

Title: Matthew 2–3

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Craig Keener examines Matthew 2–3, demonstrating how the early life of Jesus and the ministry of John the Baptist fulfill key Old Testament types and patterns. He contrasts the murderous, paranoid actions of Herod the Great, who acts as a new Pharaoh, with the devotion of the Gentile Magi who travel to worship the Messiah. The holy family's flight to Egypt is presented as a new Exodus, showing how Jesus represents and recapitulates Israel's historic suffering and redemption as a marginalized refugee. Finally, John the Baptist is depicted as an Elijah-like prophet preparing the way for Jesus, warning of imminent judgment while heralding the arrival of the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Outline

I. Historical and Cultural Setting of Matthew 2

- **A.** Introduction of new characters: Magi, Herod, and the Jerusalem scribes and priests.
- **B.** The Magi: Persian astrologers and the significance of the star (signifying a Judean king, likely around 6 or 7 BC).
- **C.** Astrological views in the ancient world and their adoption by some Jewish groups.

II. The Character and Reign of Herod the Great

- **A.** Herod's rise to power under Roman auspices and his suppression of the Sanhedrin by executing nobles.
- **B.** Architectural legacy: Pagan temples, cities honoring Caesar, and the massive Jerusalem Temple.

- **C.** Paranoia and violent legacy: Execution of Mariamne, murder of the young high priest, execution of his own sons, and the final decree to execute nobles.

III. Theological Reversals and Typology

- **A.** Herod acting as a pagan king (Pharaoh and Antiochus IV Epiphanes) compared to the seeking Magi.
- **B.** Spiritual complacency of the Bible experts who knew Micah 5:2 but refused to act.

IV. Flight to Egypt and Jesus as a Refugee

- **A.** Egypt as a traditional sanctuary and place of Jewish refuge (the large Alexandrian community).
- **B.** Reversal of the Exodus motif: Egypt is the place of safety, Judea is the place of danger.
- **C.** Theological import of Jesus as a refugee identifying with Israel's historic suffering and exile.

V. Hosea 11:1 and Israel's Recapitulation

- **A.** "Out of Egypt I called my son": Translation directly from Hebrew and the original Hosea 11 context.
- **B.** Hosea's prediction of a new Exodus and new era of salvation inaugurated by Jesus.
- **C.** Comparison of Israel's 40 years of temptation to Jesus's 40 days in the wilderness.

VI. Settling in Nazareth

- **A.** Lamentation over Bethlehem's children (Jeremiah 31:15) and Rachel's symbolic weeping.
- **B.** Nazareth: Small, scrupulously orthodox community (~500 residents).
- **C.** Proximity to Sepphoris and carpentry as a critical occupation for Jesus and Joseph.
- **D.** Sophisticated wordplays: "Nazarene" as a Hebrew wordplay on *netzer* (branch) from Isaiah 11:1.

VII. John the Baptist's Lifestyle and Wilderness Prophet Identity

- **A.** John the Baptist's depiction in the Gospels vs. Josephus's Hellenized moralizing portrait.
- **B.** John's wilderness location as a place of refuge and spiritual renewal.
- **C.** Wardrobe and diet (locusts and wild honey) evoking Elijah (2 Kings 1:8).

VIII. John's Preaching of Repentance and Baptism

- **A.** Preaching of true repentance (*metanoeo*) as a full-life transformation, not just a mental change.
- **B.** Ritual immersion context and proselyte baptism (cleansing Gentiles from impurity).
- **C.** Severe warning to Pharisees and Sadducees against relying on ancestral lineage (Abraham's children).

IX. The Coming Judge, Spirit, and Fire

- **A.** Holy Spirit and Fire: Fire in Matthew 3:10 and 12 clearly representing judgment, not just purification.
- **B.** The threshing floor metaphor: Gathering the wheat vs. burning the chaff with unquenchable fire (Gehenna).
- **C.** John's self-deprecation: Unworthy to loose sandals (a task below a Hebrew disciple).
- **D.** Identifying the Coming One as Yahweh himself, the only one authorized to pour out God's Spirit.