

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 16

Matthew 23-24

Resources from NotebookLM

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

Matthew 3-4

1. Abstract of Keener, Matthew, Session 16, Matthew 23-24, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Craig Keener's lecture analyzes Matthew chapters 23 and 24, focusing on **Jesus' condemnation of the hypocrisy and corruption within the religious leadership** of his time, particularly the Pharisees. Keener connects Jesus' critiques to similar criticisms found in Jewish traditions and writings, emphasizing that **Jesus' message wasn't anti-Jewish but rather a prophetic call for genuine faith and righteous living**. The lecture also **examines Jesus' prophecies regarding the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem**, relating it to the historical context and highlighting the fulfillment of these prophecies. Finally, Keener discusses **the implications of these teachings for contemporary religious leaders**, urging them to be servants and avoid seeking honor or exploiting their followers.

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Matthews, Session 16 – 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_Session 16.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture by Dr. Craig Keener on Matthew 23-24:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on Matthew 23-24

Introduction:

This document summarizes Dr. Craig Keener's lecture (Session 16) on Matthew chapters 23 and 24. The lecture focuses on Jesus' scathing critique of the religious leaders (Pharisees and Sadducees) and his prophecies concerning the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and alludes to his second coming. Keener emphasizes that Jesus' words are not merely historical accounts but are challenges to the religious establishments and leadership in every generation.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Critique of Hypocrisy & Religious Show:

- Jesus excoriates the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. They emphasize outward displays of piety while neglecting the inner heart.
- *Quote:* "Jesus challenges religion for show."
- Keener emphasizes that this criticism is not unique to Jesus' time; the Jewish tradition itself recognized and condemned Pharisaic hypocrisy.
- He challenges the listeners to examine their own hearts and motivations for religious practices.
- *Quote:* "...it's also something to challenge ourselves, to make us look at ourselves and say, don't act like they acted."
- Jesus condemned the tendency for religious leaders to seek honor, titles, and special treatment (e.g., best seats, honorary titles, conspicuous religious garb).
- *Quote:* "Religious leaders must not seek marks of honor."

1. The Pharisees and Sadducees:

- Pharisees: Primarily known as "separatists" with strict interpretations of the Torah. Though influential with the people, they were a minority in the Sanhedrin and not representative of normative Judaism.

- Sadducees: Aristocratic priestly class, held political power, and were often at odds with the Pharisees. Both groups sometimes collaborated to oppose Jesus.
- Keener points out that the critique is directed at the leaders, not the whole of Judaism.
- *Quote:* "They were only one aspect of early Judaism. They're not normative Judaism."

1. **Leadership as Servanthood:**

- Jesus stresses that leadership in the kingdom of God is about service, not about gaining power and honor.
- *Quote:* "Leaders thus must be servants. That's the way leadership works in the kingdom."
- He warns against exploiting God's people for personal gain, whether psychological, financial, or otherwise.
- *Quote:* "People exploit the sheep for themselves, whether for their psychological needs or more often exploit them monetarily."
- Keener mentions the dangers of "transference" and "countertransference" in ministry relationships and the need for ministers to live holy lives, as God will judge abuses.
- He mentions it's not about seeking respect, but about reflecting honor to God.
- *Quote:* "I'm seeking honor for the Lord. Exalting is God's business alone."

1. **The Importance of Inner Righteousness:**

- Jesus condemns the focus on outward religious rituals and neglecting the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness.
- *Quote:* "Though you tithe, you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faithfulness."
- He uses the humorous example of straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel to illustrate their focus on minute details while ignoring significant moral and spiritual principles.
- Jesus emphasizes cleaning the inside of the cup, urging individuals to prioritize inner transformation rather than just outward appearances.

- *Quote:* "Clean the inside of your heart. Clean the inside of your life before you clean the outside."
- The metaphor of whitewashed tombs is used to portray the Pharisees' outward appearance of righteousness masking inner corruption and evil.
- *Quote:* "You're like whitewashed tombs. They look beautiful on the outside, but inside they're full of dead people's bones and everything unclean."

1. **Judgment & Accountability:**

- Jesus pronounces judgment on the religious leaders, emphasizing that they are perpetuating the sins of their ancestors, including the persecution and murder of the prophets.
- *Quote:* "So go ahead, fill up the cup of your ancestors. They killed the prophets. Now you're going to climax their deeds by killing me."
- He warns that the current generation will bear the consequences for these actions.
- *Quote:* "Upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on the earth..."
- He emphasizes God's love for his people even while pronouncing judgement.

1. **Prophecy of the Temple's Destruction:**

- Jesus prophesies the complete destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, a shocking prediction at the time.
- *Quote:* "Not one stone here will be left upon another. Every stone will be thrown down."
- Keener notes that this prophecy was indeed fulfilled in AD 70.
- The destruction of the temple is presented as a judgment upon the religious establishment of the time.
- He mentions that there was a historical record of the destruction and the signs in Josephus, and other historical records as evidence of the event.
- *Quote:* "Also, the false testimony against him. Well, who was going to make up false testimony? But some people had a garbled testimony that he said he would destroy the temple."

1. The Second Coming and the End Times:

- The disciples inquire about the timing of the temple's destruction and the signs of Jesus' coming and the end of the age.
- Jesus distinguishes between "non-signs" and prerequisites for the end, emphasizing that the preaching of the gospel to all nations is a prerequisite.
- He also indicates that the destruction of the temple is a near-term fulfillment, while the return of Jesus is a far-term event.
- *Quote:* "With the temple's destruction, these things will be fulfilled within a generation. With Jesus coming into the end of the age, Jesus said, no one knows the day, nor the hour, not even the sun, nor the angels in heaven, but only the Father."
- He stresses the importance of being prepared for his return, whenever it may be.

Key Takeaways:

- Matthew 23-24 is not just about historical events but also about the heart of true religion and leadership.
- Hypocrisy, self-seeking, and neglecting the weightier matters of the law are condemned.
- Leadership is fundamentally about serving others.
- The destruction of the temple was a significant judgment on the religious leaders and their system.
- Jesus' words challenge the reader to examine their own relationship with God and their motivations for religious practices.

This briefing document highlights the complex and challenging themes addressed in the given lecture. It can be used as a summary or a starting point for further discussion and study of Matthew 23-24.

4. Matthew Study Guide: Session 16, Matthew 23-24

Matthew 23-24 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What is the central theme of Jesus's discourse in Matthew 23, and what does he specifically criticize?
2. According to Keener, what is the primary reason that Jesus critiques the Pharisees?
3. How were the Pharisees both influential and limited in their power in Judea at the time of Jesus?
4. What is the significance of the phrase "sitting in Moses' seat" and how did Jesus interpret it?
5. What were phylacteries and tzitzit, and why did Jesus criticize their use?
6. What does the lecture suggest about the traditional use of honorific titles like Rabbi and Father, and what does Jesus say about them?
7. What does Jesus mean by the phrase "you strain out a gnat but swallow a camel?"
8. What does Jesus say about the inward state versus the outward appearance and ritual purity of the Pharisees?
9. According to the lecture, why was the generation in Jesus' time held accountable for the righteous blood shed throughout history?
10. What are the two questions that Jesus' disciples asked him, and how does the lecture explain the significance of these questions?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The central theme of Matthew 23 is a critique of the hypocrisy and spiritual corruption of the religious leaders, especially the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus criticizes their practices like seeking honor, excessive focus on legal minutiae over justice and mercy, and failure to live according to their teachings.

2. Keener explains that Jesus critiques the Pharisees not merely as a matter of historical interest but also to challenge us to examine ourselves, ensuring that we do not act like them. The critique is a warning to avoid hypocrisy and to emphasize loving and serving God's people.
3. The Pharisees were influential with the people and were known for their strict interpretations of the Torah, but they did not hold political power, which primarily belonged to the Sadducees. They had to work with the Sadducees to get things done, but they were still popular with the populace.
4. "Sitting in Moses' seat" refers to claiming the role of Moses' successors, which the Pharisees did through their meticulous interpretations of the law and their claim to possess oral traditions from Moses. Jesus used this metaphor to emphasize their authority but also to highlight the discrepancies between their teachings and actions.
5. Phylacteries and tzitzit were religious items meant to help remind the wearer to keep the Torah; phylacteries are boxes containing scriptures worn on the forehead and hand, and tzitzit are fringes worn on the corners of cloaks. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for using these items as a show of piety to gain admiration from others, rather than to genuinely keep God's commandments.
6. The lecture suggests that honorary titles like Rabbi and Father were originally respectful terms for teachers and leaders, but that they had become titles that the religious leaders sought to be looked up to. Jesus says that all believers are brothers and sisters, that there is only one master, Christ, one Father, God, and one teacher, Jesus.
7. The phrase "you strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" is a humorous metaphor about the Pharisees' meticulous adherence to minor rules while neglecting larger principles. It refers to their tendency to meticulously filter out small ritual impurities while overlooking major ethical issues.
8. Jesus condemns the Pharisees for being overly concerned with outward appearances and ritual purity while neglecting the inner state of the heart, which should be characterized by justice, mercy, and faithfulness. He said that they are like whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside but full of death and impurity inside.

9. The generation of Jesus' time was held accountable for the righteous blood shed throughout history because they were about to complete the tradition of killing the prophets by killing the Messiah. Jesus said their actions would "fill up the measure" of their ancestors' sins.
10. The two questions the disciples asked were, "When will these things take place?" (referring to the temple's destruction) and "What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" The lecture explains that these questions blend a near-term judgment (temple's destruction) with a long-term eschatological expectation, highlighting that both have signs or pre-cursors.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the role of hypocrisy as a central critique in Matthew 23. How does Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees and scribes challenge the concept of religious authority and practice, and what are the implications for contemporary religious life?
2. Discuss the significance of the "woes" in Matthew 23 and explain how they connect to the themes of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. How do these "woes" relate to the Beatitudes and what message is being conveyed?
3. Explain how the concept of "honor" in ancient Jewish culture relates to Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders in Matthew 23. How did Jesus' actions, such as overturning tables in the temple, challenge this cultural understanding of honor and authority?
4. Discuss the relationship between the destruction of the temple and Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24. How do these prophecies fit within a broader understanding of God's judgment and salvation, and what does this teach about the nature of God?
5. Examine Jesus' role as both a sage and a prophet in Matthew 23-24. How does his teaching combine practical wisdom with a prophetic voice, and what do these dual roles reveal about his authority and mission?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Pharisees:** A Jewish sect known for their strict adherence to the law and oral traditions. They were influential with the people and were known for their exact interpretation of the Torah.
- **Sadducees:** A Jewish sect associated with the priestly aristocracy. They held political power and were in good with the Romans, often disagreeing with the Pharisees.
- **Scribes:** Teachers and interpreters of the Jewish law. They were often associated with the Pharisees.
- **Sanhedrin:** The Jewish ruling council, composed primarily of Sadducees.
- **Torah:** The first five books of the Hebrew Bible, containing the laws and teachings of Moses.
- **Phylacteries:** Small leather boxes containing scriptural passages, worn on the forehead and arm as a reminder to keep God's commands.
- **Tzitzit:** Fringes or tassels attached to the four corners of a garment as commanded by the Torah.
- **Mezuzah:** A small container holding a scroll with biblical verses, placed on the doorpost of a Jewish home as a reminder of God's commandments.
- **Rabbi:** A teacher or master of Jewish law.
- **Epidectic Rhetoric:** A type of speech focused on praise and blame, used for commendation or condemnation.
- **Proselytes:** Converts to Judaism from other religions.
- **Casuistry:** The use of clever but unsound reasoning, often to avoid obligations or justify actions.
- **Hillelites and Shammaites:** Two major schools of thought within Pharisaic Judaism. They often disagreed on interpretations of the law.
- **Gematria:** A method of interpreting Hebrew words and names by associating them with a numerical value.
- **Hesed:** The Hebrew word for covenant love.

- **Bema:** A raised platform or podium, often found in synagogues, from which scriptures would be read and taught.
- **Shekinah:** The divine presence or glory of God, often used to describe the presence or indwelling of God in the tabernacle or temple, and in the later Jewish tradition, as a way to talk about God in a way that doesn't name Him directly.
- **Q:** A hypothetical source that many biblical scholars believe that Matthew and Luke used in common.
- **Abomination of Desolation:** A term used in the Old Testament and in Matthew 24:15 to describe an act of desecration of the temple that would lead to its destruction. It is also used to describe an act of desecration that will occur at the end of days.
- **Kittim:** A term found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, often interpreted to mean the Romans, or some other invading force.

5. FAQs on Keener, Matthew, Session 16, Matthew 23-24, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Key Themes in Matthew 23-24

1. **What is the primary focus of Jesus' critique in Matthew 23?** Jesus' critique in Matthew 23 focuses primarily on the hypocrisy and spiritual failings of the religious leaders of his time, specifically the scribes and Pharisees. He condemns their outward displays of piety that mask inner corruption, their love of honor and titles, and their neglect of the weightier matters of the law such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness. He also critiques their tendency to focus on minor details of religious observance while missing the true heart of God's law. This critique extends to the broader religious establishment and serves as a warning to all religious leaders.
2. **How does Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees relate to Jewish tradition?** While Jesus strongly criticizes the Pharisees, his criticisms aren't considered "anti-Jewish" but are in line with internal Jewish disputes of the time. Later rabbis themselves condemned hypocrisy and acknowledged issues with Pharisaic practices. Other Jewish groups, such as those at Qumran who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, also harshly criticized the religious establishment of their day. Jesus' language is similar to that used by the prophets and other Jewish figures who called for reform and greater faithfulness to God's covenant.
3. **What specific behaviors and attitudes of religious leaders does Jesus condemn?** Jesus condemns several specific behaviors and attitudes including: seeking honor and titles; making a show of religious practices through conspicuous phylacteries and tassels; imposing burdens on others that they themselves wouldn't follow; hypocrisy and inconsistency; a focus on minor details of the law while neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness; using religious positions for self-gain and exploitation; and, not living according to the standards they were teaching others. In short, Jesus critiques the religious leaders for prioritizing their status and reputation over genuine service and love for God and people.

4. **Why does Jesus mention the “seat of Moses” and what does it signify?** The “seat of Moses” is not referring to a specific chair but is a metaphor for the authority and role of the religious leaders as successors to Moses, interpreters and teachers of the Law. Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for claiming this role but not upholding the spirit of the Law, emphasizing that while people should follow what they teach, they should not emulate the leaders' hypocritical actions. The seat thus symbolizes a role of leadership and teaching, that was not being fulfilled with integrity by the religious authorities.
5. **What does Jesus mean by his warnings about "whitewashed tombs"?** The metaphor of "whitewashed tombs" highlights the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Like tombs that are beautifully decorated on the outside but full of death and decay inside, these leaders presented an outward appearance of righteousness and piety while inwardly being full of corruption and evil. They were outwardly clean with their ritual purity, but inwardly full of greed, self-indulgence and hypocrisy. This image serves as a powerful indictment of their superficial faith and lack of genuine spiritual life.
6. **How does Jesus' critique of tithing relate to his broader message?** Jesus does not negate the act of tithing, but highlights that tithing can become a point of pride and lead to neglect of more important aspects of following God. He criticizes the Pharisees for being meticulous about tithing even on minor items like spices, but neglecting the weightier matters of the law like justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Jesus' point is that outward observance must be accompanied by inner transformation and commitment to God's heart. The proper use of resources is to care for the poor, the work of the ministry, and other needs, not to focus on outward appearances or status.
7. **What does Jesus' prophecy regarding the destruction of the temple signify, and how did it relate to his generation?** Jesus' prophecy that "not one stone here will be left upon another" refers to the physical destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. He declared the temple to be desolate, because it was corrupt and no longer housed the presence of God, and he stated that the destruction would happen within that generation. This was fulfilled in 70 AD when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, highlighting the judgment on the religious establishment, but this was also meant to emphasize the end of the old covenant system and the beginning of a new era based on Jesus. This prediction is seen as multiply attested and coherent with other statements made by Jesus and with the known history of the period.

8. **How should we apply Jesus' warnings about religious leaders today?** Jesus' warnings are meant to be a challenge to religious leaders today, urging them to avoid the hypocrisy and self-seeking actions of the Pharisees. Leaders are called to be servants, focused on humility and the well-being of God's people, rather than seeking status, titles, or personal gain. They should teach and live by a standard of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. We are to use our resources and positions in the church for the sake of the Kingdom and avoid any form of spiritual exploitation, remembering that all believers are called to be fellow servants of one another. Ultimately, these teachings are meant to encourage people to practice inward integrity as well as outward piety.