

Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul choose the synagogue as the place of their first messages when they arrive in a new area. *Synagogue* is a Greek word meaning congregation or assembly. A synagogue may also be called by the Yiddish word *shul*, meaning school.

Synagogues had first developed during the Babylonian captivity. The Jewish exiles, cut off from the temple in Jerusalem, gathered in local groups for teaching and worship. These small outposts kept alive their common identity as the people of God.

In the time of our Lord, synagogues were found across the scattered Jewish diaspora (dispersion) across the Roman Empire. The book of Acts records synagogues in Damascus, Salamis, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus. And we know from history there was even a synagogue in Rome.

But synagogues did not serve only isolated communities of Jews. Those who lived in Palestine felt the same need for gathering, teaching, and worshiping. So we see the Lord inaugurating His ministry in a Galilean synagogue.

The attendant who brings the scroll to Jesus and takes it after the reading would be one of several positions in the synagogue. There would also be “rulers” in charge of the building (Mark 5:22, etc.) and song leaders, known in English as cantors. The leading position was rabbi or teacher.

God’s design in the Old Testament was for His earthly people to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. The synagogue system was a concession to the conditions of exile and foreign conquest. The church, in contrast, was intended from the beginning as a place for exiles, to strengthen them as a testimony to the world around them. *“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation”* (1 Peter 2:11-12). And the positions in the church are not chosen by men but appointed through gifts of the Spirit.

**Questions:**

1. Verses 18-19 come from Isaiah 61:1-2. What comes next in Isaiah? Why is it not included in this quote?
2. What does Jesus mean by saying the people are thinking, “Physician, heal yourself”?

3. Where in Scripture are the events Jesus relates in verses 24-27? What is Jesus' point in telling them?
4. Why are the people enraged at His response?
5. Who in this passage acclaims Jesus as the Son of God? Why?
6. Why do the people wait until the sun is setting to bring the sick patients to the Lord?
7. What do we learn about Jesus' character, divine nature, and purposes in this passage?