

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Lecture 4, Introduction and Matthew 1

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 4, Introduction and Matthew 1.

The Gospel of Matthew was addressed especially to Messianic Jewish believers, Jewish Christians, and Jewish followers of Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah, Jesus.

People debate about the exact date of it. Papias saying Matthew wrote first, obviously that would argue for an earlier date. But our current Gospel of Matthew in its current form, I think it was probably sometime after the year 70.

Although the arguments for the dating of the Gospels are not conclusive either way. They're often quite different from what you have with many of Paul's letters. So, you have a wide range of debate on the dates.

The Great Commission is the climax and the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel. Ancient works would sometimes summarize their major themes at the end of a work. Often, they would introduce them at the beginning.

A work like Acts, Acts 1:8, it introduces some major themes. But Matthew's Gospel especially ties together various themes at the end of his Gospel. And we have that in the Great Commission.

I want to show how this conclusion of Matthew's Gospel actually ties together some major themes, just as a way of surveying some of these themes in Matthew's Gospel. The Great Commission involves cross-cultural ministry, evangelism, and what we could call Christian education. Matthew 28.19 and 20.

You have one imperative surrounded by three subordinate participial clauses. Or we could say it's one command that's carried out in three ways. The command is making disciples.

We do that by going, by baptizing, and by teaching. Now the going part may simply be presupposed, but it is stated there. But it presupposes to whom we're going is the nations because we're making disciples of the nations.

So, the good news needs to go out to all the nations. Well, is that a new idea in Matthew's Gospel, or is that one that he's been getting us ready for, for a while? Well, let's see. The Gospel opens with Jesus's ancestors.

And by the way, please pardon my pictures. I just took whatever pictures I could get free. They were free at the time.

So anyway, they're not all exactly relevant. But anyway, ancient genealogies typically included only men. Please don't look at me badly like I would leave out the women, but that's just what they did back then.

Ancient genealogies typically included only men, but Matthew names four women. Well, who are they and where are they from? Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Uriah's widow, whom we know from 2 Samuel was Bathsheba. Well, where are they from? Tamar was apparently from Canaan.

Her story is told in Genesis 38 where actually God uses her to help bring Judah to repentance. But she was apparently a local Canaanite. Rahab, well, you know her story from the book of Joshua.

Where's she from? She's from Jericho. And actually, her story in one of the contexts in the book of Joshua is sandwiched. It's directly adjacent to the story of Achan.

Achan was from the tribe of Judah and you might expect Achan's going to be a good guy, but Achan hid the loot that he took from Jericho under his tent. By contrast, Rahab hid the spies on her roof. Her act led to the deliverance of her family and the betrayal of her people.

Achan, however, betrayed his people and led to the destruction of his family. In each case, the family would have been in on the secret and so they shared in the responsibility. Ruth, well, we know where she's from the book of Ruth.

She was a Moabitess. Deuteronomy 23:3 says that an Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter the congregation of the Lord of the 10th generation, but she was welcome to enter because she cleaved to the Lord, the God of Israel, Ruth 1.16. And then finally we have Bathsheba, but she's not given by her name Bathsheba. She's called the wife of her, her that had been the wife, her that was the widow of Uriah, Uriah the Hittite.

Bathsheba may have been from the tribe of Judah herself. There's some evidence for that, I think in 2 Samuel, but she'd been married into a Hittite family. And so, all four of these women are either Gentiles or they have a very strong Gentile connection.

So, three ancestors of King David, the mother of King Solomon, all had these Gentile connections. And yet the purpose of Jewish genealogies was to underline the purity of one's Israelite ancestry. Matthew specifically does the opposite of Jesus' royal ancestry through Joseph.

Well, you look at who the three groups in Matthew chapter two, and we'll come back and do some of these in more detail as we do Matthew in more detail, but just tracing this theme of the Gentiles or all the nations. Well, the three new characters or groups of characters that weren't already present in chapter one are the Magi who were from the Persian king, Herod, the king of the Jews, although he was an Edomite, an Idumaeon by birth, but they had been force converted to Judaism earlier, and the scribes and the aristocratic priests who would have been perhaps something like the pastors and the seminary professors of their day. Well, God often surprises us.

The penalty for astrologers was death, but they came to worship. Well, that was true of the Magi. Now, what about Herod the Great? What Old Testament king killed the male children? It was Pharaoh.

So here you have people that might be considered pagan, outsiders, who come to worship the king of Israel, and you have the king of Israel acting like a pagan. We'll get into that in more detail later, but in Matthew chapters three and four, we also have allusions to this theme. John the Baptist is preaching to the crowds.

Don't think you can say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our ancestor. I tell you, out of these stones, God can raise up children for Abraham. Chapter four, when Jesus relocates, Matthew says it fulfills the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah, referring to Galilee of the Gentiles.

Matthew chapter eight speaks of a Roman centurion, technically probably not a Roman. He was probably of Syrian extraction, ethnically, but he served Rome, and therefore he acts as a representative of Rome in this narrative. And this man acts in faith.

Jesus embraces his faith and says, I tell you the truth, that many will come from the east, like the Magi, and from the west, like the Romans. Many will come and sit down at a table at the promised banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom. Further, in chapter eight, where Jesus cures the Gentile demoniacs, it's predominantly Gentile territory, because they're raising pigs there, and there were a number of Jewish people who lived there, but it's predominantly Gentile.

Chapter 10, Jesus says to shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town, when he sends the disciples out throughout Galilee to preach and heal. Shake the dust off your feet if they don't listen to you. Well, what very conservative Jewish people would sometimes do when returning to the holy land or coming to a holy place like the temple, would shake the profane dust off their feet.

And so here, Jesus' disciples are to treat these Galilean towns as if they're pagans. And that's why he goes on to say, I tell you the truth, it will be more tolerable, more

bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. Chapter 11, says it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.

And you, Capernaum, if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. Chapter 12, Jesus says that Nineveh and Sheba were better prepared for the day of judgment than his own people. And he's underlining the point that greater knowledge, and greater exposure to the truth, bring greater responsibility before God.

So, in places that have had more of the gospel, the judgment will be even greater if they fall short of receiving the truth. Whereas God often lavishes his gifts on those people that he's reaching out to who have never had the chance to hear before. And we see that in many of the miracle stories before, although God loves everybody everywhere.

And so, we see that in Chapter 15, we have a Canaanite woman. In Mark, she's a Syro-Phoenician woman, said to be a Greek. Well, the Greeks were the ruling citizen class of Syro-Phoenicia.

Syro-Phoenicia was the Phoenician region to the north, as opposed to Libo-Phoenicia, which was in the area around Carthage in North Africa. Why does Matthew call her a Canaanite? Well, the Canaanites, when they were displaced, a lot of them went up into this region. So, she fits also the type of a Canaanite.

And remember that there were a couple of Canaanite women at the beginning of Matthew's gospel. You had Tamar and Rahab. So now he's telling you the story of a Canaanite woman from his own day.

If there was any group that Jewish people hated almost as much as they hated Romans, or many of them hated, it was Canaanites. So, putting this aspect in the story drives him to the point. Well, this woman is part of an elite class that's been taking the bread from other people's children's mouths, in a sense.

The Greeks were the ruling citizen class of Syro-Phoenicia. Also, she's in one of the cities, which was dependent on the countryside. So, she had been in an elite position for a long time.

Now she has to come to Jesus in a position of petition and acknowledge Jesus as the son of David, she calls out, that is the rightful king. And Jesus grants her request and praises her faith. Chapter 16, Peter confesses Jesus at Caesarea Philippi.

It was a pagan city known for witchcraft and pagan worship. Originally, it was called Panias after the grotto of the deity Pan there, but then it was renamed Caesarea

Philippi in honor of the emperor and also Philip. Jesus, that's where he has Peter confess.

He says, Who do you say that I am? That's where Peter makes the confession of who Jesus is. In chapter 24, Jesus says, you'll see many signs that won't be really signs at the end, but this is the thing that will tell you that the end is coming. The good news about the kingdom must be preached among all peoples, and then the end will come.

In chapter 25, the nations are judged by how they respond to Jesus' agents. Whatever you've done to the least of these, my brothers and sisters. Well, who are Jesus' brothers and sisters elsewhere in Matthew's gospel? Whoever does the will of my father who's in heaven.

Jesus says, you have one father in heaven, Matthew 23, all of you are our brothers and sisters. So even in chapter 28, the women of the tomb are told by Jesus, go, say to my brothers. So, Jesus' brothers and sisters are the disciples, Jesus' followers, and Jesus sends them out to preach the good news of the kingdom among the nations.

And then the nations are judged by whether they fed them, they gave them drink, and so on. Well, that's what we see in Matthew chapter 10. Jesus sends his disciples out and whoever receives them, gives them hospitality, and takes them in, is going to be blessed.

If they don't, shake the dust off your feet. And at the end of the chapter, Jesus says, if they receive you, they receive me. And if they give you even a cup of cold water in my name, they've received me.

So here Jesus sends out his messengers, his agents. When we carry the good news to people who have never heard it before, we are fulfilling this role and we are fulfilling part of this promised end-time role of reaching the nations with the good news. And then finally you come to chapter 27, the first people to confess Jesus as God's son after his crucifixion.

It's the execution squad. Mark mentions the centurion, Matthew says the centurion and those who were with him, all entered into it, confessing Jesus as God's son. So, we have this theme that runs through the gospel.

When you come to Matthew chapter 28, it's no surprise. It's just climaxing a theme that's always been there. So, Matthew 28, going, also baptizing.

This isn't something that runs all through Matthew's gospel in terms of baptism, but there is something that runs through there that's related to this idea. Baptism

appears back in chapter 3 as an act of repentance. When John the Baptist preaches, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

And then people were, as they were repenting in light of this baptism of repentance, they were baptized. Now Jewish people baptized Gentiles when the Gentiles converted to Judaism. And that's significant here because John the Baptist is using this kind of washing with Jewish people.

Again, don't think to say to yourselves we're children of Abraham, but all of us have to come to God on the same terms. All of us have to repent. And in this case, washing, ceremonial washing was something that was already understood that way.

There were regular kinds of washings, but this once-for-all all kind of washing that signified a turning to God was something that was normally done with Gentiles. But notice that there's a message that goes with John's baptism. Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Well, that message has continuity throughout the gospel. That's John the Baptist in chapter 3 and verse 2. Jesus in chapter 4 and verse 17 offers the same message. That's the summary of his message.

Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Chapter 10 and verse 7, as Jesus sends out the disciples, he says, and as you go preach saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. But there's been a change since then.

The change isn't that we don't any longer preach the kingdom of heaven. The change is that now we have a clear understanding of who is the king in the kingdom of heaven. So, in Matthew chapter 28, it doesn't just say baptizing, like carrying on what John the Baptist was doing, but it specifies that the baptism has a more particular message connected with it now.

We baptize in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. That is, now we understand more fully the nature of the king whom we proclaim in the kingdom of God. All through Matthew's gospel, we see Jesus' authority.

He has authority over sickness, over spirits, over storms. As he heals someone in Matthew chapter 9, Jesus says, the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. But here in chapter 28, verse 18, Jesus says, to me is given all authority in heaven and on earth.

The kingdom of heaven really belongs to the Son of Man, to Jesus. And then in verse 19, you baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jewish people understood Father was a name that they often used in prayer for God.

The Spirit, they didn't really see the Spirit as a distinct person the way we who believe in the Trinity do, but they saw the Spirit as an aspect of God. They saw the Spirit certainly as divine. To name Jesus as the Son between the Father and the Spirit clearly depicts Jesus as divine.

And that's why Jesus goes on in verse 20 to say, I am with you until the end of the age. In Jewish thinking, the only one who could be with everybody at once was God. Only God is omnipresent.

In fact, the later rabbis had a name for God. They called him Makom, the place, meaning the omnipresent one. And this is not something new in Matthew's gospel.

This is something that he's been preparing us for as well. Matthew 1.23, he should be called Emmanuel, which is God with us. Jesus was already in his incarnation.

And Matthew 18.20, Jesus says, where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst. Well, there was a Jewish saying from antiquity that where two or three are gathered for the study of the Torah, for the study of God's law, there is God's Shekinah, God's presence among them. Jesus is claiming to be the very presence of God.

And Jesus here concludes, I am with you always, even until the end of the age. And I always used to think, well, you know, in the commission in John's gospel, Jesus says, receive the Spirit as the Father sent me, so I send you. In the commission at the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts, he promises them the Spirit so that they can go out and do this task of global mission.

But here in Matthew, I thought, well, he doesn't talk about the power, but he does because he says, I am with you. He will be with us in fulfilling this task. So, the Great Commission talks about going, talks about baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, including our message there.

But it also talks about teaching, teaching whatever I've commanded you. We have five discourse sections, major discourse sections. There are teachings elsewhere in Matthew's gospel, but we have five major discourse sections in Matthew's gospel.

Matthew chapters five through seven address the ethics of the kingdom. Chapter 10 models the proclamation of the kingdom. Chapter 13 gives parables of the kingdom, seven or eight parables of the kingdom, emphasizing the present aspect of the kingdom, how the kingdom is already present like a mustard seed or yeast hidden in a loaf.

Chapter 18 deals with relationships in the kingdom. Chapters 23 through 25 deal with the future kingdom and judgment on the religious establishment. Now, some people

would see 23 as separate from 24 through 25, but each of the five discourse sections that I've enumerated concludes with these words.

And when Jesus had finished these sayings, or in one case, when Jesus had finished these parables. So, there's like a formulae closing to each of these. And 23 kind of drifts over into 24 and 25.

But if you want to make them six discourse sections, that's fine. Often Jewish people did like to divide things into five sections based on the Torah. Psalms was divided into five sections.

They divided Proverbs into five sections. The earliest form of Mishnah Abot, well, what became Mishnah Abot? The earliest form of it was divided into five sections before they added some more. But these don't correspond directly to the five sections of the Pentateuch.

So, if you don't want to see five sections, that's fine. But in any case, these are the major themes we have in Jesus' teaching. Now, because I'm just summarizing here, I'm not going to run through all those teachings because we still have yet to do Matthew's gospel.

But I want to summarize the theme of discipleship because he's talking about making disciples of a nation. So, what does that entail in Matthew's gospel? Well, in Matthew's gospel, making disciples means we're making disciples for Jesus, not for ourselves because he specifically says that in Matthew 23. We're preparing other laborers to serve Jesus, to go out and make disciples too.

It's something that's multiplied. Jesus, first of all, is above job security. You see in Matthew chapter four, how he called people to leave their fishing nets and follow him.

And fishermen actually were not the poorest paid people. They actually usually made a better wage than peasants did. But he calls them to forsake that and follow him.

Not that fishing is bad in any way, but he has something else for them to do. We also see that Jesus is above residential security. Foxes have holes, birds have their nests, but Jesus has nowhere to rest, except maybe on the stern of a Galilean fishing boat during the storm.

He was a refugee even as an infant we see in chapter two. Jesus is above residential security. In Matthew's gospel, in fact, someone is saying to Jesus, I'll follow you anywhere you go, because Jesus is about to get into a boat and cross the Lake of Galilee.

Jesus responds if you want to follow me, don't count on having anywhere to lay your head. Jesus is also above financial security. Jesus tells someone to give everything to the poor.

That was in 19:21. He says that to a rich person. But back in chapter six, he tells all of us to lay up our treasure in heaven.

Jesus is above financial security. Jesus is also above social obligations. When he says to someone, let the dead bury their dead.

Now I can go into more detail about the background for that, but keep in mind that the greatest obligation that a son had was honoring his father and mother. And the greatest expression of that obligation, especially for the eldest son, was to bury the father. For Jesus to say that he took precedence over burying the father was for Jesus to claim a role that Jewish tradition assigned only to God.

And this young man, if he didn't deal with his father's burial, would be considered an outcast from his village for the rest of his life, because this was just socially obnoxious. It was above social obligations to follow Jesus. And Jesus is also above life itself.

He says if you want to follow me, take up your cross and follow me. That is, I'm going to the cross. If you want to follow me, take up your cross and we'll go there together.

You have to be ready to die. Well, do these demands sound too hard for us? The things that Jesus demands of his followers? It's an absolute standard, and yet it's implemented with grace. That's why it's helpful that we have not just a collection of Jesus' sayings in our canonical Gospel of Matthew, but we also have the narrative to go with it.

The Romans had to draft a bystander, Simon of Cyrene, to carry Jesus' cross. Jesus told his disciples, if you want to be my disciple, take up your cross and follow me. The Romans had to draft a bystander to do what Jesus' own disciples didn't do.

Jesus said, if you deny me, I'll deny you before my father in heaven. Peter did deny him, and yet there was forgiveness for the repentant. Judas went and hanged himself, but in the adjoining pericope or paragraph, in the adjoining paragraph, Peter expresses his sorrow in a different way.

He weeps, he mourns. Jesus didn't repudiate his disciples. He didn't repudiate those who were the forerunners of Jesus' disciples today.

I mean, at Gethsemane, we went to sleep on him. On a night when people would stay awake for Passover, they would talk about the great things God had done, his disciples went to sleep on him. His disciples abandoned him and fled.

And at the cross, most of the male disciples didn't show up, even at the cross. Originally, apparently even at the tomb. And yet, instead of repudiating the disciples, these ordinary people that Jesus picked, Jesus was not finished with them yet, but he made them into the kind of people he had called them to be.

And as God forms us into the people that he's called us to be, we can't take credit for it. Because as we look back and say, I am wholly committed to you, Lord, I will do whatever you ask of me. And we've demonstrated it by our sacrifices, by the way, we live for the Lord.

We recognize that it's because of his grace at work in us, because he was patient with us and his spirit is at work in us. And he makes us into the kind of people that he's called us to be. These same disciples eventually were the catalyst for the spreading of the good news among all the nations.

And they were our forerunners. The Lord can take ordinary people like you or like me, and he can make us into something else. And that's the conclusion of my introduction to Matthew's gospel.

At this point, I'm ready to start into Matthew's gospel itself, looking at Matthew chapter one. Matthew chapters one through four, before the Sermon on the Mount, introduce some important issues in Matthew's gospel. Biographies often begin by praising their subject's ancestors when they had significant ancestors, or praising their subject's upbringing, or by recounting significant episodes about the subject's birth or childhood to pretend later greatness.

Well, Matthew and Luke as well include all of these. As part of dealing with the background, sometimes you would include a genealogy. Matthew opens with the genealogy.

People in antiquity usually kept good track of their ancestors. The ancestry seven generations back could affect your taxation status in some of the villages in Egypt. And people would keep track of their ancestry, especially if they had very significant ancestries.

For example, if you were Jewish and your ancestors were priests, you had to keep very careful records of that. If you were descended from the royal line, you would definitely want to keep track of that. There's actually a tradition that early Christians preserved.

It's not in the Bible, but Jesus' relatives, in the time of Domitian at the end of the first century, were hailed before the emperor because of their royal ancestry. Matthew uses Jesus' genealogy to teach us some things. This is Jesus' official lineage.

His official royal lineage through Joseph is more important than his genetic lineage through Mary. That's why Joseph's genealogy is recounted. Adoption was regularly used for kings.

So, of the various kings, the various emperors of Rome in the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the dynasty of this period, not a single one of them was actually the birthson of the previous emperor. All of them were adopted as sons of the previous emperor. So, Jesus being raised by Joseph is heir to the line.

Now maybe Mary was also an heir to the line, but we don't know that. Matthew specifies Joseph's ancestry. But Matthew is also interested not just in Jesus' royal ancestry literally, but Matthew also wants to make some spiritual points about Jesus' spiritual heritage.

This is something that would be very familiar in his Jewish context because rabbis often used midrashic word plays on scripture. And here we have a couple of them. If you have an English translation, you won't see this in most of your English translations because I think the translators thought this was just a typo.

It was just a typographic mistake, a spelling error. But in Greek, in chapter one in verse 10, it doesn't say that Jesus was descended from Ammon, who was a wicked king who lived only two years. It changes one letter of Ammon to Amos, which is not a bad change to make because in Greek, names often ended with an S and you can understand why that would have been done.

But Ammon was a wicked king. Amos was a prophet. And he also adds one Greek letter, which comes out as two letters in English, but one Greek letter to the king Asa.

There it's not Asa, who wasn't a bad king, but Asa was a king of Judah. But Matthew in verse eight adds one letter to his name and it becomes Asaph. Well, who was Asaph? Asaph was a psalmist.

So, Jesus becomes heir not only to the Davidic line, but spiritually he's also the heir of the prophets and the Psalms. Now, the function of genealogy. Biblical genealogy sometimes summarizes history between eras.

We have roughly 10 generations ending in three sons, Matthew Genesis, and then another genealogy with 10 generations ending in roughly three sons. You've got different eras connected through these genealogies in Genesis as a way of moving on in time. Also in Judaism, they could function as a reminder of God's sovereignty.

Later rabbis said that arranging marriages was harder than parting the Red Sea to make all the marriages come out right so that you would exist. But most significant here is the message that the time has come. Genealogy is often skipped some generations.

And we can tell by comparing Matthew and Luke for the same period that Matthew skipped some generations. We can also tell by comparing Matthew's genealogy with 2 Chronicles that Matthew skipped some generations. But he's coming out to a rough number of roughly 14 generations here, roughly 14 generations there.

And what Matthew is saying is, look, it's these generations from Abraham to David to the exile, and now to the time of Jesus. At these major intervals, something major happened in Israel's history. Israel was due for a major event in this period, and now it's happened.

Matthew 1:1. Literally, the biblos geneseos, the book of the Genesis of Jesus Christ. This is taken from the Greek translation, which naturally you use if you're writing in Greek. It's taken from the Greek translation of Genesis 5.1, from which actually the book of Genesis, following the Greek title, receives its name.

Of course, in Hebrew, it's bereshit, but in English, anyway, we use the title Genesis. The book of the Genesis of Jesus. Now, usually when Genesis has this formula or formula like it, like the book of the generations of Adam or the book of the generations of Noah, what follows are not one's ancestors, but one's descendants.

Because one's descendants, Adam's descendants depend on Adam for their background, for their heritage. Noah's descendants depend on him for their identity in Noah. But here, it doesn't list Jesus' descendants.

It lists his ancestors that climax in Jesus. Because even Jesus' ancestors depend on him in God's purpose. He climaxes Israel's history.

Jesus was the reason for all this history that climaxes there, the ultimate reason. Jesus is said to be here, the son of Abraham, that is the true Israelite. And we'll see connections between Jesus and Israel's history as we go on, especially in chapter two, and also chapter four.

Jesus is also the son of David. Elsewhere in Matthew, this means the expected Messiah. The son of David was a messianic title elsewhere in ancient Jewish sources, like Psalms of Solomon and Dead Sea Scrolls and so forth.

Ancient genealogies often listed only males. If included the most significant women, you might expect it to include the four matriarchs of Israel, or at least the three of

them that they could have at one time, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel. These were the four matriarchs that regularly appeared in Jewish literature.

But Matthew doesn't include these four women. Instead, Matthew includes Tamar from Genesis 38, Rahab from Joshua 2 and 6, Ruth from the book of Ruth, and Uriah's widow from 2 Samuel chapters 11 and following. These are significant figures in Israel's history.

Tamar was from Canaan, Rahab was from Canaan, Ruth was a Moabitess, and Bathsheba was married to a Hittite. So, this is an exceptional genealogy. Most genealogies like to highlight the purity of one's Israelite or Levitical ancestry.

Matthew instead highlights Jesus's mixed heritage, three Gentiles and a Gentile's widow. So, you know that the Gentile mission, Matthew 28.19, is no afterthought, but this is something for which Matthew has been preparing his audience right from the start. After the genealogy, we have a paragraph that talks more about Jesus's background by talking about the piety of Joseph.

Ancient biographers could emphasize the piety of one's upbringing, one's parents, or one's ancestors, and also unusual features of the protagonist's birth. In this case, we have a particularly unusual feature of Jesus's birth, not normally associated with births, namely that it's a virgin birth. People have sometimes tried to cite parallels to this, and the parallels are really very poor.

I mean, there are many things where you can look and you can find parallels. Many of Jesus's teachings have Jewish parallels and so on. But the virgin birth, you know, Gentiles, Greeks had stories of Greek gods impregnating mortals, raping or seducing young women or girls.

But that's irrelevant to the idea of the one true deity who doesn't have intercourse with Mary. He just causes her the same way he could cause creation to come into existence. He just causes her to be pregnant.

Something closer to this is the idea of miraculous births like we have in the Old Testament. Biblical accounts of miraculous births, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph all came after answers to prayer, closed wombs were opened. We also have births foretold by angels in the Old Testament, Ishmael, and Samson, but we don't have any virgin births there.

And for those who like to say that you had ancient gods, myths of these having virgin births, that's not true. You don't find that in the ancient sources. Those are things that were made up after the fact.

Those were not around when Matthew and Luke talked about Jesus' virgin birth. Sometimes passages tell us how reliable a character is, and how much we can expect of what they say. For example, when the Gospels called John a prophet, we can expect that most of what John says is going to be right.

John doesn't understand everything rightly. He doesn't understand that the kingdom comes in two phases. So, he wants to know if Jesus is the promised one or not when he just hears about Jesus healing people instead of baptizing people in fire.

But John is mostly a reliable person. He's called a prophet and you're going to get mostly right things from him. Well, Matthew tells us something about Joseph.

We can learn from his behavior because Matthew specifically tells us that Joseph was a righteous man. Luke's Gospel tells us more about Mary, and her involvement, but Matthew tells us about Joseph. And because Matthew tells us this explicitly, we can confidently learn some lessons from Joseph's character in this context.

We can learn about commitment in marriage, compassion and mercy, consecration, or control. And if you are hearing this in translation, don't worry about it. I just used sometimes what wasn't the best wording to just come out with C. But control should be self-control, and consecration should be obedience.

The first one is just implied, commitment in marriage. In some cultures, we don't take marital fidelity seriously enough. We don't take adultery seriously enough.

Joseph would divorce Mary on the suspicion of adultery shows how seriously he and his culture took marital fidelity. Both Jewish and Roman law required divorce in the case of adultery. In fact, in Roman law, if a man knew that his wife was committing adultery and didn't divorce her, he could be prosecuted for the offense of *leno quinium*, that is for being her pimp.

So, this was taken very seriously in that culture. And it illustrates Matthew's teaching in Matthew 5.32 and 19.9, where divorce is permitted for the cause of adultery, because it's understood that adultery is a very serious breach of marriage, something people are not supposed to do. Now, I say this one is just implied.

It's just taken for granted in this passage. But we're going to look at some more explicit, clear lessons of the passage in a few moments. But I want to mention first that Joseph probably didn't know Mary as well as people often assume when they talk about engagement in modern times.

Betrothal or arison often lasted about a year. And in a small village, you'd get to know something about many people. But during that betrothal period, the young man and the young woman wouldn't be together except with a chaperone in Galilee.

In Judea, it wasn't as strict, but in Galilee, normally they had a chaperone. This betrothal was as legally binding as marriage. It could be dissolved only one of two ways, by divorce or by one of you dying.

So, Joseph is getting ready to divorce her because he thinks she's broken the covenant. And that's why he has to divorce even though it's just betrothal. It's more than certainly Western engagement.

Intercourse before marriage was forbidden during this time. A person who was found guilty of adultery, even though Deuteronomy 22 talks about them being executed, wasn't actually practiced in this period. All our evidence suggests that in this period, she would just bear a lot of shame and humiliation.

She wouldn't actually be executed for this. Well, Joseph's response to her is compassion. By divorcing her publicly, taking her before the elders in the gate of the town, he could keep any dowry that her father had given her.

Now, the way it worked in this culture was in Greek culture, fathers would give their daughters a dowry. They would give them some money that they would have to live on. If their husband divorced them, the husband had to repay the dowry, and so on.

Because of those economic arrangements, actually, in Greek culture, they threw out girl babies more often than they threw out boy babies. But in Jewish culture, they weren't supposed to throw out any babies. In Jewish culture, traditionally what had happened was the prospective groom would pay his father-in-law a bride price.

It was a way of thanking the family for raising their daughter. It was a way of expressing not just gratitude, but also honored the bride. Many cultures have that kind of bride price today.

In fact, my wife is from a country in Africa where legally we were supposed to pay a bride price to get married. And so, I paid one because I really wanted to marry her. But in any case, any money that she had brought into the marriage, he could keep.

And this was being practiced increasingly among Jewish people in this period. He could keep it if she were guilty of adultery. Plus, he could regain any of his bride price that he paid to the father-in-law, although under these circumstances he would probably get it back anyway.

But also, he could get revenge for his shame. He could avenge himself on her. And he could make clear his innocence, like, I'm not the one that got her pregnant.

Look at this. I'm upset about this. But instead, he chose a private divorce, which was something in front of just two or three witnesses.

He would give her what was called a git, which doesn't mean get out of here, but git was a certificate of divorce. And that would allow her to marry somebody else if she wanted to. But he was saying, you're no longer obligated to me.

I'm freeing you from this. But he chose to do that privately to spare her some shame. That teaches us something about what it means to be a righteous person.

Joseph was a righteous person. Part of righteousness means that we forgive those we think have hurt us, that we show kindness, and that we love our enemies, as Matthew's gospel also teaches us. Now, in this case, she hadn't actually done anything wrong, but he thought she had, and he shows compassion.

But also, we learn about consecration or obedience. To marry her, Joseph would be embracing shame for the rest of his life. He would be sharing in her shame as if he got her pregnant.

Now this was a culture where honor and shame were very important. People were going to assume that he got her pregnant. According to some later church traditions, Joseph was, he'd probably been married, and his first wife died, and so that accounted for Jesus' other brothers and sisters.

Many of us scholars think that actually probably that's just a later tradition. The tradition is actually not attested before the Protoevangelium of James. So, you can take whichever view you want on that.

But many of us would argue that probably this was just an average probability. This was probably Joseph's first marriage. Joseph was probably between the ages of 18 and 20, which was the usual age of marriage for Jewish men at this time.

Mary was probably in her mid-teens. As soon as girls reached puberty, they were considered marriageable in Galilee and Judea, but they often married a bit older than that. But Mary was probably not a whole lot younger than he was in contrast to Greek culture where they had a husband who was a lot older than their wives.

So, Joseph is a young man. He's got all of his life ahead of him. Mary has all of her life ahead of her, but they obey the dream that God gave him.

This was no ordinary dream, but an angel of the Lord spoke to him in this dream. Matthew likes to tell us about these dreams. You have the Magi having dreams.

In Matthew chapter 27, you also have Pilate's wife having a dream. Joseph has other dreams. In the Bible, God sometimes gave symbolic dreams in other ways, but when it was God or an angel speaking to you, you knew you better pay attention to that dream.

That was not just you had something bad to eat before you went to bed. Self-control. They abstained from intercourse until Jesus was born.

Young married couples were usually poor. So, they usually lived in a single room. Joseph, if he was like many other grooms, when he first got married, if he hadn't finished building a house yet, Joseph and Mary may have been staying in kind of a makeshift room on type of Joseph's parents' home.

So here they were at close quarters and yet they didn't have intercourse. Now they were married. They were allowed to have intercourse, but they chose not to.

And many people back then thought if you leave a man and a woman together alone for 45 minutes, they'll give in. They won't be able to resist. But Joseph and Mary show us, and they put the shame on people in much of our Western culture, people who say we can't control ourselves.

Our animal passions are too strong. Unless, of course, it's something illegal and then we control ourselves. But Joseph and Mary show us an example of self-control.

Why did they do this? If they had had intercourse on the wedding night, they could have proved that she was a virgin. They could have gotten honor for themselves. But they chose to abstain so it wouldn't just be a virgin conception, but it would be a virgin birth for the honor of God's Messiah for what had been told them.

Now if we look at Matthew's treatment of Isaiah 7:14, who is the Immanuel son of this passage? Isaiah 7.14, therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman will be with child and their son, and she will call his name Immanuel. Now there's some debate about one of the Hebrew words here.

I'm not going to go into that debate. I'll leave that for your Isaiah professor to deal with. But the context in Isaiah is this.

The Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ask a sign for yourself. The context is that there were two other kingdoms that were putting pressure on the kingdom of Judah. The kingdoms of Samaria, Israel in the north, and the kingdom of Damascus, or Aram, further to the northeast.

They were trying to get King Ahaz to join their coalition against the king of Assyria. And the prophet Isaiah says, don't do it. These kingdoms are going to be conquered by the king of Assyria.

These two kings that you're afraid of are going to fall. Don't listen to them. Now, the Lord himself is going to give you a sign.

And this is the sign because Ahaz didn't want to ask for a sign. A young woman's going to bear a son. Remember, keep in mind, this is a sign to Ahaz, the king of Judah at that time in the 700s BC.

She'll bear a son, call his name Immanuel. He'll eat yogurt and honey at the time he knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be abandoned.

So, these other kings are going to become non-issues. This was something that would happen in Ahaz's lifetime. And this was something that this child's birth was going to happen in the world.

Chapter 8, then the Lord said to me, to Isaiah, write on this tablet, swift is the booty, speedy is the prey, mere shall hash pass. So, he went into the prophetess, this would be Isaiah's wife, and she conceived, and she may have also been somebody who prophesied as well, but I'm just saying that's why he went into her. He went into her, she conceived, and she gave birth to a son.

The Lord said, name her Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Swift is the booty, and speedy is the prey. For before the boy knows how to cry out, my father or my mother, the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.

Does that sound like that might be related to the prophecy in chapter 7? So, it sounds like the sign to Ahaz would be Isaiah's own son. Did Matthew get it wrong? But as we keep reading in Isaiah, Isaiah 8:18, Isaiah says, I and the children God has given me are for signs and wonders to Israel. Well, what's the purpose of a sign? Is it so we can look at the sign and say, oh, that is such a lovely sign.

I mean, I wish I had a sign like that in my bedroom. So, we just admire the sign. The point of a sign is that it points to something.

It draws our attention to something. Isaiah and his sons were not so that everybody would look at his sons. They were pointing to something else, something beyond themselves.

And in this case, yes, there was an immediate fulfillment, but even within Isaiah itself, it looked beyond that to a greater fulfillment when truly Emmanuel, truly God would be with us in a greater sense. And this is also part of the same context as you go on into Isaiah chapter 9, Isaiah 9 verses 6 and 7. A child will be born to us. A son will be given to us.

The government will rest on his shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. And it goes on to talk about him ruling over the throne of David.

So, this would be a descendant of David, and yet he also would be called Mighty God. And lest you think that Mighty God doesn't mean that he would actually be called Mighty God, the chapter after this speaks of God himself as the Mighty God. So, God himself would come into history and God himself would be God with us.

Well, did Matthew really have the whole context in mind when he quoted Isaiah 7:14? I think Matthew did, because just a few chapters later, Matthew chapter 4, Matthew quotes from that very context in Isaiah chapter 9 when he speaks of a light in Galilee of the Gentiles. That's the context right before the Mighty God. If the same context is still in Matthew's mind a few chapters later, I think there's good reason to believe it was in his mind in Matthew chapter 1. What we sometimes do when we look at Matthew's quotations from the Old Testament, we want to read Matthew into the Old Testament, or we say, oh, Matthew didn't read the context.

But sometimes the problem is that we didn't read the context far enough, which I think is the case in Matthew chapter 1 and verse 23 and Isaiah 7.14. Matthew did know the context. Matthew maybe didn't handle it the way that some of us would handle scripture today, but Matthew certainly knew what he was doing in a very sophisticated way that would be certainly intelligible to other Jewish interpreters of his day. He was one of the best of them if you read the other Jewish interpreters.

But by the way, when I've preached lessons from Joseph's character, sometimes people have gotten convicted because not everybody we preach to has necessarily lived a sexually pure life before we preach to them. So, it's nice to remind them that this passage includes another character and this character is really helpful to mention when we talk about sin. And that is in Matthew chapter 1 and verse 21, Jesus, who will save his people from their sins.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 4, Introduction and Matthew 1.