

Title: Gospel of Matthew: Introduction and Matthew 1

Author: Dr. Craig Keener

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener introduces the Gospel of Matthew, focusing on its target audience of Messianic Jewish believers and its unique structural and theological themes. Keener shows how the Great Commission serves as the book's climax, tying together the global mission to all nations which is already foreshadowed in the opening genealogy by the inclusion of four women with Gentile connections. The lecture also examines the righteous character of Joseph in Matthew 1 and the deep theological significance of the virgin birth as the fulfillment of Isaiah's Emmanuel prophecy.

Outline

I. Target Audience and Dating of Matthew

- **A. Audience Characteristics**

1. Addressed specifically to Messianic Jewish believers, Jewish Christians, and Jewish followers of Yeshua (the Jewish Messiah).

- **B. Debates on Dating**

1. Some scholars argue for an early date, relying on Papias's historical view that Matthew wrote his Gospel first.
2. Dr. Keener dates the Gospel's current form to sometime after 70 AD.

II. The Great Commission as the Climax and Conclusion (Matthew 28:19-20)

- **A. Structural Integration in Ancient Literature**

1. Ancient works typically introduced major themes at the beginning and summarized or tied them together at the conclusion.

- **B. The Core Command of the Great Commission**

1. One central imperative: "Make disciples."

2. Carried out through three subordinate participial clauses:

- a. "Going"
- b. "Baptizing"
- c. "Teaching"

- **C. Focus of the Mission**

1. Directed at "all nations" (Gentiles).
2. Establishes cross-cultural ministry, evangelism, and Christian education as central to the Gospel.

III. The Gentile Theme Traced Throughout the Gospel

- **A. The Genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17)**

1. Breaks ancient customs of including only men by naming four women with prominent Gentile connections:
 - a. Tamar (apparently a local Canaanite from Genesis 38).
 - b. Rahab (from Jericho in Joshua; contrasted with Achan, an insider who failed).
 - c. Ruth (a Moabitess welcomed despite Deuteronomy 23:3).
 - d. Bathsheba ("Uriah's widow," connected to a Hittite family).
2. Purpose of typical Jewish genealogies was to prove purity of Israelite ancestry; Matthew does the opposite to show the Gentile mission is no afterthought.

- **B. Allusions and Explicit References to Gentiles**

1. Matthew 2: Magi (Persian astrologers, pagan outsiders) worship Jesus, while Herod (an Edomite) acts like a pagan Pharaoh.
2. Matthew 3–4: John the Baptist warns against relying on Abrahamic descent; Jesus relocates to "Galilee of the Gentiles".
3. Matthew 8: Roman Centurion's faith praised; Jesus heals demoniacs in predominantly Gentile territory.
4. Matthew 10: Disciples told to treat unrepentant Jewish towns like pagans by shaking off dust.

5. Matthew 11–12: Unrepentant Galilean cities compared unfavorably on judgment day to pagan cities like Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, Nineveh, and Sheba.
6. Matthew 15: Canaanite woman's faith and request to the "Son of David" is granted.
7. Matthew 16: Peter confesses Jesus at Caesarea Philippi, a pagan city associated with witchcraft.
8. Matthew 24–25: Gospel preached to all nations before the end; nations judged by how they treated Jesus's messengers.
9. Matthew 27: The Roman execution squad (Centurion and companions) are the first to confess Jesus as the Son of God after the crucifixion.

IV. Baptism, Divine Authority, and the Presence of God (Matthew 28)

- **A. Baptism of Repentance**

1. Used by John the Baptist in chapter 3; continuity of the message "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
2. Historically, Jews baptized Gentile converts; John's baptism of Jews emphasized that all must repent on equal terms.

- **B. The Trinitarian Formula**

1. "Baptizing in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
2. Placing Jesus (the Son) between the Father and the Spirit clearly depicts Him as divine.

- **C. The Omnipresence of Jesus**

1. "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
2. Parallel to Jewish saying about God's presence (Shekinah) being where two or three are gathered to study Torah (similar to Matthew 18:20).
3. Fulfills the name Emmanuel ("God with us") from Matthew 1:23.

V. Teaching and the Cost of Discipleship

- **A. Five Major Discourse Sections in Matthew**

1. Chapters 5–7: Ethics of the Kingdom (Sermon on the Mount).
2. Chapter 10: Proclamation of the Kingdom.
3. Chapter 13: Parables of the Kingdom.
4. Chapter 18: Relationships in the Kingdom.
5. Chapters 23–25: Future Kingdom and judgment.
6. Each discourse ends with a formulaic closing ("And when Jesus had finished...").

- **B. The Radical Demands of Discipleship**

1. Above job security (leaving fishing nets in chapter 4).
2. Above residential security (Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head).
3. Above financial security (laying up treasures in heaven; selling riches).
4. Above social obligations (letting the dead bury their dead; putting Jesus above burying a father, which was a duty to God).
5. Above life itself (taking up the cross).

- **C. Grace for Failures**

1. Demands are absolute, but implemented with grace.
2. Disciples failed to carry the cross (Simon of Cyrene had to be drafted), fell asleep at Gethsemane, and fled.
3. Peter denied Jesus but was forgiven and restored, whereas Judas did not repent.
4. Ordinary people are transformed by grace to become catalysts for the global mission.

VI. Genealogy and Birth Narrative of Jesus (Matthew 1)

- **A. Genealogies in Antiquity**

1. Used for tracking lineage (taxes, priestly status, royal claims).
2. Royal lineage through Joseph establishes Jesus's official legal right to the throne (as adoption was a standard practice, e.g., in Roman dynasties).

- **B. Spiritual and Rabbinic Wordplay (Midrash)**

1. In Greek, chapter 1 verse 10 spelling variations link ancestors to spiritual figures:
 - a. "Ammon" (wicked king) modified to "Amos" (prophet).
 - b. "Asa" (king) modified to "Asaph" (psalmist).
2. Jesus is the heir to the Davidic line, the prophets, and the Psalms.

- **C. Chronological Structure**

1. Organized into 3 groups of 14 generations.
2. Skipped generations to highlight a skeletal structure of history.
3. Signals that Israel was due for a major event, which is fulfilled in Jesus.

- **D. Major Titles in Matthew 1:1**

1. "Son of Abraham" (true Israelite).
2. "Son of David" (the expected Messiah).

- **E. Righteous Character and Piety of Joseph**

1. Commitment to marriage (betrothal was as legally binding as marriage).
2. Compassion: Chose a private divorce (giving a certificate/git with 2-3 witnesses) to spare Mary public shame, despite his legal rights to keep her dowry or seek revenge.
3. Consecration/Obedience: Obeyed the dream and the angel, embracing a lifetime of shared social shame (people would assume he got her pregnant).
4. Self-control: Abstained from intercourse until after Jesus's birth to preserve the honor of God's Messiah (and the virgin birth).

- **F. Prophetic Fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14**

1. Original historical context of Isaiah 7: Child born in Ahaz's day (Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz) served as an immediate sign that threatening kingdoms would fall.

2. The sign pointed to a greater ultimate fulfillment: a child called "Mighty God" (Isaiah 9:6-7) who would reign on David's throne.
3. Matthew understood the context deeply (shown by quoting Isaiah 9 in Matthew 4).
4. Jesus's mission: save His people from sins (Matt 1:21) and be "God with us" (Matt 1:23).