

# Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 5

## Matthew 2-3

### Resources from NotebookLM

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

#### 1. Abstract of Keener, Matthew, Session 5, Matthew 2-3, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

**Dr. Craig Keener's lecture** analyzes Matthew chapters 2 and 3, exploring the narratives surrounding the birth and infancy of Jesus. **Keener examines the historical context**, interpreting the actions of the Magi, Herod, and religious leaders, and highlighting the theological significance of the events. He **discusses the historical plausibility** of the narratives, considering evidence from Josephus and other sources. **Key themes** include the contrast between pagan acceptance and Jewish rejection of Jesus, the role of prophecy, and Jesus' identification with the suffering of his people. The lecture also **explores John the Baptist's message** of repentance and its implications for the coming judgment and the kingdom of God.

**2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Matthews, Session 5 – 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 the provided lecture excerpts by Dr. Craig Keener on Matthew 2-3:

#### **Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on Matthew 2-3**

**Overall Theme:** This lecture focuses on the opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel, highlighting key events surrounding Jesus' birth and the ministry of John the Baptist, emphasizing the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and the divine nature of Jesus. Keener also emphasizes the contrast between those who respond to the coming of Christ and those who reject it, even among the religious elite.

#### **Key Ideas and Facts from Matthew 2:**

- **The Magi and Their Significance:**
  - The Magi are introduced as Persian astrologers, not traditionally seen as positive figures in a Jewish context, and potentially associated with evil magic.
  - They follow signs in the heavens, specifically the alignment of celestial bodies that signifies the birth of a king in Judea, indicating that God uses unexpected avenues to reveal truth.
  - Their journey and worship of Jesus is significant because they are not Jewish, highlighting the universal nature of God's plan.
  - Keener notes the astrological beliefs of the time and how even Jewish people had absorbed some of these practices.
  - Quote: "God chose to communicate in a special way to the people who were looking at the stars...sometimes God places something in a culture where even though it's forbidden normally, God will use that as a way for us to reach people with the good news."
- **Herod the Great: A Study in Power and Paranoia:**
  - Herod is depicted as a ruthless and paranoid ruler who is politically savvy but morally bankrupt.
  - He's an Edomite who gained power through Roman support, and he eliminates opposition and prioritizes his own reputation.

- His actions, including the massacre of the infants, are in character with his documented history of violence and paranoia.
- Quote: "Better to be one of Herod's pigs than one of his sons."
- Herod's actions are compared to those of the Old Testament Pharaoh and Antiochus IV Epiphanes, both of whom committed infanticide.
- His actions are contrasted with the pagan Magi who worshipped Jesus.
- **The Scribes and Priests: Knowledge Without Obedience:**
  - These religious leaders knew the scriptures and could pinpoint the location of the Messiah's birth, yet they did not act on that knowledge.
  - They are presented as a foil to the Magi, who traveled far to worship Jesus.
  - Keener stresses the importance of acting on biblical truth and not simply knowing it.
  - Quote: "Knowing the Bible is not all that we have to do. We have to obey the Bible."
  - They are portrayed as precursors to those who later opposed and ultimately sought to kill Jesus.
- **Jesus' Flight to Egypt:**
  - This is portrayed as a divine act of protection, a fulfillment of God's plan.
  - It is presented as a reversal of the Exodus, with Egypt now a place of refuge and Jerusalem a place of danger.
  - Jesus is shown to be a refugee, identifying with the suffering of his people.
  - The experience evokes Moses and the stories surrounding his birth, with the parallel of Herod becoming like a new Pharaoh.
  - Quote: "out of Egypt I've called my son" (Hosea 11:1), which is applied to Jesus to show that he is the fulfillment of God's promise to his people.
- **The Weeping of Rachel:**
  - The massacre of infants is connected to Jeremiah's prophecy of Rachel weeping for her children, illustrating the depths of the tragedy.

- This emphasizes the use of the Old Testament to illuminate the meaning of the events in Jesus' life.
- Matthew connects this moment to the exile, implying that even in suffering God is fulfilling his larger plan.
- **Settling in Nazareth:**
- Nazareth was an obscure, unimportant place, with people even questioning if anything good could come from there.
- Matthew argues this settlement is not random, but divinely ordained.
- The prophecy of Jesus being called a Nazarene is explored through Hebrew wordplay, connecting it to the messianic title "branch" (netzer).
- The location of Nazareth is also shown to be logical because of its proximity to the city of Sepphoris where Joseph, a carpenter, would have found work.
- Keener explores the theological significance of the family settling in Nazareth which would become associated with Jesus.
- Quote: "God alone ultimately holds the power of life and death."

### **Key Ideas and Facts from Matthew 3: John the Baptist:**

- **John's Lifestyle and Ministry:**
- John's location in the wilderness is shown to be significant, both historically as a place of refuge and biblically as a precursor to the New Exodus.
- His lifestyle is characterized by sacrifice and separation from worldly values, mirroring that of a prophet, a model for following Christ.
- Quote: "The wilderness was an ideal location for those ostracized from society."
- His clothing and diet evoke the prophet Elijah, a figure associated with the coming of the Messiah.
- His message is one of repentance, a call to turn away from sin and towards God, rather than just a change of thinking.
- Quote: "The meaning of a word is not determined by its roots...the meaning of a word is determined by what happens when you put those together and how people use the wording."

- **John's Baptism:**

- John's baptism is not a typical Jewish ritual immersion, but is more akin to the immersion of Gentile converts, suggesting a call for all people to turn to God in the same way.
- John stresses that the people cannot depend on their descent from Abraham for salvation.
- Quote: "You can't just depend on being descended from Abraham...Instead, all of us have to come to God in the same terms."
- He is described as summoning them to a "life of repentance."

- **John's Message of Judgment:**

- John warns of a coming judge and the coming judgment, using vivid imagery of fire and the separation of wheat and chaff.
- The fire is primarily a symbol of judgment, specifically Gehenna, a place of destruction.
- Keener points out that John is addressing the Pharisees and Sadducees, calling them "offspring of vipers" which was a very strong insult of the time.
- Quote: "Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

- **The Coming One and His Power:**

- John proclaims that the one who is coming will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, indicating the divine authority of Jesus and the dual nature of his mission of salvation and judgment.
- He describes his own unworthiness to even deal with the sandals of the coming one, suggesting that the coming Messiah is God himself.
- Quote: "The only one who could give God's Spirit, the only one who could pour out God's Spirit was God himself."

### Key Takeaways:

- **The fulfillment of prophecy:** Matthew's Gospel constantly links events in Jesus' life to Old Testament prophecies.
- **The importance of obedience:** Knowing scripture is not enough; it must lead to action and transformation.
- **The contrast between true and false faith:** The lecture highlights the difference between the humble Magi and the religiously learned but inactive priests, and between those who repent and those who do not.
- **Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises:** Jesus is shown to be the true king, the deliverer, and the one who brings salvation and judgment.
- **The dual nature of the kingdom:** The kingdom of God has both elements of salvation and judgment.
- **The call to sacrifice:** The examples of John the Baptist and Jesus call Christians to make sacrifices for the sake of the Kingdom.

### Overall Significance:

Keener's lecture emphasizes that Matthew is not simply reporting historical events, but interpreting them through a lens of faith and the Old Testament. He shows the theological significance of even the smallest details. Keener stresses the importance of knowing scripture well enough to interpret it within its original cultural and literary context. He also emphasizes that true faith is not just intellectual agreement, but obedience and a transformation of life.

## 4. Matthew Study Guide: Session 5, Matthew 2-3

### Matthew Chapters 2-3 Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Who were the Magi, and how did they find out about the birth of Jesus?
2. Why was Herod the Great threatened by the birth of a new king?
3. What role did the scribes and chief priests play in the events of Matthew 2?
4. Why did Joseph take Mary and Jesus to Egypt?
5. How does Matthew connect the events of Jesus's infancy to the story of Moses?
6. What does the name "Nazarene" signify in the context of Matthew's gospel?
7. Describe the lifestyle and appearance of John the Baptist.
8. What is the significance of John's baptism?
9. What does John the Baptist mean when he warns about a baptism of fire?
10. Why does John the Baptist emphasize that he is unworthy to even carry the sandals of the coming one?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The Magi were Persian astrologers who followed signs in the heavens. They saw a celestial alignment that they interpreted as signifying the birth of a powerful ruler in Judea.
2. Herod was a notoriously insecure and power-hungry ruler. The idea of a new king being born threatened his reign, leading him to take drastic actions to protect his authority.
3. The scribes and chief priests identified Bethlehem as the place where the Messiah would be born, based on scripture, but they did not act on this information themselves. They informed Herod and the Magi but did not go to Bethlehem.
4. Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod's order to kill all male children in Bethlehem. The family sought refuge there to avoid the persecution of the local king.

5. Matthew draws parallels between Jesus's infancy and Moses's story by depicting Jesus as a persecuted child who flees to Egypt and later returns, just as Moses did. This pattern emphasizes Jesus's role as a new deliverer of God's people.
6. The term "Nazarene," referring to Jesus's place of origin, was considered insignificant and potentially a point of criticism. However, Matthew interprets it as divinely significant, referencing a prophecy of a coming king as a "branch" (netzer), similar to Nazarene in Hebrew.
7. John the Baptist lived an ascetic life in the wilderness, wearing rough clothing made of camel hair and eating locusts and wild honey. He was set apart from the general population as a prophet in the mold of Elijah.
8. John's baptism was a ritual of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It was meant to prepare people for the coming of the Messiah.
9. The baptism of fire is a symbol of judgment for those who do not repent and is intended to be understood in the context of the preceding passage. Those who do not bear good fruit will be subject to a severe separation, like chaff from wheat.
10. John's humble statement highlights the immense difference in status and power between him and the coming Messiah. This declaration underscores Jesus's divine nature and ultimate authority.

## Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the characters of Herod the Great and the Magi in Matthew 2. What does this juxtaposition reveal about the nature of true faith and power?
2. Analyze the significance of Matthew's use of Old Testament scripture in chapters 2 and 3. How do these references contribute to the theological themes of the gospel?
3. Discuss the role of the wilderness in the stories of both John the Baptist and Jesus. What symbolic meaning does the wilderness hold in the context of Matthew's gospel?



4. Examine the connection between repentance and baptism as presented by John the Baptist. What implications do these actions hold for the audience in Matthew's gospel?
5. Explore the imagery of fire in Matthew 3, contrasting the common interpretations of "baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire" with the judgment-oriented context provided in the lecture.

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Magi:** Persian astrologers or wise men who studied the stars. They were also known as Magoi, sometimes associated with evil magic.
- **Herod the Great:** The king of Judea, known for his political shrewdness, paranoia, and cruelty.
- **Scribes:** Jewish scholars and interpreters of the law, like the “seminary professors of the day.”
- **Sanhedrin:** The Jewish ruling council or assembly.
- **Pharisees:** A Jewish religious and social movement known for their strict observance of the Law.
- **Sadducees:** A Jewish religious and political group, primarily composed of priests.
- **Herodium:** Herod's palace, which was in view of Bethlehem.
- **Mariamne:** Herod's favorite wife, whom he had executed on false charges and later honored with a tower named after her.
- **Nazarite:** A person who has consecrated themselves to God through a vow including a strict diet.
- **Netzer:** Hebrew word meaning "branch," used as a messianic title.
- **Nazarene:** A person from Nazareth, often used to describe Jesus.
- **Gematria:** A Jewish method of interpreting scripture using numbers corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, sometimes used for word-play.
- **Gezer HaShavah:** A Jewish interpretive technique where two texts are paired based on similar themes.

- **Metanoeo:** The Greek word for "repent," conveying not just a change of mind, but also a change of life and action.
- **Ruach HaKodesh:** Hebrew for the Holy Spirit.
- **Gehenna:** A Jewish term for a place of the damned, often described as a place of fire.
- **Chaff:** The outer husk of grain, which is worthless and is thrown into the fire, a symbol of judgment.

## 5. FAQs on Keener, Matthew, Session 5, Matthew 2-3, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ: Key Themes from Matthew 2-3

1. **Who were the Magi and why were their actions significant?** The Magi were Persian astrologers, likely Zoroastrian, who followed signs in the heavens to find the newborn king of the Jews. Their visit is significant because they were Gentiles, traditionally considered "outsiders," who came to worship Jesus, in contrast to Herod, a Jewish king, who sought to kill him. This highlights how God's message can reach unexpected people and places and how religious leaders can sometimes be blind to God's work. The Magi's actions show an openness to recognizing God's presence outside the traditional Jewish community, and the Magi's worship contrasts sharply with Herod's deadly jealousy.
2. **How did Herod's background and character contribute to his actions in Matthew 2?** Herod the Great was an Edomite king of Judea installed by the Romans. He was known for his ruthlessness, paranoia, and desire to maintain power at all costs. He eliminated political rivals, including members of his own family, to secure his rule. This history, documented by Josephus, explains his violent reaction to the news of a new king being born in Bethlehem. His massacre of the children in Bethlehem reflects his tyrannical nature and fear of losing his authority. His actions portray him as the opposite of the true king, Jesus.
3. **What role did the Jewish religious leaders (scribes and chief priests) play in the events of Matthew 2, and what does this reveal?** The scribes and chief priests, despite their deep knowledge of the scriptures, specifically Micah 5:2, did not actively seek out or worship Jesus. They only provided Herod with the information about Bethlehem being the birthplace of the Messiah but did nothing themselves. This highlights the danger of having knowledge of the Bible without genuine faith and obedience. They failed to act on the information they possessed, revealing a disconnect between intellectual understanding and a personal commitment to God's will. This serves as a warning against religious complacency.

4. **Why did Jesus and his family flee to Egypt, and what are the theological implications of this event?** Joseph was warned in a dream to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt to escape Herod's persecution, evoking the story of Moses. This highlights a divine protection over Jesus and also places him as an infant refugee. This event reverses the Exodus narrative where the Hebrews left Egypt for freedom. This reversal underscores that Jerusalem, the holy city, has become dangerous while Egypt becomes a place of refuge. It further connects Jesus with the experience of exile and the sufferings of his people.
5. **How does the narrative in Matthew 2 connect Jesus to Old Testament figures and events?** Matthew draws numerous parallels between Jesus' early life and key events in the Old Testament, such as the stories of Moses and the Exodus. The story of Jesus fleeing to Egypt mirrors the story of Moses being hidden away to escape a tyrannical leader. The use of Hosea 11:1 "Out of Egypt I called my son," originally referring to Israel's Exodus from Egypt, is now applied to Jesus, showing Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises and a representative of Israel. He is presented as a new Moses, a deliverer of his people, and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Additionally, Rachel's weeping in Jeremiah 31 is connected to the weeping for the murdered children in Bethlehem.
6. **What was significant about John the Baptist's ministry and lifestyle?** John the Baptist's ministry was characterized by his unique lifestyle and message. His location in the wilderness, clothing made of camel's hair, and diet of locusts and wild honey were a rejection of societal norms and a call for repentance. These elements also intentionally mirrored the prophet Elijah from 2 Kings 1:8 and his diet and dress, indicating that John was the one prophesied to prepare the way for the Lord's coming in Malachi 4. His baptism was a call to repentance and a public declaration of turning from sin. His ministry was seen as a call to prepare the way for the coming Messiah.

7. **What was the main message of John the Baptist, and how did it relate to his call to repentance?** John's primary message was a call for repentance, urging people to turn from their sins and prepare for the coming kingdom of God. He emphasized that lineage (being descended from Abraham) was not sufficient. His call to repentance was demonstrated through baptism, a symbol of cleansing and a new life. He warned of the coming judgment and the need for genuine fruit demonstrating a change of heart and life. He warned the Pharisees and Sadducees, calling them a "brood of vipers," about the coming wrath. John's preaching sought to confront hypocrisy and complacency and to incite people to live lives worthy of their status as children of God.
8. **What does the imagery of "baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire" represent, and why is it significant?** John's proclamation that the coming Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire has a complex meaning. While baptism with the Holy Spirit was understood as the gift and empowerment of God's Spirit as promised in the Old Testament, the "fire" is interpreted as a symbol of coming judgment. John uses the image of winnowing and burning chaff to show the distinction between true believers and those who are not, with the chaff burned with unquenchable fire. The baptism of fire highlights the dual nature of the Messiah's coming – a source of salvation and a source of judgment. Those that repent will receive the Holy Spirit but the unrepentant will receive fire.