

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 2 Reliability of the Gospels, Miracles Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Keener, Matthew, Session 2, Reliability of the Gospels, Miracles, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener focuses on the reliability of the Gospels and the occurrence of miracles. He argues for the Gospels' historical accuracy by highlighting their early linguistic features and the authors' access to eyewitnesses, including prominent figures like Jesus's brother James. Keener further addresses skepticism surrounding miracle accounts by presenting numerous contemporary firsthand accounts of healings and resurrections, supported by medical documentation where available. He emphasizes the consistency of these modern testimonies with the miraculous events described in the Gospels and the Book of Acts. The lecture aims to bolster the credibility of both the historical accounts and the miracle reports within the Gospels.

2. 25 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Matthews, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels – Acts → Matthew).



**Keener_Matthew_S
ession02.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided source, "Keener_Matthew_EN_Lecture02.pdf".

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Lecture 2 - Reliability Part 2 and Miracles Part 1

Overview:

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener focuses on two major themes: (1) the historical reliability of the Gospels and (2) the reality and evidence for miracles, particularly healing and resurrection, as described in the Gospels and experienced in contemporary accounts. Keener aims to demonstrate that the Gospels are trustworthy historical documents, and the miracle accounts should not be dismissed based on preconceived notions. He uses a combination of textual analysis, cultural context, and eyewitness testimonies to support his claims.

Part 1: Reliability of the Gospels

- **Early Traits and Aramaic Influence:** Keener argues that the Gospels contain linguistic and cultural elements that point to their early origins in Judea and Galilee, rather than being later fabrications. He states, "Often we have Aramaic rhythm when Jesus' sayings are translated back into Aramaic." This suggests that the Gospels retain earlier forms of speech, images, and maxims.
- Examples include: Judean and Galilean figures of speech, the structure of the Lord's Prayer, debates among Pharisaic schools, and the use of "son of man". These aspects are more consistent with Jesus' historical context than later church settings.
- The metaphor of a camel passing through the eye of a needle (rather than an elephant) further highlights this Galilean context.
- **Eyewitness Testimony and Leadership:** The early church was led by eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection. Keener states, "the leaders of the church, according to Galatians 2 and 1 Corinthians 15, were people like the brother of Jesus, Jesus' closest disciples who were Peter and John."
- These individuals had the greatest authority and influence in the church, implying a commitment to the authentic transmission of the stories.

- **The Integrity of the Disciples:** Keener emphasizes that the disciples, who were eyewitnesses to Jesus, were willing to die for their beliefs, making the intentional creation of a known falsehood unlikely. He states, "Who would die for a false claim that they knew was false?"
- **Women's Testimony:** The Gospels' inclusion of women's testimony to the resurrection, despite cultural prejudices, is seen as a further sign of authenticity. "The Gospel writers would not have made that up in that kind of culture."
- **Luke's Investigative Approach:** The Gospel of Luke explicitly states that the author conducted careful investigation and consulted eyewitnesses. Keener highlights the statement from Luke 1:3: "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning." He connects this to the Hellenistic ideal of verifying information and geographical detail, as well as consulting eyewitnesses.
- The "we" passages in Acts are taken to mean Luke's presence during Paul's travels, offering access to primary sources.
- **Common Knowledge:** Luke addresses Theophilus by referencing things he has "been taught", meaning the basic stories were already common knowledge in the church within a few decades of Jesus' ministry. Keener states, "Luke is not going to say to Theophilus, I'm confirming the things you already know, if the contents of his book are not things that were already known to Theophilus."
- **Absence of Later Debates:** The Gospels lack later debates that were central to the church, such as the circumcision of Gentiles. This indicates they were not created to support or resolve later controversies.
- **Paul's Confirmation:** Paul's teachings, which are the earliest New Testament documents, often confirm and align with the teachings and traditions found in the Synoptic Gospels. He also acknowledges a distinction between his own opinions and what Jesus specifically taught, "Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 said, this is what the Lord says... Then he says, now, this is what I say."
- **Variation Between Gospels:** Minor variations within the gospel accounts are natural and consistent with the patterns seen in ancient biographies. Keener claims, "It's the same kind of range of variation you have in other ancient biographies."
- **Lost Gospels:** Keener dismisses the notion that "lost gospels" present a credible challenge to the established four. He argues that the apocryphal and Gnostic

gospels are either novels or later collections of sayings with 2nd century or later Gnostic elements that lack historical accuracy, and cannot be considered reliable sources for information about Jesus' life. "To say that the apocryphal gospels are giving you reliable information about Jesus, they don't have the same kind of Galilean and Judean information."

Part 2: Miracle Reports

- **Western Skepticism:** Keener acknowledges that Western scholars have often doubted miracle reports, often citing that eyewitnesses would not claim to have witnessed dramatic miracles. He points to the case of David Friedrich Strauss who "argued that the gospels must be full of myth...because eyewitnesses would never claim that they saw miracles."
- Keener points out the flaw in this theory by describing the case of Strauss's friend, Edward Morica who was healed through the ministry of Johann Christoph Blumhart.
- **Contemporary Eyewitness Testimony:** He presents numerous contemporary examples of healing, including documented medical cases, to demonstrate that miracle reports are not simply ancient myths, including accounts of the healing of deafness, blindness, bone diseases, and digestive issues, supported by medical documentation and eyewitness accounts.
- Examples include: a 9 year old deaf girl instantly healed, healings in Mozambique, Lisa Larios' healing from degenerative bone disease, Bruce Van Mata's healed and regrown intestines, healings of broken bones, and documented cases of vertical heterophoria.
- **Eyewitness as Evidence:** Keener argues for the validity of eyewitness testimony in various fields (sociology, anthropology, journalism, historiography, law) and argues that a smaller number of credible eyewitnesses should carry more weight than skeptical non-eyewitnesses.
- **Eyewitness Testimony of Raising from the Dead:** Keener then presents accounts of people being raised from the dead, noting that these accounts cannot be written off as mere psychosomatic effects.
- He acknowledges that it's possible that death is sometimes misdiagnosed but notes he knows of 10 people in his close circle who have been raised from the dead and that "if these were all misdiagnosed deaths, we are burying a rather disproportionate number of people prematurely."

- He mentions reports from Wesley's journals, Dr. Mervyn Oscobano, Dr. Chauncey Crandall, and Dr. Sean George.
- He also includes several accounts he received from his personal contacts including: Dr. Deborah Watson, a government official from India, Hindu villagers, Vikram in Mumbai, a woman in the Philippines, his neighbor from Indonesia, Professor Ayo Adewuya from Nigeria, Leo Bawa, Timothy Olanade, and members of his wife's family including pastor Andre Mamadze, Jeanne Mabilia, and Papa Albert Besweswe.
- **Purpose of Miracles:** Keener emphasizes that miracles occur when God specifically leads believers, and not every prayer results in healing. He makes clear that miracles are for God's purposes and are not something we can make happen by our own strength.

Key Takeaways:

- The Gospels are historically reliable, containing evidence of their early origins in Judea and Galilee.
- The leadership of the early church and the willingness of the disciples to die for their faith provide evidence for their truth.
- Eyewitness testimony is a valid form of evidence and should not be easily dismissed.
- Contemporary miracle reports, supported by medical evidence and eyewitness accounts, challenge the skepticism of Western scholars.
- Miracles, including healings and resurrections, continue to occur, showing God's power and work in the world.

Conclusion:

Dr. Keener's lecture presents a strong case for the reliability of the Gospels as historical documents. He challenges the skepticism that is often applied to the miracle reports by providing contextual understanding, textual evidence, and the accounts of credible eyewitnesses. He encourages listeners to approach these accounts with an open mind and to consider the evidence presented.

4. Matthew Study Guide: Session 2, Reliability of the Gospels, Miracles

Matthew Lecture 2: Reliability and Miracles Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the significance of Aramaic rhythms and figures of speech being found in the Greek Gospels?
2. Why is the phrase "son of man" considered evidence for the early nature of the Gospels?
3. How did the prominent role of eyewitnesses like Peter, John, and James in the early church contribute to the reliability of the Gospels?
4. What does Luke's use of "we" in the Book of Acts suggest about his involvement in the events described?
5. Why is the absence of debate about circumcision in the Gospels considered evidence of their reliability?
6. How does Paul's distinction between Jesus' teachings and his own in 1 Corinthians 7 support the accuracy of the Gospels?
7. According to Keener, what are the two main types of "lost gospels," and why are they not considered reliable sources for information about Jesus?
8. How did the story of Blumhart and his healing ministry challenge the views of David Friedrich Strauss?
9. What are some of the specific examples of medical evidence that Keener uses to support his claims of modern-day miracles?
10. What general principle does Keener apply to the use of eyewitness testimony regarding miracles?

Answer Key

1. The presence of Aramaic rhythms and figures of speech in the Greek Gospels suggests that the Gospels were translated from an earlier Aramaic source, and that they retain linguistic features characteristic of Jesus and his Galilean context.

This suggests an early dating and accurate transmission of Jesus's words and teachings.

2. The phrase "son of man," while common in Aramaic and Hebrew, makes little sense in Greek or English. Its presence in the Gospels indicates that they preserve Jesus's unique way of speaking and thought, which is evidence against their fabrication.
3. The prominent roles of eyewitnesses like Peter, John, and James in leading the early church gave them the authority and influence to ensure the accurate transmission of information about Jesus. Their firsthand experiences and testimony served as a check against the embellishment of stories.
4. Luke's use of "we" in the Book of Acts strongly suggests that he was personally present and involved in the events described in those passages. This is because ancient literature typically only used "we" to describe the author and a group of others actually present, not a fictitious literary device.
5. The absence of debate about circumcision in the Gospels, despite its significance in the early church, suggests that the Gospels accurately record Jesus' teachings, not later theological concerns of the church. If the Gospels had been fabricated later, there would likely have been conflicting invented sayings on that subject.
6. Paul's differentiation between Jesus' direct commands and his own advice in 1 Corinthians 7 shows his commitment to accurately conveying Jesus' words. His distinguishing his teaching from Jesus' suggests a genuine attempt to pass on tradition accurately, rather than invent sayings for Jesus.
7. The two main types of "lost gospels" are the apocryphal gospels and the Gnostic gospels. Apocryphal gospels are novelistic and lack historical accuracy. Gnostic gospels are a collection of sayings and contain later Gnostic elements, making them unreliable historical sources.
8. The case of Edward Morica's healing, which was directly experienced by a friend of Strauss, served as a direct challenge to Strauss's claim that eyewitnesses could not attest to miracles. It also demonstrated that miracles did happen in the 1800s, calling into question Strauss's later dating of the gospels.
9. Keener provides medical evidence from cases like a girl's auditory nerve damage being healed and reports of bone regeneration in Lisa Larios to support the claims of modern miracles. He also references the healing of Bruce Van Mata's small

intestine and documentation of broken bones healing in multiple cases to show there is physical evidence for healings.

10. Keener argues that a smaller number of reliable eyewitnesses should be given greater weight than a larger number of skeptical non-eyewitnesses. He applies the logic used in evaluating the accuracy of other historical claims.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the linguistic and cultural evidence within the Gospels that points to their early composition and connection to Jesus' Galilean environment. In what ways do these traits strengthen their reliability?
2. Analyze the role of eyewitnesses in the transmission and preservation of the Gospel narratives. How do the examples of Peter, John, and Luke, and the inclusion of women's testimony, contribute to the Gospels' credibility?
3. Explain the different types of "lost gospels" and why they are not considered reliable sources for historical information about Jesus. What criteria does Keener use to assess the authenticity and reliability of historical sources?
4. Evaluate the arguments and evidence Keener presents for the possibility of miracles today. How does he address skepticism about miracle reports from a Western viewpoint?
5. Consider how Keener uses various examples, both from the first century and the modern era, to defend his claims of the reliability of the gospels. How does he compare the reliability of the gospels with ancient historical works, and is this comparison sufficient?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Aramaic:** A Semitic language that was likely the common language of Galilee during Jesus' time.
- **Synoptic Gospels:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which share a similar structure, content, and literary style.
- **Hellenistic:** Pertaining to the Greek-influenced culture of the Eastern Mediterranean following the conquests of Alexander the Great.
- **Canon Lists:** Official lists of books recognized as authoritative scripture by religious communities.
- **Apocryphal Gospels:** Writings that present themselves as gospels but are not considered part of the biblical canon; often fictional and written later.
- **Gnostic Gospels:** Texts that express the religious ideas of Gnosticism, a system of belief that had its own take on the teachings of Jesus.
- **Diatessaron:** A harmony of the four Gospels compiled by Tatian in the 2nd century.
- **Macular degeneration:** An incurable eye disease in which the cells of the retina are damaged or destroyed.
- **Heterophoria:** A type of vision misalignment.
- **Psychosomatic:** Refers to a physical condition that originates from or is worsened by a mental or emotional state.
- **Cyanosis:** A bluish discoloration of the skin resulting from poor circulation or inadequate oxygenation of the blood.

5. FAQs on Keener, Matthew, Session 2, Reliability of the Gospels, Miracles, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Gospel Reliability and Miracles

1. **How do the Gospels preserve early Aramaic influences despite being written in Greek?** The Gospels, while written in Greek, often retain Aramaic figures of speech, rhythms, and cultural references common in Judea and Galilee, where Jesus primarily spoke Aramaic. This suggests an early translation process, likely within the bilingual early Jerusalem church, preserving the original language's flavor before Greek idioms became dominant. Examples include certain sayings of Jesus, Jewish metaphors and interpretive techniques.
2. **Why are the eyewitness accounts in the Gospels considered credible?** The early church was led by eyewitnesses, including Jesus' closest disciples like Peter and John and Jesus' own brother, James. These individuals held the greatest authority within the community. Furthermore, the Gospel writers, like Luke, actively investigated their sources, consulting eyewitnesses to ensure accuracy. The fact that these witnesses, such as the disciples, were willing to die for their belief in Jesus' resurrection further supports the sincerity of their claims. Even the inclusion of women's testimony to the resurrection is significant, as this was against the prevailing cultural bias of the time.
3. **How did Luke ensure the reliability of his Gospel and Acts?** Luke indicates in his Gospel that he carefully investigated and researched the events he described, consulting written and oral sources from eyewitnesses. The "we" sections in the Book of Acts suggest that Luke was a traveling companion of Paul, placing him in a position to gather firsthand accounts. Also, Luke writes to Theophilus to confirm what he has "already been taught," suggesting these accounts were already common knowledge in the early church.

4. **What are some of the key historical details in the Gospels that suggest reliability?** The Gospels often include specific details about Jewish life and practices during Jesus' time, such as debates among Pharisaic schools, common Jewish prayers, and metaphors that align with the culture. The fact that there are no sayings in the Gospels related to the later debate about whether Gentiles need to be circumcised shows later church concerns did not alter them, but instead reflect the historical teaching of Jesus. Additionally, Paul's references to the Lord's Supper and his distinction between Jesus' teaching and his own, further suggests that the gospel traditions were passed down accurately from early disciples.
5. **What is the problem with the "lost gospels" and why aren't they reliable sources?** The so-called "lost gospels" are not lost but rather were largely discarded by the early church. The four canonical Gospels were almost universally accepted from the 2nd century onward. Most of the non-canonical gospels are novels from the late 2nd and 3rd century that were never meant to be historical accounts of Jesus and instead represent fictional narratives. Gnostic gospels are later works from the 2nd century or beyond, containing Gnostic elements not present in 1st-century texts, making them unreliable for information about the historical Jesus. Also, the secret gospel of Mark is likely a modern forgery, so it cannot be considered reliable either.
6. **Why does the West have skepticism towards miracle accounts in the Gospels and what does the evidence suggest?** Western skepticism towards miracles stems from the belief that dramatic miracles like those in the Gospels were not something that eyewitnesses would claim to have seen. Early Western scholars argued that such events could only be attributed to myth. However, firsthand accounts, modern medical documentation and eyewitness testimony, not only from the past but the present, demonstrate that miracle claims continue to this day. These accounts involve not only healings but also cases of resuscitations from death, pointing to the plausibility of miracle accounts in the past.

7. **How does modern eyewitness testimony and medical evidence support miracle claims?** Numerous documented cases of miraculous healings exist, including the healing of deafness, blindness, severe bone disease, and damaged organs. In some cases medical professionals themselves have provided the testimony and testing results. These documented cases come from different parts of the world, even Western countries, including from medical professionals, and they involve a variety of medical conditions that science cannot explain. These accounts, while not universally experienced, illustrate the continuation of miracles today and show they should be taken seriously.
8. **Do miracle reports mean that everyone who is sick will be healed and what is the real claim?** The claim isn't that *everyone* who is prayed for will be healed. It is recognized that people suffer and are not always healed. However, significant claims of miracles do exist, and these are often clustered within faith communities that actively seek and expect God's intervention. The main point is that God does perform miracles, as evidenced by a wide range of eyewitness testimonies and, in some cases, medical corroboration. These events are not always predictable, but instead are initiated by the divine.