

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Lecture 5, Matthew 2-3

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 5, Matthew 2-3.

Picking up in Matthew 2, we've just finished Matthew 1 in the introduction and moving on now to Matthew 2.

Some of the characters carry over from Matthew chapter one, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. But we also have a new set of characters, three characters or groups of characters. We have the Magi, Persian astrologers.

We have Herod, king of the Jews, even though he's an Edomite and technically wasn't supposed to be allowed to be king. But since the Edomites were forced to convert to Judaism, I guess it was allowed. And also, he had political power that we'll talk about very soon.

And the scribes and the aristocratic priests who were the pastors and seminary professors of the day, as we mentioned earlier. Well, the Magi repeatedly appear as a cast of Eastern and earlier period Babylonian and this period Persian wise men. Traditionally, they were polytheistic.

At some point, they became Zoroastrians. We don't know which it was at this point. But the term Magi appears in Greek translations of Daniel for Daniel's enemies.

So, these are not people that you would automatically expect are going to be good guys when you first hear the story or Jewish people wouldn't normally expect these to be positive, especially because the term Magoi, Magi, was also used for evil magicians in the Greek world, which were considered very bad. Notice also where these Magi find out about things. They find out about things with signs in the heavens.

Well, a particular celestial body, I think it was Jupiter, signified kingship. Another stood for Judea. And so, when these aligned, that would suggest a powerful ruler being born in Judea.

And there are actually a number of different theories about exactly what the star was that they saw. But of the several possibilities astronomers suggest, the likeliest is a few years before Herod's death in the year 4 BC, which fits what we know of this. Jesus was probably not born in the year one.

He was probably born somewhere around six or maybe even seven BC. Now, apparently, for this one event in history, God chose to communicate in a special way to the people who were looking at the stars. And 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.

We're not doing something wrong, but they may have done something wrong. But would Herod listen to astrologers? Well, astrology was considered the science of his day. And even Jewish people by this period thought that, well, astrology could predict the future for the Gentiles.

It just doesn't have any control over the nations and it's only predictive. The stars don't actually control the future. Rulers were particularly afraid of comets because comets were thought to portend the death of a ruler.

It said that Nero, when people reported to him a comet, killed some nobles and said, ah, the comet was portending their death and not mine. It's also said that Vespasian when he was on his deathbed, was told of a long-haired comet. That's what they called a comet with a long tail.

And he said that must be the death of the Parthian emperor that it's portending because Parthians were known for their long hair. And then Vespasian died. But rulers often had problems with astrologers because they didn't want people predicting their death.

Jewish people absorbed some of these values of astrology so that by the sixth century in Galilee, you can have a synagogue its floor is a mosaic of the zodiac with Helios, the sun god, in the middle. This wasn't something that later rabbis would have approved of, but it was the way some Jewish people were practicing their faith. Even in the first century, we have Josephus and Philo writing in this period, describing different things in the tabernacle or the temple in light of the constellations.

So, there were people who were paying attention to this in these days. And it's not surprising that Herod did so. Bethlehem was just six miles from Jerusalem.

It was within view of the Herodium, Herod's palace. So, Herod could have actually been sitting in the palace in the Herodium and sent out troops to massacre the children. A caravan of this size wouldn't simply disappear.

Normally, it would come through. Once it came into Judea, it would come to Jerusalem and then take the road south to Bethlehem. When the caravan was getting ready to leave and go back to the east to get to the main road north, they would naturally take the road north six miles back to Jerusalem.

Herod expects them to come back through Jerusalem. And Herod knows that if they come back to Jerusalem, they're obligated to stop and talk with him because he's obligated them to do so. He doesn't suspect that they might decide to take a detour and take a southern road and go roundabout to get back.

Now, I'm going to tell you some things about Herod the Great so that you understand that his behavior here is in character. We don't have all his atrocities recorded for us by Josephus, the Jewish historian from this period, but we have quite a lot of them recorded. When Rome began to expand, some Judean factions sought Rome's help against other Judean factions.

They said, you help us, put us in power over Judea, then we will be part of your empire. Eventually, Rome helped them win and they helped Rome gain power. And Rome helped put Herod the Great in power.

Herod made sure that Jerusalem's local aristocracy, its Sanhedrin, which was just a good Greek term for a council, like a senate, a city council, or something like that, made sure that the Sanhedrin supported him. He killed the existing nobles and put his own political supporters in power. How's that for smart political acumen? That's not something, by the way, that you should practice in the church with troublemakers in the church.

I'm just teasing, but that's a very dangerous politician there. His political instincts were excellent. Unfortunately, he was friends with Antony, but he was enemies of Cleopatra, who was Antony's girlfriend.

That doesn't usually work out too well, but he stayed friends with Antony until Antony died. Caesar, some of the supporters of Caesar, killed Antony and Cleopatra. And so, when Octavian Caesar, also known as Augustus later on, when Augustus became the new ruler, Herod volunteered to be his friend instead.

He said, you know, I was friends with your enemy, but you see what a loyal friend I am because I stayed friends with him up until he died. So, you see that I can be a loyal friend and I want to be your friend now. And Caesar actually said that's a good idea.

You can be my friend too because I know you'll be a loyal friend. Herod became a famous builder. He dedicated temples for other gods in other cities, especially temples in honor of Caesar.

But in Jerusalem, he began especially the greatest temple of the ancient world, the temple of the one true God. Because the Jewish people had only one temple, they had only one God and only one temple, they put all their resources into this temple.

In Sebast, which was on the ruins of ancient Samaria, he built a temple in honor of Caesar.

It probably looked better back then. In Jerusalem, he built the temple of the one true God. The Jewish people from around the Roman world and further to the east in Parthia and Persia also honored this temple.

But some of his decorations were a bit too Gentile for the Pharisees. So, you had a couple of Pharisaic teachers who had about 50 students and they were lecturing to their students how this golden eagle in Herod's temple was a problem. It was too Roman.

So, what they did, was they tried to take down this golden eagle. So, Herod had them killed. Herod was even political about some of his many marriages.

Herod married Mariamne, who was a Maccabean princess. She would validate him with the people. Herod was of Edomite extraction.

That didn't go over very well. But Mariamne was his favorite wife. He had a number of wives.

But unfortunately, someone falsely accused her of adultery. And so disregarding politics for once, Herod had her strangled to death. Later he discovered her innocence and he felt badly.

So, he named a tower in his palace after her. He had three towers in his palace, Hippicus, Phaseal, and Mariamne. One named after his beloved deceased friend, one named after his beloved deceased brother, and one named after his beloved deceased wife, whom he had had killed on false charges.

Herod also disliked competition. Mariamne's kid brother was the high priest and he was getting very popular, too popular. And Herod didn't like competition.

So, this was not politically useful. So, the young man had a drowning accident in a pool that archaeology reveals was only about three feet deep, only about one meter deep. Maybe the high priest was very short, but I suspect that instead, it was a matter of foul play.

Herod was insanely jealous. No one could be king except for him. He heard that two of his sons were plotting against him.

So, he had them killed but later discovered that they were innocent. They were framed. Later, another son actually was plotting against him.

So, Herod had him killed also, even though Herod was on his deathbed at this point. The Emperor Augustus allegedly said, and this may not be a true story, but it does illustrate the point about Herod, better to be one of Herod's pigs than one of his sons. Herod cared deeply about his reputation.

And I hope you will not mind my pictures, but I just, needed whatever picture was free. So, I took a picture of a funeral. Anyway, Herod cared deeply about his reputation.

He wanted people to mourn when he died. So, he left orders with his sister-in-law that when he died, some nobles he'd had rounded up would be executed to make sure that people would mourn on the day that he died. But when he died, she actually freed them and there was rejoicing in the land.

There's a proverb about that in the book of Proverbs. So there's rejoicing when a wicked ruler dies. Is it surprising that Herod would have killed the male babies of Bethlehem? Now, if we look at the text, we see something, not just this background, but we actually look at the text itself.

We see an inversion of characters in light of the Old Testament. God often surprises us because the biblical penalty for astrologers as a form of diviners was death. But these came to worship the king of the Jews.

Well, the Old Testament king who killed the male children of Bethlehem, who killed the male children of Israel, was Pharaoh. And also, Jewish people might think of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who executed a lot of children. When Jewish mothers insisted on circumcising their babies, he had the babies killed, hung around their mother's neck, and had them thrown from the walls of Jerusalem.

Talk about some wicked rulers. These were some wicked rulers. So, when Jewish people thought about pagans, they also could think of how Gentiles would abandon babies or sometimes kill babies, which was something that Jewish people recognized was very bad.

They would never do that. So here you have the king of the Jewish people acting like a pagan, acting like a pagan king. The exact opposite of the Magi, who might be considered pagans, but they came to worship the king of the Jews.

But the people in the narrative who might scare us the most are the Bible teachers. Because Scripture told the Magi where to go. The Magi may have been following the star, it may have been moving before them.

There are different opinions about how exactly that worked. If there was a tale or just the star told them it would be in Judea. And so, they get to Judea and they don't know where to go after that.

But in any case, however you view the star, the star was giving them some general direction. But when they get to Jerusalem, the place where the royal palace is, where they expected the child to be born as a king, Herod has to consult his own wise people. And there he consults the scribes and the chief priests and the elders, the Bible experts of the day.

Oh, and they knew exactly. Yeah, this king is to be born, Micah chapter five, verse two. Of course, the verses are added later, but Micah chapter five and verse two, he's going to be born in Bethlehem.

So, the Magi go on their way with their caravan to Bethlehem. And what do the wise men of Herod do? Apparently, they do nothing. Now, historically, you can keep in mind, these are probably the children of Herod's political lackeys that he put in power when Herod first came to power as a king.

But when you look at the moral in Matthew's gospel, I mean, here the Magi go, but the people who knew the Bible the best, they don't do anything. Knowing the Bible is not all that we have to do. We have to obey the Bible.

We have to take it seriously enough to act upon what we learn. They didn't go. And a generation later, the successors of these scribes and these chief priests wanted Jesus dead.

He was no longer a baby. And the line between taking Jesus for granted and wanting him out of the way may be sometimes thin. We need to follow Jesus and not just talk about it.

Now, when the Holy Family goes to Egypt and they settle there, it's not actually like in the picture here because the pyramids are in Southern Egypt, and Jesus and his family would have gone to Northern Egypt, to the Delta region. But Alexandria was a very large city, probably the second largest city in the Roman Empire. And the Greeks in Alexandria, Alexandria had been founded by Alexander the Great and his Greek followers and Macedonian followers.

People considered themselves Greeks. They founded the city of Alexandria and they spoke of it as Alexandria near Egypt, even though Egypt had been a prestigious empire centuries before. In this period, the Greeks looked down on Egypt.

And so, they spoke of Alexandria as near Egypt, even though it was really in the Delta region of Egypt itself. Perhaps one-quarter to one-third of Alexandria was Jewish and

another quarter of it was local Egyptian. And then the Greeks who settled there, they said, no, we're the only citizens.

The rest of you just came into our city. You are foreigners. So, there were a lot of Jewish people there in this period.

They faced genocide actually in the early second century. But Egypt had long been a place of refuge. It was a place of refuge in Joseph's day if you remember Joseph in the book of Genesis.

But here we have something like a reversal of the Exodus. Remember in the case of Moses in Exodus 4:19, it said, those who sought your life are dead. You can go back to Egypt now.

Well, here it's those who sought Jesus's life in Judea who are dead and they're able to go back from Egypt. So, Egypt becomes the place of refuge and Jerusalem becomes the dangerous place. There were Jewish traditions as well as early Christian traditions about Jesus in Egypt.

But anyway, Matthew chapter two, verses 13 through 18, talks about the persecuted child. Jewish tradition associates Jesus' stay in Egypt with sorcery because Jewish people who didn't believe in Jesus said, no, he did these miracles, but as a sorcerer. Nobody denied that he did miracles, but it was just a matter of whether they were from God or not.

If you know Jesus and you know the God of the Old Testament, you know that Jesus is the one who comes to reveal the heart of God. The God who may visit the iniquity of the parents upon the children of the third and fourth generation, but whose covenant love and covenant faithfulness is to the thousandth generation of those who love him and keep his commandments. Jesus shows us God's heart.

So again, if you know Jesus, you know he reveals God. I mean, he's clearly from God. But anyway, Matthew chapter two, the persecuted child.

There's also the Egyptian Christian tradition of Jesus staying there, but Matthew is our earliest source for this. The theology of the narrative, God protected Jesus and his family. This protection was divine vindication.

And also, it evokes a story of Moses, including some stories about Moses that were told about Moses' parents receiving a dream as a warning and so on. Jesus identifies with his people's heritage in this context. And we'll talk more about that later.

And also, we see Jesus as a refugee. Many Jewish people believed, and you find this in the Mekilta, early Jewish commentary in Exodus. Many Jewish people believed

that God spoke only in the Holy Land or once in a while somewhere else if it was a holy place near water, a pure place near water.

But we see here that God works outside that land, just like we see in Acts 7 and other passages. We also see that Jesus was a refugee. Israel had experienced being a fugitive.

Elijah was a fugitive. David was a fugitive. And we see Jesus here as a fugitive with nowhere to lay his head, even as an infant.

And that shows that he identifies with this in our sufferings, identifies with this in the cross. My wife actually was a refugee during the war in her nation for 18 months. And when she saw this, that Jesus was a refugee, it meant so much to her.

And it can mean so much to us when we are suffering to remember that our Lord suffered also. And he understands our pain. He understands what we go through.

Also, something interesting in this passage, there are four place names in Matthew 2. Jesus goes from one place to another, with nowhere to lay his head. Now, some people cite here ancient stories about divine babies and heroes overcoming. But the story here is closest to the story of Moses.

Again, in Jewish tradition, a scribe predicted Moses's birth to Pharaoh and a dream warned Moses's father. Jesus goes to Egypt with somebody named Joseph. And there are all these allusions.

Herod is like a new Pharaoh. And also, Jesus fled. It's the language that's used in Exodus 2.15 for Moses fleeing in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

But especially the parallel becomes clear in Matthew 2:15, out of Egypt I've called my son. This is taken from Hosea 11.1, which also says, when Israel was young, I loved him. Now these are parallel lines in Hosea.

So, what he's talking about when he says out of Egypt, I called my son, he's talking about when he brought his people Israel out of Egypt. Israel was often called God's son in the Old Testament. So, the passage was not directly talking about the Messiah in Hosea's context.

It was talking about Israel at the time of the Exodus. Is Matthew ignoring the context here? But Matthew doesn't take this from the Greek, the standard Greek translation of the time, the common Greek versions of the time that we call the Septuagint. Instead, Matthew correctly translates the Hebrew directly on his own, which would lead me to suspect that Matthew probably knows what he's doing.

He probably also knows the rest of the context. Because Hosea 11, after it speaks of the first Exodus, speaks of a new Exodus in Hosea chapter 11, a new era of salvation. It goes on and talks more about the Exodus.

When Israel was young, I loved him out of Egypt. I called my son, I bent down, I lovingly fed my people, and so on. And then talks about judgment because his people are disobeying him.

And he says I'm going to send you off to Assyria like you were in Egypt before. But then we're on verse eight in Hosea 11. He says, O Ephraim, how can I do this to you? How can I make you like these cities that I overturned in my anger and kindled the fire upon my wrath? Instead, my own heart is overturned within me and my own compassions are kindled.

I will call and my people will come trembling like birds from the land of Egypt, like doves from the land of Assyria. I will settle them again in this land. He speaks of a new Exodus, a new era of salvation.

And of course, that's what Jesus has come to do. Jesus has come to restore his people. He's come to save his people from their sins.

Now that mission may be completed in some respects the second coming, but certainly at the first coming he's inaugurated that beginning. Now this isn't just a guess looking at Matthew. It fits the context.

Matthew consistently follows this pattern. In chapter four of Matthew, you have a pattern here. Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years.

Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days. Israel was tempted in the wilderness. Jesus is tempted in the wilderness.

God gives Israel commands in Deuteronomy. Jesus quotes three commands from Deuteronomy and then fulfills those commands. Rachel weeps over Israel during the exile.

Rachel weeps over Israel's children in Matthew chapter two. And we'll see more details about that. In fact, the Old Testament itself often suggests connections like this.

If you look in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 42 through 44, the servant there is explicitly said to be Israel, God's chosen. Isaiah 42:18 he says, who is blind but my servant. So deaf is my messenger whom I send.

Again, in Isaiah 49:3 Israel is God's servant. But in Isaiah 49:5 God's servant is one to bring Israel back to him. Again, in Isaiah 53 we have that 52:13 through 53:12 that what we have is one who suffers on behalf of Israel.

Israel had sinned, but this one, says he hadn't sinned. He was suffering on behalf of his people. So, when Israel fails in the servant's mission, there's one within Israel who comes and represents the whole of the people and suffers on their behalf.

And I think Matthew is drawing the same kind of connection and he'll do it with one of these passages in Isaiah that we already have a connection for in the Old Testament itself. Well, the killing of Bethlehem's male children, how historical could that be? We have an account of that somewhere else from the ancient world, but it probably was depending actually on Matthew. Matthew is probably the first account.

We couldn't expect to find it in Josephus because Josephus is only dealing with royal accounts, especially things in Jerusalem. But it fits everything we know about Herod's character and it also fits the location being four to six miles southeast of Bethlehem. The Herodium is four miles southeast of Bethlehem and Bethlehem is visible from there and so on.

But Matthew is not just recounting this story dispassionately. This is a very sad story for the other children and their families. Matthew denounces injustice in 2.16 and 2.17. Five times the passage speaks of the child and his mother.

What could be more harmless than this child and his mother? This dictator is paranoid about a child and his mother. Matthew doesn't recount this dispassionately, but he laments and he uses language taken from Jeremiah chapter 31. In our tragedy, we rarely recognize God's larger work in history, but even in the midst of our suffering, it's part of a much larger story.

And God has promised a day when justice will prevail. In the midst of this tragedy, God preserves his long-range purpose for history. Jesus identifies with his people's exile, just as he identified with their Exodus.

Chapter two in verse 18, therefore cites Jeremiah 31.15, which compares Israel's anguish in the exile to what happened in Bethlehem at this time. It speaks of Rachel who's crying out on behalf of her children there in Jeremiah 31. Well, everybody knew the Old Testament well, and Matthew takes for granted that his target audience, his core audience does know the Old Testament well.

Everybody who knows the Old Testament well knows that Rachel was buried near Bethlehem, Jeremiah 35.19. And so Matthew may make an implicit Gezer HaShavah. Gezer HaShavah was a Jewish interpretive technique where you would take two texts that talk about something similar and you'd put them together. In fact, later rabbis

said that Jacob buried Rachel there so she could pray later on for the exiles who were being carried past her.

Now, when I quote the later rabbis, I'm not saying that what they said was true. I'm just using it to illustrate the way people thought back then. But here's the context in Jeremiah 31.

God comforts Rachel and then Jeremiah goes on to prophesy Israel's restoration because he says, Israel is my dear son, the child in whom I delight. So again, this connected with what he just said about the son back in 2.15 quoting from Hosea. And Jeremiah also goes on in Jeremiah 31.31-34 to speak of a new covenant, just as Jesus in Matthew chapter 26 will speak of the covenant in his blood.

Jewish teachers often implicitly suggested entire contexts when they would quote a verse because they expected that they were speaking to people who were biblically literate, and who knew the wider context. Sometimes it misses readers today who don't know the Bible as well as ideally we should. Then it speaks of them settling in Nazareth.

Now people have differed over the population of Nazareth. Archeologically, some estimate that there were only 500 residents in Nazareth. It kind of depends.

They've excavated much of Nazareth, but what if you live just a bit beyond what we consider the boundaries? But in any case, some estimate only about 500 residents. It was a very small community. You can see why in John 1.46 Nathaniel says, can anything good come out of Nazareth? It's a negative reputation necessarily.

It was considered fairly orthodox. Later on, after the destruction of the temple, one of the 24 courses of priests settled in Nazareth because it was considered a pure place. The residents kept Jewish law very scrupulously.

Pottery suggests that a number of Judean immigrants from further south settled here in Galilee in Nazareth sometime earlier. So that would comport well with Joseph's and maybe Mary's families being from further south in the area around Bethlehem and then settling here. Also, later Christians wouldn't have invented Nazareth as a place for Jesus to grow up.

I mean, it was prestigious in the ancient world to be from a prominent place, Ephesus, Athens. You know, if you could say you were from Jerusalem, for Jewish people, that was the most prominent. But to make up a background in Nazareth, very few people would have heard of Nazareth if not for Jesus outside of Galilee.

Carpentry was also a very valued occupation undoubtedly in Nazareth because when Jesus was still a child, Sepphoris, which was one of the two leading cities of Galilee,

was burned to the ground in a revolt against the Romans over taxes. So immediately Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, set to rebuilding Sepphoris. So, guess what? If you live in a community four miles away from Sepphoris, if you live in Nazareth or any of the other small villages there around, you would probably be able to make a living for a while as a carpenter or as a stonemason.

And in this case, Joseph and Jesus are both said to be carpenters. It makes good sense of the location historically. Now looking at the theology of chapter two, verses 19 through 23, settling in Nazareth.

You know, people might criticize Jesus' Nazareth background. Some people who didn't like his followers called them Nazarenes. They often spoke of Jesus of Nazareth.

It wasn't necessarily a put-down, but for people who didn't like him, they could say, well, he comes from this little village. I mean, he's not somebody important. So, Matthew responds to that.

And we see this number of elements of theology in this passage, things that it teaches us. First, we see the respite from trouble. Herod's death is mentioned three times.

Herod wanted to kill the child and his mother, but God alone ultimately holds the power of life and death. The gates of death cannot prevail against God's people. If we die, not one hair of our head falls to the ground without God knowing it.

We can trust our heavenly father, and he's also able to preserve us if it's his will. And so, in this case, God is preserving his purposes. We also see Jesus' return as something like a new Moses or a deliverer.

I mentioned earlier how Moses was told he could go back to Egypt because those who sought his life were dead. And Joseph is told in a dream, you can go back to the Holy Land because those who sought the child's life are dead. But when he hears that Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great is in power in Judea, he settles instead in Galilee because Herod Antipas wasn't the nicest person in the world, the ruler of Galilee, but he was much better than Archelaus.

And that's something else we see in the narrative that God can give us wisdom. In this case, Joseph had wisdom because Archelaus was not a very nice person, the ruler of Judea. He came to power in Judea after his father Herod the Great's death.

But as one historian has put it, Archelaus had all of his father's vices, but none of his virtues. That is, he was a very unkind, very mean person, but he was a bad administrator, unlike his father, and ended up being banished in the year 6 to Vienna

in Gaul. So, it was wise for him not to settle in Judea, and not to go back to Bethlehem.

But we also see finally that it was God's plan to settle in Nazareth. Nazareth was politically insignificant, and had maybe 500 residences, we've seen. So, that invites a biblical rationale, and the biblical rationale is that it was divinely significant.

And Matthew cites, he doesn't say a prophet, he says prophets. So, he may be weaving together some different texts like Jewish interpreters of his day sometimes did. He should be called a Nazarene.

Well, Jewish interpreters sometimes also used word plays. Sometimes they blended allusions and used word plays. So, scholars today have had trouble figuring out which passages he's talking about.

Some scholars think that he's talking about Judges chapter 13, where Samson was a Nazarite. He should be called a Nazarite. But a larger number of scholars think that it's a Hebrew wordplay.

In Isaiah's chapter on the Hebrew word netzer, branch, which may be part of the origin of the name Nazareth because it's a branching place. But a netzer means a branch and it's used as a title for the promised coming king in Isaiah chapter 11 and verse one. It's also used as a messianic title in the Dead Sea Scrolls and so forth.

So, Matthew is probably doing something sophisticated, but in this case, it's so sophisticated that scholars today are still trying to figure out exactly which is the sophisticated thing that he was doing. Also, I neglected to mention this earlier, but you have the same thing in Matthew chapter one with these sets of 14 generations. Some scholars say that there that's using the Jewish principle of gematria.

14 is the way of spelling David in Hebrew letters when you use each letter as a Hebrew numeral for the Hebrew alphabet. So, there are a number of more debatable things we could go into in Matthew's gospel. I'm not trying to go into all those, but with this, we finish Matthew chapter two.

And we go on into Matthew chapter three, where we come across John the Baptist's message. We're going to look first at his message. Well, we're going to look first at his lifestyle and then at his message.

Warnings of a Wilderness Prophet, chapter three, verses one through 12. Josephus, the Jewish historian from the first century, also talks about John the Baptist, also talks about John baptizing people in the Jordan. But Josephus is writing for a Greek audience or at least a diaspora Jewish audience.

He also expects some Gentile readers. And Josephus portrays John as a Hellenistic moralizing philosopher. So, John is out there purifying their souls and then purifying their bodies with water.

But basically, the idea that we have in the gospels, the way the gospels put it is closer to what we know John would have been like because he's preaching in the Holy Land. He's not somebody who's in touch with Greek philosophy. Now, if you take a course from me on Paul or something, we might talk about Greek philosophy.

I love to study all those things too. But John the Baptist was not talking about Greek philosophy. He's a Judean prophet.

So, some of the elite thought that prophets had ceased in their day. The Pharisees thought that the Torah was insufficient. We don't really need prophets running around.

The Sadducees, would mess up their political power if you had people going around saying that they spoke for God. But populist movements were more open to prophets. So, you did have people willing to go out even into the wilderness and follow people who claimed to be prophets.

Josephus mentions a few others, although most of them don't come out looking too good. John the Baptist and actually Jesus, whom Josephus mentions in Antiquities 18.63 and 64. Josephus talks about Jesus as well and speaks of him fairly favorably as he speaks of John fairly favorably.

But most of the others, he said, were trying to stir up trouble. John's lifestyle. We look at his location in the wilderness.

It's in all four gospels, his wardrobe, and his diet. First of all, his location. Well, would this have been historical? In Mark, we read about this wilderness associated with the Jordan.

And somebody outside the Holy Land wouldn't associate wilderness with the Jordan. I mean, you'd expect it to be all fertile around the river. But in the case of the Jordan, you had this fertile region just on either side of the Jordan.

And then it became a lot less so as you went beyond it. So, it fits the geography, it fits the topography of the region. Also, the wilderness was a commonplace of refuge.

It's where people went when they needed to get away from trouble. You find that in one of the later stories of the rabbis, this one rabbi, Simeon ben Yochai, and his son went and hid in a cave in the wilderness and didn't come out until they heard a

heavenly voice, you could come out. It was also a place where you could safely record crowds, and safely draw crowds.

Well, why would Matthew or Mark bother to record this? Why was it important? Well, one reason is it prefigures Jesus, who's going to be in the wilderness in the next chapter. Another is that it models a lifestyle of separation from all that the world values. The wilderness was an ideal location for those ostracized from society.

Radical prophets, including anti-Roman prophets, could congregate there and not be as likely to be caught. Bandits hung out in the wilderness. Also, renewal movements, like the people who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Qumran community, were a movement in the wilderness.

They also would be away from authorities and they would also be away from corrupt society, as many people viewed it. Also, there was a biblical reason. Biblical prophets had predicted a new Exodus.

In fact, we mentioned that in the case of Isaiah chapter 11. It's also in Isaiah 2. It's in Isaiah 11. It's various places.

One of the places where it appears is in Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 3. So there you have the voice of one crying in the wilderness saying, prepare the way for our God. And sure enough, John the Baptist is such a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for the coming promised new Exodus, the new era of salvation. His lifestyle may epitomize sacrifice, which fits what we're going to see when we look at John's wardrobe, at how John dresses.

I mean, in the wilderness, there's no place to plug in your laptop. There's no place to get on the internet and watch a video like this. There's no place to plug in your light bulbs.

But anyway, it was harsh even for first-century Judeans. John's wardrobe, he dresses like the poorest of the poor. Again, sacrificial lifestyle.

But there's another element of the way he dresses. And that is that the way he dresses evokes the prophet Elijah. Second Kings 1.8, he dresses like Elijah in Second Kings 1.8. Elijah was supposed to return before the day of the Lord.

That's in Malachi chapter 4, Jewish tradition developed further, the book of Sirach, and so forth. Elijah was to prepare the way for God, just like in Isaiah 40 in verse 3. It says, one coming in the wilderness to prepare the way for God. Well, whose way does John prepare? John prepares the way for Jesus.

The gospel writers already here, close to the beginning of the gospels, are telling you that they know who Jesus really is. Jesus is God in the flesh. So, Matthew chapter 3 in verse 3 quotes Isaiah referring to Yahweh.

Now, Matthew doesn't quote Malachi 3, which Mark does quote, which brings in Elijah in another way. Matthew doesn't quote that here. He quotes that in chapter 11, but that's going to come up later in Matthew's gospel as well.

Besides John's location and John's wardrobe, we have John's diet. John eats locusts and wild honey. He eats bugs.

Now, depending on what part of the world you're from, this may sound good or this may sound bad. I remember when I was staying in Plateau State in the middle belt of Nigeria, when the flying ants came out, everybody was saying, oh, these are really good. This is the time to get them.

And they were plucking off the wings and popping them into their mouths. In some parts of the Congo, termites are considered very, very delicious. Locusts were kosher.

That is, they fit the requirements of Leviticus 11. You're allowed to eat locusts. Jewish people could eat locusts.

The Dead Sea Scrolls also talk about the proper way to prepare locusts for food. But normally you didn't eat just locusts. To subsist entirely on locusts was a very particular diet.

And only somebody who lived in the wilderness would be doing that. Very sacrificial lifestyle. Although John did get to sweeten them a little bit by putting wild honey on them.

How would he have gotten the wild honey? Well, you could make a fire, smoke the bees out, then take the hive, break it open, and scoop out the honey. The simple diet was often associated with wilderness pietists. We read about it in various places where some Jewish people had to do this.

And some people have called to this. We each have different kinds of callings. We each have different kinds of sacrifices that we have to make for the kingdom.

Jesus talks about this later when he says, you know, you complained about John the Baptist. You said he came neither eating nor drinking. He must have a demon.

And Jesus said I came eating and drinking. And you say, look, a gluttonous man and a winebibber. And Jesus points out to them, just inconsistent.

They want to attack prophets no matter what they do. But Jesus is going to sacrifice even more than John, at least for 40 days when he goes without food altogether. But the point of these different examples is that we have to stake everything on the kingdom.

The kingdom is like a pearl of great price that a merchant went and sold everything for, Matthew 13, or like a treasure hidden in a field worth everything else you already have because it's greater than all that. Jesus is worth everything. He's worth every sacrifice.

And in different parts of the world, we're called to sacrifice different things. As a young Christian, I was sharing my faith in the streets, because I wanted other people to hear the good news about the Lord who had saved me. I mean, I didn't actually hear the good news about how to become a follower of Jesus until the day I became one.

And I was converted from atheism that same day. But I was beaten sometimes for sharing my faith in the streets. I had my life threatened.

Now, my life is nothing like that now. The sacrifices I make are very different, but at different times in our lives, or for different ones of us, we're called to suffer different things, but we're all brothers and sisters, and we need to stand together. And if you're in a place where you're not suffering much, remember in prayer those who are.

But whatever opportunities we have, we can sacrifice resources for the sake of the kingdom, do whatever we can with whatever we have, whatever situation we're in. And that's the kind of example we have here in the Gospels. We learn also about John's mission to Israel.

John's preaching, John's message. It's a message of repentance. Jewish people spoke often about repenting.

Every time you sinned, you would need to repent of it. You would need to do penitence. Some people have said, well, you know, this is the Greek word *metanoeo*, which means a change of mind.

But the meaning of a word is not determined by its roots, by you take this part of the word and this part of the word, and this meant this, and this meant this. The meaning of a word is determined by what happens when you put those together and how people use the wording. And the way this wording is used in the Gospels, it's like the prophets of Israel who were calling Israel, turn to God, return to the Lord, oh God of Israel.

And John is calling the people to turn, not just to change their thinking, but to change their lives, to submit their lives to the God of Israel. And they're confessing their sins in verse six. And then John shows them to do this or summons them to do this also with an act of repentance, in this case with baptism.

Josephus again tells us about that. But now what's the background of that? Well, there were various ritual immersions that were used in antiquity. Some strict groups like the ones who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls practiced ritual immersion regularly.

In fact, they practiced them in the nude, not with anybody of a different gender, but they stripped naked to do it. Probably John didn't do that because, you know, they're out in public with the Jordan, but they wanted to cover themselves with the water. Later rabbis said you had to have 40 seahs of water.

And they've actually measured, archaeologists have measured the immersion tanks in Israel that Jewish people used. And sure enough, they can fit that much water in. But there was a special kind of immersion.

There were other kinds of washings too, like for the hands and so on, but a special kind of immersion that was used when Gentiles were converting to Judaism. They would be immersed in water to be cleansed from their former Gentile impurities. And we already talked about that earlier, that John may be saying to his Jewish hearers, you know, you can't just depend on being descended from Abraham.

The same way we could say to somebody today, you can't depend on being raised in a Christian home for people who were. Instead, all of us have to come to God in the same terms. All of us have to repent.

All of us have to acknowledge that we are saved only by what God does for us. And so John is preaching this and it raises the children about, raises the issue of Abraham's children. John says, you offspring of vipers.

That's something we'll look at a few slides later than this, but obviously that's not meant to be complimentary. I don't know very many cultures where calling somebody a viper or the child of a viper is complimentary. Maybe some cultures are exceptions, but most of them are not.

Certainly not this one. John says, you must bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Well, that's a theme.

Jesus echoes that later in this gospel too. Small fruitless trees were useless except as firewood. They were too small.

Maybe you could use them in your roof, but they wouldn't even make good roof beams. They were often used in the Old Testament as a symbol of Israel and the nations. Stones also were used as an Old Testament symbol sometimes for God's people.

But he says, God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones. And there may be a wordplay in the Semitic language in which John is preaching. The wordplay would be between Aven and Ben.

It's very similar to stone and sun. God can raise from these stones children for Abraham and the prophets often used word plays. So, he warns them against dependence on ancestral merit.

And we have John's message of the coming judge and judgment. John proclaims that the kingdom is coming. He doesn't understand that it's going to come in two stages, but he understands that the kingdom is coming.

And this is a message that Jesus carries on and that Jesus sends his disciples to carry on. So, it therefore becomes a model for our preaching in a sense. But he's warning them, the kingdom that's coming, it's just like you have in the book of Amos, that this day of the Lord that's coming to you will be a day of darkness, not of light.

That is a day of wrath. It's a day of judgment for those who aren't prepared for the king. That's one reason that God has let people have free will.

He hasn't intervened in history already and brought everything to an end. We say, well, where is God's justice? Some people should stop saying that because they're not ready for God's justice. When God comes, he will execute full justice.

And those who've sinned need to make themselves ready for that day. We've all sinned. We need to make ourselves ready for that day by turning to God.

So, he talks about this coming one who's going to bring judgment, but he's also bringing the kingdom. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Well, I don't know about in your circles, but I've often heard people talk about baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire with reference to meaning becoming more holy, that the fire burns away impurity and unholiness from us.

Well, fire symbolizes different things in different passages in the Bible. Sometimes it symbolizes purification. Sometimes it symbolizes testing.

Jeremiah speaks of fire shut up within his bones, that the word of the Lord was within him so much he couldn't hold it in. But most often in the Bible, fire symbolizes judgment. And that Jewish tradition often used it the same way.

What does fire mean in this context? Well, let's go back to earlier in the context and look at whom John is addressing. John sees many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he's baptizing. In Luke, it's the crowds.

Matthew zeroes in on a particular part of the crowd. Matthew really has it in for Pharisees and Sadducees in his gospel. But you already know from Mark that they're going to be troublemakers.

So anyway, when John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them, you offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath like serpents fleeing from the flame? Are these friends of his? I mean, is he speaking to them like, oh, you are really godly people? When he says you are offspring of vipers, brood of vipers, in Mediterranean antiquity, it was widely believed, and this includes among Gentiles, it was widely believed that the way that baby vipers were born, they hatched inside their mother. Reptiles lay eggs, but these hatch inside their mother, and then they chew their way through their mother's womb, killing their mother in the process. So sometimes when people insulted people as vipers, it was like calling them parent murderers.

And John makes it even more explicit. You offspring of vipers, you parent murderers. Oh, you want to say we're children of Abraham.

Actually, you are the killers of your parents. You're on that moral level, probably not complimenting them. Well, what is John warning them about? He speaks of fleeing from the coming wrath.

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. Was that happy fire? Is that the fire of fire shut up within your bones to make you preach? No.

Every tree that does not produce good fruit is thrown into the fire. This is the fire of judgment. That's verse 10.

Verse 12, the verse right after verse 11, verse 12 says that his winnowing fork is in his hand and he's going to thoroughly clear his threshing floor. Well, what they would do after the harvest when they would gather the wheat, they would throw the wheat up into the air and the wind would blow out the lighter chaff because the chaff, you couldn't eat it. So, it was a way of separating the wheat from the chaff.

And then you could gather the wheat to the barn, but the chaff, that was worthless. It was only meant to be burned. And sometimes when God spoke of judgment in the Old Testament prophets, he also spoke of the objects of his judgment as chaff, who would be burned.

But chaff wasn't even good fuel. It didn't burn quickly. I'm sorry, it did burn quickly.

It didn't last for a long time. And so, you would think this chaff burns up quickly, but he says, no, this chaff is going to burn with unquenchable fire. What fire was the unquenchable fire? When Jewish people spoke of that, they often spoke of Gehenna, which was the Jewish view of a place of the damned.

Now there were different Jewish views of that, but all of them involved destruction. And some of them involved eternal destruction. And speaking of this chaff burns with unquenchable fire, John takes the most horrible image that Jewish teachers and Pharisees would speak of as this is what's going to happen, the worst possible thing that would happen to the damned.

John says you Pharisees are in for that. Well, the fire in verse 10 is the fire of judgment. The fire in verse 12 is the fire of judgment.

For those of you who are good with math, what verse comes between verses 10 and 12? Yes, verse 11, where he speaks of being baptized in the Holy Spirit and in fire. So, in the context, what does the fire refer to? In the context, this context, it has to refer to judgment. Do all the Pharisees repent? Remember, it's only the trees that repent and bear good fruit that won't be thrown into the fire.

And also, John speaks of the wheat and the chaff. Well, some are going to be wheat and some are going to be chaff of the people that he speaks to. So, he's speaking to many people.

He's speaking to a group of people. The you is plural in Greek there. So, when John is speaking to the crowds, you all are going to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and in fire.

Some of you are going to get the Holy Spirit. Some of you are going to get the fire. There may be a play on words because the word for spirit and the word for wind are the same.

It's the wind that separates out the chaff. But also it makes a point because the Old Testament prophets had promised at the time, the promised time of restoration, that God would pour out his spirit upon his people. The spirit is called the Holy Spirit twice in the Old Testament in Psalm 51 and Isaiah 63.

But often the spirit of God was called the Ruach HaKodesh, the Holy Spirit in early Judaism. So, we really probably don't want to be baptized in fire the way this text means it. Yes, we want to be holy, but that's probably not what this text is talking about.

We want to have the Holy Spirit. And I want to mention some of these views on Gehenna that I talked about. Some Jewish people believe that the wicked would be burned up instantly.

It would be instant annihilation of the wicked. Some Jewish people believed that it would be a temporary punishment for about a year. For non-Apostate Israelites, it would only be a year.

Some believe that it would be eternal torment. Well, in the Gospels, John and Jesus borrow the harshest image of their day for the resurrection of the damned. And guess to whom they most often address this? The people who most need to be shaken from their complacency.

And Jesus reaches out to the people who feel like, oh, we are sinners. God wouldn't accept us. He reaches out to them.

But the people who are like, oh, we're so good. We don't need this good news of the kingdom that you're proclaiming. He shakes them from their complacency, warning them of coming judgment.

But we also read here about the coming judge's power. John the Baptist, speaking of this one, is going to baptize in the Holy Spirit and in fire. Well, in light of the Old Testament, who was going to pour out God's spirit? Who has the authority to pour out God's spirit? Joel chapter 2, Isaiah chapter 42, Isaiah chapter 44, Isaiah chapter 61, Ezekiel 36, Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel 39.

The only one who could give God's Spirit, the only one who could pour out God's Spirit was God himself. If John is proclaiming someone who's coming, who's going to baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire, this must be God himself. No one else could be authorized to do this.

And plus, John says, I am not worthy to deal with his sandals. Now, in antiquity, disciples of rabbis would say that they would do anything for their teacher that a slave would do, except deal with the feet and with the sandals, because that was too demeaning. That was something only a slave would do, latching the sandals, carrying the sandals and so forth, washing the feet.

John says, I'm not even worthy to deal with his sandals. I'm not even worthy to be his servant. Remember, the prophets were servants of Yahweh.

The prophets were servants of God in the Old Testament. John is saying, this one is so great. This one is Yahweh himself.

John recognizes that Jesus is great and invites us to recognize the same, that the one we worship is mighty. He's God in the flesh and he is truly deserving of all of our praise and all of our obedience.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Matthew. This is session 5, Matthew 2-3.