

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 3

Miracles & Exorcism

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Keener, Matthew, Session 3, Miracles & Exorcism, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. Craig Keener's course on Matthew focuses on miracles and exorcisms. **Keener presents numerous firsthand accounts of healings and other supernatural events from various cultures and time periods**, arguing that these experiences challenge the notion that miracles are impossible. **He directly addresses David Hume's philosophical arguments against miracles**, highlighting flaws in Hume's reasoning and citing modern scientific and anthropological research that supports the existence of supernatural phenomena. **The lecture also explores exorcisms**, offering anthropological and personal accounts to demonstrate the widespread belief in and experience of spiritual possession. Finally, **Keener emphasizes the significance of miracles and exorcisms as signs of God's kingdom and power**, illustrating their role in evangelism and conversion throughout history.

2. 39 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Matthews, Session 3 – 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).



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3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Craig Keener's lecture, "Miracles Part 2 and Exorcism":

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener - Miracles and Exorcism

Date: October 28, 2024 (based on source document creation date) **Source:** Excerpts from "Keener_Matthew_EN_Lecture03.pdf"

Overview:

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener focuses on the themes of miracles and exorcism, drawing from personal anecdotes, historical accounts, and cross-cultural observations. The lecture aims to demonstrate the ongoing reality of these phenomena as signs of God's faithfulness and power, while also addressing philosophical and scientific objections, particularly those stemming from the arguments of David Hume. Keener emphasizes that miracles and exorcisms are often linked to groundbreaking evangelism, serving as signs of the Kingdom of God.

Key Themes & Ideas:

1. Personal Anecdotes and Eyewitness Testimony:

- **Raising from the Dead:** Keener shares the story of his wife's sister, Therese, who was revived after being bitten by a snake and not breathing for approximately three hours. He emphasizes the lack of brain damage and her subsequent ministry, highlighting the personal significance of this miracle within his own family.
- 1. *"And Koko Moise prayed for the child, Therese, and Therese started breathing again. And the next day she was fine. So, I asked Madame Jacques, as she's locally known, how long was it before she started breathing again? How long was it that she wasn't breathing? She had to stop and think to get from one place to another, from this one village to the other."*
- **Nature Miracles:** Keener presents multiple accounts of nature miracles from various historical and geographical contexts, including 17th century Sri Lanka, 1800s with Pastor Blumhart, and 20th-century Indonesia. He cites walking on water and water turned into wine. He also mentions the story of Watchman Ni in China, where rain came during a festival after the team prayed. Another story was

from Nigeria from Dr. Emanuel Etopson's father, where it didn't rain for 4 days until his father's house had a roof.

1. *"His father, this was around 1975, was just trying to get their home ready. They just moved in. They didn't have a roof on the home yet...He said it's not going to rain one drop of rain on this village until I have a roof on my house."*
2. **Rebuttal of David Hume's Arguments Against Miracles:**
 - **Hume's flawed logic:** Keener critiques David Hume's argument that miracles are violations of natural law, and thus impossible. Keener argues that Hume's view is based on a presupposition against a theistic worldview and a circular logic that automatically dismisses eyewitness testimony for miracles.
 - 1. *"His basic argument is that miracles are not part of human experience, which is not consistent with what we've been seeing...Hume simply presupposes this without admitting that that's what he's doing. Hume is simply stating his opinion, not offering an argument."*
 - **Modern Physics:** He argues that Hume's "prescriptive conception of natural law" is undermined by modern physics that uses natural law more descriptively and less prescriptively.
 - **Circular Argument:** Keener points out the circularity of Hume's logic: dismissing eyewitness accounts of miracles because miracles are deemed impossible, even when the accounts meet his own stated criteria for credibility. He illustrates this with Hume's treatment of the healing of Blaise Pascal's niece.
 - 1. *"Well, Hume would say if you do have testimony, then it must not be reliable because we know that miracles don't happen or can't be shown to happen. In other words, it's a completely circular argument."*
2. **Ethnocentric Bias in Skepticism of Miracles:**
 - **Hume's Ethnocentrism:** Keener highlights the ethnocentric bias in Hume's arguments, noting his claim that only "ignorant and barbarous peoples affirm miracles," while being well-known for his racism. He brings up Hume's ignorant statements about black slaves.
 - 1. *"Hume said that only ignorant and barbarous peoples affirm miracles...Hume said, look, we've had slaves in the British Empire for generations, and yet never a single one of them has ever achieved any major level of education. Why is that?"*

- **Bultmann's Modernism:** Keener also critiques Rudolf Bultmann's assertion that modern people cannot believe in miracles and spirits, arguing that Bultmann's "modern world" excludes a large portion of the world's population.
- *"Bultmann said that mature modern people don't believe in miracles...But what Bultmann defines as the modern world excludes from the modern world all traditional Jews, Christians, Muslims, traditional tribal religionists, spiritists, basically everybody except his mid-20th century Western academic elite, deists, atheists, and so on."*

1. **Global Prevalence of Healing Claims:**

- **Statistical Evidence:** Keener cites multiple studies and surveys demonstrating the widespread belief and experience of divine healing, particularly among Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians globally. He cites a 2006 Pew Survey that estimates 200 million Pentecostals and Charismatics from 10 countries had seen divine healing, and another survey showing 39% of other Christians in those countries have witnessed divine healing.
- *"For each of these countries, or for the total of these ten countries, and only these ten countries, and for Pentecostals and Protestant charismatics in these countries alone, the estimated total of these people who claim to have witnessed divine healing comes out to somewhere around 200 million people."*
- **Conversions Through Healings:** He discusses how millions of non-Christians have converted due to extraordinary healing experiences. He cites statistics from China showing up to 90% of conversions from house churches came from faith healings. In Madras (Chennai), India, 10% of non-Christians reported healing when prayed for in Jesus' name.

1. **Miracles as Signs of the Kingdom:**

- **Foretaste of the Future:** Keener emphasizes that miracles, as seen in the Gospels, serve as signs of the coming Kingdom of God, a promise of a better world without suffering. He reiterates that healings are temporary in this life and should point to a greater eternal hope.
1. *"The signs, Jesus said, these are foretastes. These are signs of the kingdom of God. These are letting you know what's going to come. They're just a sample."*

- **Groundbreaking Evangelism:** He notes that miracles often accompany groundbreaking evangelism in new areas, drawing people's attention to the claims of Christ.
1. **Exorcism and Spirit Possession:**
 - **Anthropological Documentation:** Keener asserts the widespread documentation of spirit possession in anthropological literature, noting that the denial of possession trance is considered akin to "being a flat-earthier" in anthropology. He cites a study that found 74% of societies have spirit possession beliefs.
 1. *"Anthropologists documented so widely that the denial of possession trance is regarded as the anthropological equivalent of being a flat earther."*
 - **Physical and Psychological Effects:** Keener details common characteristics of spirit possession, such as sudden changes in voice and behavior, altered neurophysiology, violent behavior, and occult phenomena.
 - **Eyewitness Accounts:** Keener provides numerous eyewitness accounts of exorcism, both from his own experiences and those of others, including a story from Joram Mugari, a former exorcist in traditional African religion, and accounts from others around the world. He shares a personal story of being spiritually attacked and having a tree fall where he was standing just minutes before.
 1. *"And quietly, the person couldn't hear him. Quietly, David was just in himself, praying, you know, God, please help this person. The person suddenly sat up, stuck his finger in his face, and said, let him alone. He's mine."*
 - **Distinction from Mental Illness:** While acknowledging that some cases may be psychosomatic or psychological, he provides examples of exorcisms where physical changes or events occur, demonstrating something beyond ordinary mental illness.
 - **Power Encounters:** He shares accounts of conversions of spirit practitioners due to experiencing God's power through exorcism.
 1. **Appropriate Epistemological Approaches:**
 - **Science and Unique Events:** Keener stresses that scientific methods are not equipped to study unique events like miracles, which are inherently unrepeatable. He asserts that different disciplines require different epistemic approaches.

1. *"Science as science pronounces unrepeatable events...Science isn't meant to deal with unique events in history, such as miracles by definition are."*
- **Eyewitness Testimony:** He notes that the appropriate approach to evaluating historical events like miracles should involve things like checking with eyewitnesses.

Conclusion:

Dr. Keener's lecture challenges materialistic worldviews by presenting compelling evidence for the reality of miracles and exorcisms, drawing from personal experiences, historical accounts, and cross-cultural data. He seeks to debunk the philosophical arguments of skeptics like David Hume, emphasizing the pervasive nature of these phenomena and their role as signs pointing to the Kingdom of God. The lecture calls for a more open and nuanced approach to these experiences rather than dismissing them out of hand due to philosophical or ethnocentric biases. It also encourages a Christian approach to acknowledge a spiritual dimension with potential adversaries, but ultimately a dimension that is ultimately subject to God's power.

This briefing document should be helpful in understanding the key arguments and themes present in Dr. Keener's lecture.

4. Matthew Study Guide: Session 3, Miracles & Exorcism

Miracles, Exorcism, and the Supernatural: A Study Guide

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Antoinette Malombe's account, how did her daughter Therese recover after being bitten by a snake?
2. What specific types of miracles did Kurt Koch report seeing in Indonesia during the 1960s revival?
3. In the story of Watchman Ni, what event occurred after one of his team members predicted rain during a village festival?
4. How did Anana Etop's actions in Nigeria reportedly lead to a village becoming Christian?
5. What is the core problem with David Hume's argument against miracles?
6. How did the healing of Blaise Pascal's niece challenge Hume's argument, and what was Hume's response?
7. According to the lecture, how does modern science's understanding of natural law differ from Hume's?
8. According to the lecture, what percentage of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians in ten surveyed countries claim to have witnessed divine healing?
9. How do anthropologists typically define spirit possession?
10. How do the stories of David Van Gelder and Craig Keener himself support the argument for the reality of spiritual forces?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Therese was bitten by a snake and stopped breathing for approximately three hours. After Koko Moise prayed for her, she began breathing again and recovered fully, experiencing no brain damage.
2. Kurt Koch reported witnessing blind eyes opened and water turned into wine during his time in Indonesia. He interviewed witnesses to these events and others during the revival.

3. After a member of Watchman Ni's team predicted rain on a festival day that had been historically dry, a torrential downpour occurred on the day of the festival, which caused the priests to reschedule.
4. Anana Etop, in frustration, declared that it would not rain until he had a roof on his house. For the next four days, despite the rainy season, it didn't rain in his village, leading the local community to convert to Christianity.
5. David Hume's argument against miracles assumes that miracles cannot happen because they violate natural law and are outside of human experience. This argument is based on his atheistic presupposition that God cannot intervene, rather than on logical reasoning.
6. The medically documented healing of Pascal's niece, witnessed by many, was exactly the kind of evidence that Hume said would convince him; however, he disregarded it, stating that because miracles are not believable this evidence must be false. This revealed the circular nature of Hume's argument.
7. Hume viewed natural law as prescriptive and unviolable, but modern science sees natural law as descriptive and based on observation rather than set rules. Therefore, what Hume considered impossible is not so in the context of modern physics.
8. The Pew survey from 2006 revealed that an estimated 200 million Pentecostal and charismatic Christians in ten surveyed countries claim to have witnessed divine healing. Further, about 39% of other Christians in those countries claimed the same.
9. Anthropologists define spirit possession as an altered state of consciousness that is interpreted by the local culture as being under the influence of a spirit. This definition does not require belief in the existence of spirits, just a record of local beliefs.
10. David Van Gelder witnessed a crucifix melt from heat while a possessed person could not say "Jesus is Lord". And Craig Keener witnessed a tree that fell immediately after he and his family stepped away from it. These stories suggest supernatural forces are at work.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze and critique David Hume's argument against the possibility of miracles. Discuss the weaknesses in his reasoning and the implications of his philosophical position. How does the lecture refute his arguments?
2. Discuss the role of eyewitness testimony in assessing the validity of miracle claims. In what ways does this method differ from the scientific approach, and why is it important to consider when examining extraordinary events?
3. Compare and contrast the views of Rudolf Bultmann with those of Justo Gonzales, Hua Yung, and Philip Jenkins on the role of the supernatural in contemporary life and faith. How do cultural perspectives challenge Bultmann's views?
4. Explore the relationship between miracles and the establishment of Christianity throughout history, as described by Keener's lecture. How do these signs and wonders contribute to conversions, and what challenges do they pose to existing worldviews?
5. Discuss how the lecture uses anthropological and personal accounts of spirit possession to support the argument for the reality of spiritual forces. How do these accounts challenge a purely materialistic view of reality?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Miracle:** An extraordinary event, often attributed to divine intervention, that defies natural laws or common explanation.
- **Psychosomatic:** Relating to physical symptoms caused by a mental or emotional state.
- **Inductive Reasoning:** A form of reasoning in which one draws general conclusions from specific observations or data.
- **Circular Argument:** A fallacy in reasoning where the conclusion is assumed in the premise, making the argument invalid and unpersuasive.
- **Deism:** A belief in a God who created the universe but does not actively intervene in its affairs.
- **Natural Law:** A system of laws and principles believed to be derived from nature and thought to be universal or divinely ordained.

- **Ethnocentric:** Evaluating other peoples and cultures according to the standards of one's own culture, often with the implication of superiority.
- **Abolitionists:** People who advocated for the end of slavery.
- **Pentecostalism:** A Protestant Christian movement emphasizing spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues, prophecy, and divine healing.
- **Charismatic:** A movement within Christianity emphasizing spiritual gifts and the work of the Holy Spirit.
- **Epistemic Approach:** The method or approach used to determine what counts as knowledge or belief in a given field.
- **Exorcism:** The act of driving out or expelling a supposed evil spirit from a person or place.
- **Spirit Possession:** An altered state of consciousness believed to be caused by the influence of a spirit or supernatural entity.
- **Psychophysiology:** The branch of psychology that studies the relationship between mental and physical processes
- **Occult:** Relating to supernatural, mystical, or magical powers and practices.
- **Witchcraft:** The practice of magic, often associated with malevolent purposes or spirits.
- **Power Encounter:** A direct confrontation or interaction with spiritual powers or entities, often resulting in conversion or spiritual change.

5. FAQs on Keener, Matthew, Session 3, Miracles & Exorcism, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Miracles, Exorcism, and Spiritual Realities

1. **What types of miracles are discussed, and what is the significance of these events?** The sources discuss various types of miracles including healings (such as the resurrection of a child after being bitten by a snake), nature miracles (such as rain appearing unexpectedly, and stopping rain), and exorcisms. These are not seen as mere coincidences or acts of chance. Instead, they function as "signs of the kingdom," foretastes of the future where there will be no more suffering. They serve to draw attention to the claims of Christ and God's active presence in the world. The healings and exorcisms demonstrate God's authority and compassion, and nature miracles show God's power over the natural realm. These miracles are often seen as especially prominent in areas where the Gospel is being introduced for the first time.
2. **How do these accounts challenge common modern perspectives on miracles?** The accounts presented challenge the modern, often Western, perspective that miracles are impossible or don't occur. This skepticism is traced back to David Hume, whose arguments are critiqued as being circular, presupposing atheism or a deistic view of a non-intervening God. Furthermore, Hume's claim that miracles are not part of "uniform human experience" is directly challenged by the vast number of testimonies worldwide, particularly in the global South, from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, who claim to have witnessed or experienced miracles. The text argues that these accounts should not be dismissed simply because they don't fit a particular Western worldview.
3. **What is the significance of eyewitness testimony in these accounts?** Eyewitness testimony is of paramount importance in these accounts. They emphasize the credibility of witnesses from diverse backgrounds and cultures, including those who were initially skeptical. Specific examples given are from Dr. Keener's own family, and documented accounts from Indonesia, China, Nigeria, Korea, and other parts of the world. The stories are not seen as isolated incidents, but as part of a consistent, albeit not uniform, pattern of miraculous activity. The sheer volume of accounts across various cultures and time periods is used to counter the claim that miracles are not a part of human experience. Eyewitness testimonies also underscore that these events are not merely psychological or psychosomatic occurrences, but genuine demonstrations of divine power.

4. **How are exorcisms described in the text and what role do they play?** Exorcisms are portrayed as real events involving spiritual entities. Anthropological studies are cited to show that belief in spirit possession is common in many societies. These possessions are characterized by altered states of consciousness, changes in personality, and sometimes violent or unusual behaviors. Exorcisms, as presented, demonstrate Jesus' authority over demons as a foretaste of the future when evil will be completely overcome, which is similar to the role of miracles as signs of the kingdom. Exorcisms also show that spiritual warfare is real, and that there is a spiritual dimension that is hostile to humanity but is ultimately subordinate to God's power.
5. **What does the text suggest about the nature of spiritual entities and their interaction with the physical world?** The text suggests that spiritual entities, whether demonic or otherwise, can interact with the physical world. They are not simply metaphors or psychological constructs. There are accounts of objects moving without being touched, unusual physical phenomena like a crucifix that becomes hot, and even a tree that suddenly split and fell right where people were standing after they were attacked spiritually. These suggest that spiritual entities can have physical manifestations and exert influence beyond the human mind. Moreover, the text suggests that there is a spiritual hierarchy, with God's power being greater than that of any demonic force.
6. **What is the critique of David Hume's arguments against miracles, and how does it relate to science?** David Hume's arguments against miracles are presented as fundamentally flawed. It is argued that Hume's claims about miracles are based on a presupposition that miracles violate natural law, without acknowledging that God is the one who established these laws and can act upon them as He wills. His argument is also viewed as circular, rejecting eyewitness accounts simply because they do not fit his predetermined assumptions about what is possible, ignoring or dismissing valid evidence. The text highlights that many early scientists believed in miracles, and modern physics understands natural laws descriptively, not prescriptively as Hume assumes. It also suggests that scientific approaches should be appropriate to their field of inquiry, and should not be used to dismiss unique historical events such as miracles, which cannot be replicated in experiments.

7. **How do the concepts of miracles and exorcisms relate to the idea of the “kingdom of God”?** Miracles and exorcisms are explicitly tied to the concept of the kingdom of God. They are presented as foretastes, signs, or reminders of the future reality of God’s reign where there will be no more suffering, sickness, or evil. Jesus’ healings and exorcisms demonstrate His power and authority, both now and in the future, and show that the kingdom of God is breaking into the present age. These events are meant to encourage faith and to give hope to believers in God’s power and the ultimate victory over all things. They are not just isolated acts of kindness, but are integral parts of a larger story about God’s redemptive work in the world.
8. **How do cultural and ethnocentric biases affect the interpretation of these events?** The text explicitly challenges ethnocentric perspectives that dismiss miracles or spiritual experiences in non-Western cultures. It points out how Western academic biases can lead to a narrow worldview that rejects the possibility of miracles based on philosophical assumptions rather than examining the actual evidence. The text emphasizes that the testimony of millions of people from various cultures and backgrounds should be taken into account when evaluating the existence and impact of miracles and spiritual phenomena. It argues that disregarding the experiences of the global South and other non-Western communities is itself a form of prejudice and that a more open and nuanced approach is needed to understand the full scope of these events.