

Title: Matthew 3-4

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener examines Matthew chapters 3 and 4, focusing on the pivotal transition from John the Baptist's ministry to the public emergence of Jesus. Dr. Keener explores the theological depth of Jesus' baptism and subsequent testing in the wilderness, drawing rich parallels between Jesus' trials and Israel's historical wanderings. He also analyzes Jesus' strategic move to Galilee, the semantic meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the radical call to discipleship that demands personal sacrifice.

Outline

I. Introduction and Jesus' Baptism (Matthew 3:13-17)

- **A. The Baptism as an Historical Reality**
 1. Attested despite meeting the "criterion of embarrassment" regarding John baptizing Jesus.
 2. John's reluctance: feels unworthy and desires Jesus' baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire.
- **B. Threefold Divine Attestation of Jesus' Identity**
 1. Parting of the Heavens: echoing Old Testament theophanies like Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 64.
 2. Spirit descending as a dove: symbol of restoration and new creation recalling Genesis 8.
 3. The Heavenly Voice (*Bat Qol*): echoing Psalm 2:7 (the promised Davidic King) and Isaiah 42:1 (the suffering servant).

II. The Wilderness Testing and Trial (Matthew 4:1-11)

- **A. The Spirit-Led Life**

1. Jesus' baptism of the Spirit leads immediately to testing in the wilderness.
2. A model for believers: the Spirit-led path can lead to hardship rather than immediate triumph.

- **B. Typological Parallels to Israel and Moses**

1. 40 days of fasting parallel Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness.
2. Evokes Moses' fasting on the mountain (Exodus 24) and Elijah's journey (1 Kings 19).

- **C. The Historical Pattern of Testing**

1. Biblical figures (Joseph, Moses, David, Elijah) are tested before or during their ministries.
2. Personal reflection: Dr. Keener shares his two-year trial of false accusations where he learned dependency on God's grace.

- **D. Overcoming Satan's Temptations with Scripture**

1. The Devil's strategy: redefining Sonship by questioning God's word and appealing to worldly power.
2. First Temptation (Stones to bread): temptation to use supernatural power for personal ends; countered with Deuteronomy 8:3 (trusting Father's provision).
3. Second Temptation (Temple leap): temptation to force God's hand or create danger; countered with Deuteronomy 6:16 (refusing to test God).
4. Third Temptation (Bowing to Satan): temptation of political dominance without the cross; countered with Deuteronomy 6:13 (worshipping God alone).
5. True vs. false scriptural interpretation: Satan quotes Scripture (Psalm 91) out of context; Jesus applies it with contextual accuracy.

- **E. Triumph and Angelic Ministration**

1. Jesus commands Satan to leave, demonstrating authority over spiritual forces.

2. Angels come to minister to Him, showing that Father's timing and provision are perfect.

III. Strategic Relocation to Galilee (Matthew 4:12-16)

- **A. Relocation from Nazareth to Capernaum**

1. Historical authenticity: Capernaum and Nazareth are obscure locations that nobody would invent.
2. Strategic advantages of Capernaum: a bustling regional crossroads of trade and travel.

- **B. Cultural and Regional Dynamics**

1. Galilee as Judea's frontier: regional prejudice from Jerusalem elite who looked down on Galileans.
2. Excavations confirm Galileans kept the Torah faithfully, despite not following Rabbinic leadership.

- **C. Foreshadowing of the Gentile Mission**

1. Quoting Isaiah 9: "Galilee of the Gentiles" symbolizes the future global expansion of the message.
2. Debunking Walter Grundman (Nazi theologian) who falsely claimed Jesus was an Aryan Gentile.

IV. The Message and Nature of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 4:17)

- **A. Semantic Definition of "Kingdom"**

1. Greek (*Basileia*) and Hebrew (*Malkut*) refer to "reign", "rule", or "authority" rather than a geographical territory.
2. Contrast with modern English views of a physical realm.

- **B. The "Already, Not Yet" Tension**

1. Present reality: The Kingdom has invaded history in the person of Jesus (the *Autobasileia*).
2. Future expectation: The final consummation and resurrection of the dead are still to come.

- **C. The Holy Spirit as the Down Payment**

1. The Spirit is our *arrhabon* (down payment / first installment) of our future inheritance.
2. Experience of the Spirit gives believers a genuine foretaste of the future age.

V. The Radical Call to Discipleship (Matthew 4:18-22)

- **A. The Call of the Fishermen**

1. Recruitment of Peter, Andrew, James, and John.
2. Fishermen were middle-class business owners (not destitute peasants), making their abandonment of livelihood significant.

- **B. Downward Mobility and Livelihood Abandonment**

1. Sages in antiquity waited for disciples to seek them; Jesus radically summons them directly.
2. Leaving family businesses was counter-cultural and offensive to ancient societal expectations.

- **C. Prioritizing Jesus Above All**

1. Demands absolute priority of Jesus (first things first), while still upholding family responsibilities like honoring parents.

VI. Demonstrating the Kingdom: Healing and Teaching (Matthew 4:23-25)

- **A. Public Ministry of Healing**

1. Large crowds drawn from great distances (including Syria) by Jesus' reputation as a healer.
2. Ancient rhetorical hyperbole: "every sick person" indicates massive scale, not literal exhaustiveness.

- **B. Faith and Miracles**

1. Sacrificial acts of faith (illustrated by the modern-day healing of a student's sister in Kenya).
2. Healings serve as signs of the promised future renewal rather than a guarantee of ease in this age.

- **C. The Illusion and Unreliability of Popularity**

1. Contrast between early Galilean crowds and the Jerusalem crowds in Matthew 27 crying "crucify him".
2. Disciples must live for God's honor rather than fleeting human popularity.