this layer, the citation's meaning is generated through grammatical transformation – tense/aspect choice, participial imagery and clause structure – rather than through verbatim reproduction alone. Having traced these syntactic mechanisms, the discussion can now test whether Matthew's appropriation of Isaiah is likewise recognisable at the level of narrative configuration.

Narrative configuration as intertextuality

In Matthew 4, the narrative configuration of Isaiah 8–9 is not merely echoed but re-performed within a new narrative horizon. When the two texts are read in view of their situational background, a thematic intertextuality emerges at the level of plot: in Isaiah, YHWH employs Assyria as an instrument of judgement upon a faithless people, yet the same narrative sequence culminates in restoration; in Matthew, the people who 'sit in darkness' are likewise portrayed as the locus of divine restoration as the light dawns through Jesus' ministry. In this respect, the circumstances depicted in Isaiah and the situation presupposed in Matthew disclose an intertextual correspondence in narrative configuration (Carter 2000a:507).

Isaiah 8–9 may be schematised narratively as a sequence of: (1) the announcement of Assyrian invasion (Is 8:7–10); (2) a recollective citation that frames prophetic experience and waiting (Is 8:16–18); (3) the proclamation of restoration/light (Is 9:1–2 [Eng 9:1–2]); and (4) the enactment of restoration in images of liberation and peace (Is 9:3–5). Matthew 4, in turn, unfolds as: (1) Jesus' relocation and the initiation of ministry (Matt 4:12–13); (2) a recollective citation that interprets the relocation through Isaiah (Matt 4:14–16); (3) the proclamation of the kingdom (Matt 4:17); and (4) the enactment of restoration through teaching, proclamation, and healing (Matt 4:23–25). The following analysis examines how these sequences align and thereby function intertextually at the level of narrative construction:

- **Crisis as narrative prelude:** The Assyrian threat (Is 8:7–10) and the initiation of Jesus' ministry (Mt 4:12–13). From the perspective of form criticism and genre analysis, Isaiah 8:7–10 – when examined in terms of verbal forms, semantic force and syntactic configuration – may be classified as a challenge speech directed towards an enemy on the eve of war (Williamson 2017:513). The unit bears the rhetorical markers of a confrontational discourse that couples imperatival summons with anticipated defeat: 'Raise the war cry, yet you will be shattered'. The imagery of 'girding' functions as an implicit command presupposing an early stage of military preparation, while the preceding verb 'assemble yourselves' indicates a summons that initiates the sequence of wartime mobilisation (Williamson 2017:512–513). Within Isaiah's prophetic rhetoric, the announcement of Assyrian aggression thus operates as a divinely authorised forecast of judgement upon Israel's covenantal unfaithfulness.

By contrast, Matthew 4:12–13 does not contain an explicit proclamation announcing Jesus' ministry in the same direct manner. Nevertheless, the evangelist introduces a narrative time-marker that performs an analogous anticipatory function. The arrest of John the Baptist is not merely chronological information; it functions as a foreshadowing signal that anticipates the trajectory of threat that will later confront Jesus and his disciples (cf. Mt 24:9; 26:2, 25) (Combrink 1983:79–80; France 2007:141). For this reason, attention must be given to the verbal framing in Matthew 4:12. The participle ἀκούσας is best understood as causal (Davies & Allison [2004] 2006:375): upon hearing that John had been imprisoned, Jesus begins his own public activity. This narrative transition signals the inauguration of a new phase of ministry defined by the proclamation of the kingdom of God (Lohmeyer 1967:63). In this sense, John's arrest functions as a temporal precursor to Jesus' mission.

The indicative verb ἀνεχώρησεν likewise carries theological weight. In Matthew, it occurs repeatedly (10 times) and often marks movement that participates in the divine economy – withdrawal for protection, relocation or mission expansion within God's plan. Accordingly, ἀνεχώρησεν in Matthew 4:12 should not be reduced to a neutral travel notice; it narratively signals movement into a newly constituted locus of mission. Although some interpret the verb in terms of flight, it is better read not as mere escape but as transition into a new phase of challenge and vocation (Josephus, *Vita* 151; Davies & Allison [2004] 2006:376). Matthew thus anticipates Jesus' ministry by employing a subtle temporal and spatial signal rather than an explicit announcement.

In broad narrative terms, therefore, Isaiah's announcement of war and Matthew's initiation of Jesus' ministry disclose thematic intertextuality at the level of plot prelude. Firstly, both narratives are framed as divine action: Isaiah depicts Assyria's advance as an instrument of YHWH's judgement upon Israel's unbelief, while Matthew portrays John's arrest as the narrative condition through which God inaugurates Jesus' mission. In both cases, the narrative sequence begins

with divine agency. Secondly, in both cases, completed verbal forms function proleptically, constructing a narrative horizon that anticipates decisive divine intervention. Although Isaiah's speech is cast in forms that can be described as past-oriented, the rhetorical effect is prospective: it constructs Assyria's incursion as impending judgement. Likewise, Matthew's 'having heard' narrates a completed event, yet functions to project the future course of Jesus' mission (Mt 4:12). Finally, both Isaiah's prophetic activity and Jesus' ministry commence under threat: the Isaianic sequence unfolds under the announced danger of Assyrian aggression, while Jesus' ministry begins within the crisis generated by John's imprisonment. These shared narrative elements suggest not merely thematic resemblance but deliberate narrative alignment, through which Matthew re-performs Isaiah's crisis-prelude within a new covenantal horizon:

- **Proclamation as narrative turning point:** Isaiah 9:1–2 and Matthew 4:17. Isaiah 9:1–2 may be understood as a proclamatory announcement concerning the advent of messianic restoration. Sweeney (1994:229–230), noting the use of perfect forms in 9:1, argues that the inverted construction – 'the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light' – functions as an exclamatory declarative statement. Likewise, Isaiah 9:2 (Eng 9:3) employs second-person perfect forms ('You have multiplied the nation', 'You have increased its joy'), which resemble the language of praise or thanksgiving psalmody and publicly proclaim YHWH's salvific intervention. In this sense, the passage operates rhetorically as a proclamatory discourse announcing divine deliverance.

Whether construed as a salvation oracle announcing deliverance from Assyrian humiliation or as a Davidic enthronement declaration, Isaiah 9:1–2 functions rhetorically as a proclamation within a crisis-to-restoration sequence. Alternatively, if Isaiah 9:1–6 is construed as a royal declaration, the unit may be read as a Davidic enthronement oracle addressed to Israel. On this reading, the emergence of a Davidic ruler signifies that Zebulun and Naphtali – regions once trampled by foreign powers – will no longer remain abandoned to darkness but will experience restoration in both socio-political and theological dimensions. Regardless of which interpretive trajectory is adopted, Isaiah 9:1–2 functions as a proclamation within its narrative context.

Matthew 4:17 likewise assumes a proclamatory form. Firstly, it signals the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry. The formula 'From that time' marks a decisive narrative transition and announces that Jesus now begins proclaiming the kingdom of heaven (Luz 2007:160). The temporal marker τότε is directly linked to John's arrest, indicating that Jesus assumes and continues the proclamation previously associated with John (Mt 3:2). In this way, the narrative transfers the heraldic task from John to Jesus (Luz 2007:160).

Secondly, the declaration 'the kingdom of heaven has drawn near' functions as an announcement of eschatological

nearness: it proclaims the advent of divine rule in a new historical moment. Matthew's presentation differs from the Marcan parallel (Mk 1:15) by omitting explicit temporal references to fulfilment, thereby foregrounding the performative force of Jesus' proclamation itself (Davies & Allison [2004] 2006:389; Luz 2007:160). Jesus' announcement thus constitutes a programmatic declaration of divine kingship.

Thirdly, the imperative 'Repent' conveys an assertion of authority. Although repentance is not Matthew's dominant theological theme, John urges repentance twice (Mt 3:8, 11), whereas Jesus calls for repentance repeatedly (Mt 4:17; 11:20–21; 12:41). Within Matthew's narrative world, Jesus is portrayed as possessing authority to forgive sins. Consequently, the command 'Repent' functions not merely as moral exhortation but as a performative declaration grounded in Jesus' superior authority relative to John.

Read intertextually, therefore, Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom in Matthew's proclamation does not merely echo Isaiah; it re-performs the Isaianic turning point within a new narrative horizon centred on the kingdom. In both texts, proclamation constitutes the narrative turning point that moves the plot from crisis towards restoration. The Isaianic announcement of light and the Matthean proclamation of the kingdom function analogously as declarative acts that inaugurate divine restoration within their respective narrative worlds:

- **Recollective citation:** Isaiah 8:16–18 and Matthew 4:14–16. Isaiah 8:16–18 may be understood as a recollective citation that frames prophetic experience retrospectively. Dekker (2009:63–88) argues that the plural expression 'signs and portents' וּלְמוֹפְתִים לְאֵתוֹת evokes symbolic vocabulary associated with Exodus and Sinai traditions, particularly motifs linked to deliverance discourse. On this reading, Isaiah 8:16–18 constitutes a personal recollection in which the prophet narratively gathers his lived experience of divine revelation in the form of testimony, sign and disclosure.

The command, 'Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching', suggests that the torah proclaimed by Isaiah was not immediately received. The prophet retrospectively interprets this moment as a period in which God temporarily 'sealed' the word. The declaration, 'I will wait for YHWH ... I will hope in him' (Is 8:17), portrays a context of crisis – such as the Assyrian invasion – in which God appears to hide his face and remain silent. This passage thus reflects the prophet's interior experience of divine hiddenness. In such circumstances, waiting becomes the only faithful response available to the human subject.

Furthermore, the statement, 'Behold, I and the children whom YHWH has given me are signs and portents', recalls concrete historical experience. The names of Isaiah's sons embody prophetic messages; Shear-Jashub, for example, signifies both survival and socio-political restoration.

Retrospectively, the prophet discerns that the divine sign had been operative even within apparent concealment. Accordingly, Isaiah 8:16–18 may be read as a recollective narrative structured around testimony, sign and revelation: in a period when the word was resisted and faith destabilised, the prophet was instructed to seal the testimony and wait upon YHWH, only later discerning that divine signs had been present all along.

Matthew 4:14 introduces the citation formula that frames 4:12–13 as fulfilment: 'so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled'. The conjunction וְאֵלֶּכָּה functions here as a connective marker that links the preceding narrative to its prophetic referent (Davies & Allison [2004] 2006:211–212; France 1981:233–251). Thus, Matthew 4:12–13 participates in a narrative configuration shaped by the Isaianic text. The question, then, is whether the recollective dimension present in Isaiah is likewise operative within Matthew's narrative.

Matthew 4:15–16 may be read as a recollective act that reactivates Isaianic memory within the present narrative. Jesus' relocation to Galilee is interpreted through the remembered trauma of northern Israel's devastation. By invoking Zebulun and Naphtali – regions associated with Assyrian conquest – Matthew recalls a landscape marked by national defeat and darkness. These geographical names function as mnemonic signs that connect past catastrophe to present salvation. Likewise, the description 'the people sitting in darkness' evokes the remembered condition of northern Israel and suggests that the experience of political darkness, spiritual stagnation and covenantal crisis persists into the 1st century Galilean context.

In this way, the citation thus activates Isaianic memory as a narrative hermeneutic through which present geography is re-signified. The darkness described in Isaiah is retrieved and narratively recontextualised as the horizon within which Jesus' ministry is disclosed as light. Matthew 4:14–16 thus exhibits a narrative structure of recollection: past crisis is remembered in order to frame present restoration. By appropriating the Isaianic technique of retrospective interpretation, Matthew presents Jesus as the revelatory fulfilment of a remembered condition of darkness. The recollection of Israel's past becomes the medium through which divine light is disclosed in the present:

- **Enacted restoration:** Isaiah 9:3–5 and Matthew 4:23–25. Wegner (1992:103–112, 2009:237–249) argues that Isaiah 9:3–5 depicts the concrete realisation of restoration for northern Israel and Judah under Assyrian oppression. Although Isaiah 9:3–7 is commonly read as a messianic prophecy, verses 3–5 may be understood, from the perspective of Israel's lived experience, as articulating the substantive effects of the restoration that the coming ruler will inaugurate. The perfect verb in Isaiah 9:3 ('You have multiplied the nation', 'You have increased its joy') functions as a prophetic perfect, declaring as accomplished

a restoration that remains future from the historical standpoint. It signals the anticipated socio-political liberation of the exiled northern kingdom (Martin 2022:89–91).

The imagery in Isaiah 9:4 – the breaking of the yoke, the staff of the oppressor, and the rod of affliction – denotes the termination of domination and the advent of liberation. The allusion to the ‘day of Midian’ evokes Gideon’s victory, a paradigmatic symbol of divine intervention and national restoration. The yoke, staff and rod mark the transition from judgement and humiliation to socio-political renewal; they metaphorically portray Israel as a people reduced to the status of exploited beasts of burden (Oswalt 1986:230 n. 9; Wildberger 1981:211–12). Willis (1990:94–95) similarly interprets the breaking of the rod and staff as signifying victory over a specific oppressor, announcing a renewed historical opportunity for Israel’s restoration.

Isaiah 9:5 continues this imagery with the burning of ‘every boot of the tramping warrior’ and ‘garments rolled in blood’, symbolising the cessation of warfare and the restoration of peace (Delitzsch 1989:210). The destruction of military remnants signifies not the redistribution of spoils but the definitive end of violence. It anticipates the advent of shalom – a transformation from devastation to stability and communal wholeness (Blenkinsopp 2000:176–188). In this way, restoration encompasses not merely spiritual renewal but the reconstitution of social and political life under divine rule.

A corresponding enactment of restoration appears in Matthew 4:23–25. While this passage summarises Jesus’ proclamation of the gospel, it simultaneously emphasises his healing of ‘every disease and every affliction’. Willitts (2007:366–367) characterises Matthew’s messianology as ‘restorative messianism’, suggesting that the Gospel anticipates a renewal analogous to the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. The image of ‘sheep without a shepherd’ (Mt 9:35–36), linked with ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (10:6), frames Jesus’ ministry within a paradigm of communal and national restoration. On this reading, the Galilean ministry in Matthew 4:23–25 functions intertextually with Isaiah 9:3–5 by making visible the restoration of a fragmented Israel. Jesus appears as shepherd and king who gathers and heals a wounded people, inaugurating a renewed covenant community.

Luz (2007:165–167) further interprets Matthew 4:23–25 as forming an inclusion with 9:35. The triadic structure – teaching, proclamation of the gospel, and healing – provides the narrative frame for the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7) and the miracle narratives (Matt 8–9). Jesus’ ministry of word and deed thus manifests the reign of God as holistic restoration, encompassing faith, ethical formation and bodily healing. Culpepper (2016:2) likewise observes that Jesus’ ministry demonstrates the fulfilment of Scripture, the breaking of boundaries, authority over evil, and the restoration of persons to wholeness [*shalom*] and community.

Accordingly, Matthew 4:23–25 may be read as the narrative embodiment of the ‘great light’ proclaimed in 4:15–16. The arrival of light is not merely declarative but enacted in teaching, proclamation and healing. These activities reconstitute community, incorporate the socially marginalised, and render visible the restoration anticipated in Isaiah 9:3–5.

Read at the level of plot, Matthew’s engagement with Isaiah 8–9 is best observed in the patterned sequencing of crisis, proclamation, recollection and enacted transformation across the two narratives. The correspondence is not mechanically exact; nevertheless, the alignment of narrative movements indicates that Isaiah functions as more than an oracle to be ‘proved’. Rather, it supplies a narrative template that is rearticulated within Matthew 4:12–25. Intertextuality here operates through structural re-performance: earlier narrative progression is re-inscribed into a new story-world, yielding continuity with transformation. The next step is to examine how this narrative alignment is further intensified and localised through the Gospel’s handling of spatial vocabulary in Matthew 4:15–16.

Spatial-semiotic (historical) analysis

Matthew 4:12–13 delineates the geographical scope of Jesus’ ministry. Many scholars argue that Matthew’s cluster of toponyms – Zebulun, Naphtali, ‘the way of the sea’, ‘beyond the Jordan’, and ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ – functions less as cartographic description than as a symbolic configuration of Galilee (Carter 2000a:119). These place names operate as semiotic markers within a narratively constructed space: geography is not a neutral background but an ideologically encoded territory within the Gospel’s symbolic world. The question, therefore, is how this spatial vocabulary relates intertextually to Isaiah.

Carter (2000a) and Chancey (2002:10) suggest that Matthew activates memories of Assyrian domination and Galilee’s liminal character, thereby construing the region as a theologically charged space. Although Matthew 4:15–16 does not reproduce any extant form of Isaiah 8:23–9:2 exactly, its geographical sequence resonates with Isaiah by locating restoration precisely within contested territory marked by imperial pressure. In this way, Matthew re-inscribes Isaianic geography: Galilee is not narrated as peripheral space but as the locus where crisis is reconfigured into covenantal restoration.

Matthew 1:22–23 evokes the broader Isaianic horizon (Carter 2000a:509–510). The citation of Isaiah 7:14 should be read within Isaiah 7–9, which moves from the Immanuel sign amid imperial threat to the promise of light dawning in Galilee. The Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom in 722 BCE (2 Kgs 15:29) rendered these territories signs of judgement. Isaiah 8:16–9:1 presents this catastrophe as covenantal chastisement, spatially inscribed upon the land: Zebulun and Naphtali are marked by humiliation and ‘thick darkness’ (Is 8:22; 9:1). Imperial domination thus becomes a condition embodied in geography (Oswalt 1986:234–240).

Within this framework, Matthew's citation functions not merely as predictive fulfilment but as spatial reactivation. In 4:15–16, he preserves the Isaianic sequence of place names – 'Zebulun and Naphtali', 'the way of the sea', 'beyond the Jordan', 'Galilee of the Gentiles' – following the Septuagintal tradition (Is 8:23–9:1 LXX; Davies & Allison [2004] 2006:374–379). By retaining these markers, Matthew reinscribes restoration within the same territorial coordinates once associated with humiliation: the land brought into contempt becomes the stage upon which divine light appears (Oswalt 1986:233–240).

Particularly significant is the transformation of the people's posture. Whereas Isaiah depicts them as 'walking' [πορευόμενος] in darkness, Matthew describes them as 'sitting' [ὁ καθήμενος] in darkness (Mt 4:16; Menken 1998:536–537). The shift from movement to stasis intensifies the condition: darkness becomes a spatially immobilising reality. The phrase ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου, [in the region and shadow of death] further territorialises the imagery, linking existential crisis with geographical space (Luz 2007:160–161). Darkness is thus embedded within a specific landscape rather than functioning as a mere metaphor (Oswalt 1986:235–238).

Conversely, the declaration that 'a great light has dawned' [φῶς ἀνέτειλεν] signals reversal within the same space. The verb ἀνατέλλω evokes light rising upon a particular horizon, indicating restoration enacted in the very territory once marked by humiliation (France 2007:143–145). Continuity of place combined with reversal of meaning demonstrates deliberate narrative re-signification: Galilee remains geographically the same, yet its theological significance is transformed.

Within the Matthean context, this spatial reconfiguration addresses a community living under imperial pressure (Luz 2007:45–48; Wengst 1987:1–54). By situating Jesus' ministry in Galilee – historically associated with Assyrian humiliation (Carter 2000b:67–74) – Matthew reactivates Isaianic geography as theological space. The proclamation of the kingdom in 4:17 marks the inauguration of divine rule within that contested region. Even under Roman authority and Herodian complicity (Mt 4:12; 14:2), the narrative affirms that imperial power does not nullify divine sovereignty (Davies & Allison [2004] 2006:261–267).

Accordingly, Matthew's engagement with Isaiah 7–9 operates as a geographical re-signification (Menken 1998:538–539). The land once associated with judgement becomes the locus of renewed divine action. The Isaianic memory of humiliation is not erased but transformed. Galilee, formerly coded as a space of darkness under imperial domination, is reimagined as the site where 'a great light' dawns (France 2007:79; Oswalt 1986:241–243). Restoration theology in Matthew is therefore spatially embodied: divine sovereignty is manifested precisely in the territory that once signified covenantal collapse. Through this spatial reconfiguration, Matthew

articulates a theology of restoration grounded in the reclamation of contested geography under imperial rule.

Isaiah's geographical references carry socio-political significance beyond mere description. The territories of Zebulun and Naphtali belonged to the land promised to Israel (Dt 34:1–4; Jos 19:10–39), yet as northern border regions, they were especially vulnerable to Assyrian invasion. The 'way of the sea' likely refers to a major international corridor (Via Maris) that was economically significant but politically exposed (Chancey 2002:28–36; Reed 2000:23–30). 'Beyond the Jordan' further underscores distance from Jerusalem's political and religious centre. Over time, Galilee came to symbolise liminality – ethnic plurality and peripheral status – rather than central authority (Chancey 2002:54–63; Oswalt 1986:239).

From a semiotic perspective, Isaiah recodes this geography through imagery of humiliation and darkness (Is 8:22; 9:1). Space becomes the bearer of judgement: the land once granted in promise is marked by imperial domination. Yet Isaiah 9:1–6 announces reversal. The region brought into contempt will receive glory, and divine rule will be reasserted over the same territory (Childs 2001:80–86; Oswalt 1986:241–245).

Matthew appropriates these Isaianic place names to frame Jesus' ministry as restoration within that contested land (Mt 4:15–16). The regions once associated with humiliation become the locus of renewed divine action. Jesus' relocation to Galilee thus signifies not retreat but the inauguration of ministry from Israel's peripheral territory, where promised restoration begins.

Matthew 4:15–16 preserves Isaiah's geographical vocabulary [γῆ Νεφθαλείμ, ὁδὸν θαλάσσης, πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, Γαλιλαία τῶν ἐθνῶν] and situates Jesus' ministry within that same terrain. The depiction of 'the people sitting in darkness' λαὸς ὁ καθήμενος ἐν σκοτίᾳ is retained, yet the declaration that they 'have seen a great light' φῶς εἶδεν μέγα redefines the space as the locus of restoration. This is not a simple reversal of meaning, but the realisation of the royal renewal anticipated in Isaiah. Galilee, once marked by imperial humiliation, is reinscribed as the place where the reign of the King begins (Carter 2001:103–106).

This spatial reconfiguration shapes the identity of the Matthean community. Rather than locating itself within a Jerusalem-centred order, the community understands its identity under royal rule inaugurated in wounded territory (Carter 2001:93–96). Space thus becomes the medium of identity reconstruction: land once associated with judgement becomes the starting point of the kingdom's reign.

Although Carter rightly underscores the imperial dimension of Galilee, reading it chiefly as a site of resistance does not exhaust the theological logic of Matthew's citation. In light of Isaiah's royal promise, Galilee functions not merely as counter-imperial space but as the site where comprehensive

restoration unfolds (Willitts 2007:371–372). The primary emphasis lies in messianic renewal rather than political opposition.

Finally, the expression ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ does not imply that the region lacked a Jewish presence or was dominated exclusively by Gentiles (Chancey 2002:1–15, 54–63). After 70 CE, Galilee remained a significant centre of Jewish communal life (Luz 2007:157; Reed 2000:23–30). Matthew’s use of Isaiah’s terminology therefore signals that Israel’s restoration begins in a region historically marked by humiliation. Jesus’ ministry in Galilee proclaims renewal even under Roman rule, reflecting a community shaped by marginality and post-imperial crisis.

The analysis of Matthew 4:15–16 demonstrates that geography participates in intertextual meaning-making. Matthew’s retention of Isaianic toponyms [Ζαβουλὼν Νεφθαλίμ θάλασσαν πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου Γαλιλαία τῶν ἔθνων] functions as a set of semiotic markers that transport Isaianic memory into the Matthean setting. Intertextuality at this layer is therefore not limited to wording or plot but extends to the ideological encoding of space. Named places become carriers of prior textual horizons that are recontextualised within Matthew’s narrative world. With the syntactic, narrative, and spatial layers now described in their respective operations, the concluding section can draw these strands together in order to clarify the citation’s theological function.

The preceding analyses demonstrate that Matthew’s citation of Isaiah in 4:14–16 operates through a coordinated, multi-layered intertextual dynamic. At the grammatical level, syntactic transformation reshapes the verbal texture of the Isaianic utterance; at the narrative level, structural alignment re-performs the prophetic sequence within a new plot horizon; and at the spatial level, geo-semiotic re-signification anchors this sequence within ideologically charged territory. These dimensions are not discrete methods applied externally to the text but mutually reinforcing modes of textual construction. Intertextuality thus emerges as an integrated process in which grammar, narrative progression and spatial encoding converge within a single interpretive movement. The theological significance of this coordinated intertextual act may now be clarified.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Matthew 4:14–16 should not be read merely as a fulfilment formula but as a narratively configured act of restoration in which Isaiah is redeployed to re-map Galilee as a restored covenantal space. By citing Isaiah 8:23–9:1 (LXX 9:1–2) at the moment Jesus relocates to Galilee, Matthew does more than ‘prove’ prophecy: he re-situates Isaianic memory within his narrative world and reinscribes the very territory once marked by humiliation and darkness as the locus where divine kingship becomes operative.

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that this reconfiguration unfolds across coordinated intertextual layers. At the syntactic level, Matthew’s grammatical transformations (e.g. the shift from ‘walking’ to ‘sitting’) intensify darkness as a spatially immobilising condition and relocate prophetic utterance within narrative discourse. At the narrative level, Matthew aligns his account with the Isaianic sequence of crisis → darkness → proclamation → enacted renewal, so that the citation functions as recollective memory shaping present meaning rather than as an isolated proof-text. At the spatial level, Isaianic toponyms operate as semiotic markers: they recall covenantal land memory and imperial trauma, enabling Matthew to re-code Galilee from a sign of judgement into the starting point of renewed divine action.

Taken together, these dimensions disclose a coherent intertextual act in which grammar, plot and geography converge. Fulfilment [πληρῶ] in Matthew is therefore best understood not as predictive correspondence alone, but as restoration-through-reinscription: covenant identity is reconstituted precisely within the territory where darkness once signified collapse. While imperial conflict remains part of the narrative horizon, it does not exhaust Matthew’s theological logic. The decisive move lies in the narrative and semiotic reconfiguration of contested space under divine kingship, through which a community learns to perceive its identity within a re-mapped covenantal landscape.

Acknowledgements

Professor In Cheol Shin is a Research Fellow at McMaster Divinity College, working with Professor S. E. Porter, Hamilton, Canada.

Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

CRedit authorship contribution

In Cheol Shin: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The author declares that all data that support this research article and findings are available in the article and its references.

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