

MacArthur Study Bible on

Matthew 9 & 10

Matthew, meaning “gift of the Lord,” was the other name of Levi (9:9), the tax collector who left everything to follow Christ (Luke 5:27, 28). Matthew was one of the 12 apostles (10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). In his own list of the 12, he explicitly calls himself a “tax collector” (10:3). Nowhere else in Scripture is the name Matthew associated with “tax collector”; the other evangelists always employ his former name, Levi, when speaking of his sinful past. This is evidence of humility on Matthew’s part. As with the other 3 gospels, this work is known by the name of its author.

9:1 His own city. Capernaum (*see note on 4:13*). Jesus had left there to get away from the crowds for a time (8:18).

9:2 your sins are forgiven. The fact that the man was brought on a bed indicates that his paralysis was severe. Jesus’ words of forgiveness may indicate that the paralysis was a direct consequence of the man’s own sin. Cf. John 9:1–3; *see notes on Luke 5:20–26*.

9:3 This Man blasphemes! This would be a true judgment about anyone but God incarnate, for only the One who has been sinned against has the prerogative to forgive. Jesus’ words to the man were therefore an unequivocal claim of divine authority.

9:4 knowing their thoughts. Cf. 12:25; John 2:24. Though the Lord Jesus humbled Himself (Phil. 2:4–8) and set aside the independent use of His divine prerogatives in incarnation (John 5:30), He was still fully God and, therefore, omniscient. See Mark 13:32; Luke 2:52.

9:5 which is easier. It is certainly easier to claim the power to pronounce absolution from sin than to demonstrate the power to heal. Christ actually proved His power to forgive by instantly healing the man of his paralysis. If He could do the apparently harder, He could also do what seemed easier. The actual forgiving of the sins was in reality the more difficult task, however, because it ultimately required Him to sacrifice His life.

9:9 sitting at the tax office. Matthew’s own humility is seen here. He did not disguise his past or make any excuse for it. Whereas Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27 employ his former name, Levi, Matthew himself used the name by which he was known after becoming a disciple (cf. Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). Tax collectors were among the most despised persons in this society. The money they collected was often partly extorted for personal gain (cf. Luke 19:8) and partly a tax for Rome, which made them not only thieves, but also traitors to the Jewish nation (*see notes on 5:46; Mark 2:15*).

9:11 tax collectors. *See note on 5:46, 47.*

9:12 well ... sick. The Pharisees thought they were well—religiously pure and whole. The outcasts knew they were not. Salvation can’t come to the self-righteous.

9:13 go and learn what *this* means. This phrase was commonly used as a rebuke for those who did not know something they should have known. The verse Jesus cites is Hos.

6:6 (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Mic. 6:6–8), which emphasizes the absolute priority of the law’s moral standards over the ceremonial requirements. The Pharisees tended to focus on the outward, ritual, and ceremonial aspects of God’s law—to the neglect of its inward, eternal, and moral precepts. In doing so, they became harsh, judgmental, and self-righteously scornful of others. Jesus repeated this same criticism in 12:7.

9:14 disciples of John. Luke implies that the Pharisees asked this question (*see note on Luke 5:33*; cf. Mark 2:18–20). Evidently, some Pharisees were still present when John’s disciples came. Both groups together may have asked this question. **the Pharisees fast often.** Cf. Luke 18:12.

9:15 then they will fast. *See note on 6:17.* Using the analogy of a wedding party, Jesus answered that as long as Christ was present with them there was too much joy for fasting, which was connected to seasons of sorrow and intense prayer.

9:16 unshrunk cloth on an old garment. That new cloth does not work on old material is analogous to trying to patch New Covenant truth onto old Mosaic ceremonial forms.

9:17 new wine into old wineskins. Animal skins were used for fermentation of wine because of their elasticity. As the wine fermented, pressure built up, stretching the wineskin. A previously stretched skin lacked elasticity and would rupture, ruining both wine and wineskin. Jesus used this as an illustration to teach that the forms of old rituals, such as the ceremonial fastings practiced by the Pharisees and John’s disciples, were not fit for the new wine of the New Covenant era (cf. Col. 2:17). In both analogies (vv. 16, 17), the Lord was saying that what the Pharisees did in fasting or any other ritual had no part with the gospel.

9:18 ruler. Jairus (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41) was a ruler of the synagogue.

9:20 a flow of blood for twelve years. This woman’s affliction not only was serious physically but also left her permanently unclean for ceremonial reasons (cf. Lev. 15:25–27). This meant she would have been shunned by all, including her own family, and excluded from both synagogue and temple. **the hem of His garment.** Cf. 14:36. Probably one of the tassels that were sown to the corners of a garment in order to remind the wearer to obey God’s commandments (Num. 15:38–40; Deut. 22:12).

9:22 made you well. Lit. “saved you.”

9:23 flute players and the noisy crowd. Typical fixtures at a time of mourning in that culture (cf. 2 Chr. 35:25). The crowd at a funeral usually included professional mourners, women whose task it was to wail plaintively, while reciting the name of the departed one, as well as any other loved ones who had died recently. The result was a noisy, chaotic din.

9:24 sleeping. Jesus was not saying that her death was a misdiagnosis. This was a prophecy that she would live again. He made a similar comment about Lazarus’ death (John 11:11)—and then had to explain to the disciples that he was speaking metaphorically (John 11:14). Sleep is a designation for death in the NT (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:51; 1 Thess. 5:10). **they ridiculed Him.** How quickly their paid act of mourning turned to derision!

9:27 Son of David. Cf. 1:1; 12:23; 21:9, 15. A messianic title (*see note on 1:1*). See 20:29–34 for a remarkably similar, but separate, account.

9:29 According to your faith. *See note on 8:13.*

9:30 See *that no one knows*. See *note* on 8:4.

9:34 the ruler of the demons. The Pharisees had seen enough of Jesus' power to know it was God's power. But, in their willful unbelief, they said His was the power of Satan. See *note* on 12:24; cf. 25:41; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15.

9:35 every sickness and every disease. Jesus banished illness in an unprecedented healing display, giving impressive evidence of His deity, and making the Jews' rejection all the more heinous. See *note* on 12:15.

9:36 He was moved with compassion. Here the humanity of Christ allowed expression of His attitude toward sinners in terms of human passion. He was "moved" with compassion. Whereas God, who is immutable, is not subject to the rise and fall and change of emotions (Num. 23:19), Christ, who was fully human with all the faculties of humanity, was on occasion moved to literal tears over the plight of sinners (Luke 19:41; see *note* on Luke 13:34). God Himself expressed similar compassion through the prophets (Ex. 33:19; Ps. 86:15; Jer. 9:1; 13:17; 14:17). **they were weary and scattered.** The people's spiritual needs were even more desperate than the need for physical healing. Meeting that need would require more laborers (v. 37).

9:37 harvest. Cf. Luke 10:1, 2. The Lord spoke of the spiritual harvest of souls for salvation.

9:38 Therefore pray. Jesus affirmed the fact that believers' prayers participate in the fulfillment of God's plans.

10:1, 2 disciples ... apostles. "Disciple" means "student," one who is being taught by another. "Apostles" refers to qualified representatives who are sent on a mission. The two terms emphasize different aspects of their calling.

10:1 He gave them power. See *note* on 2 Cor. 12:12. Jesus delegated His power to the apostles to show clearly that He and His kingdom were sovereign over the physical and spiritual realms, the effects of sin, and the efforts of Satan. This was an unheard of display of power, never before seen in all redemptive history, to announce Messiah's arrival and authenticate Him plus His apostles who preached His gospel. This power was a preview of the power Christ will exhibit in His earthly kingdom, when Satan will be bound (Rev. 20) and the curse on physical life curtailed (Is. 65:20–25).

10:2 the names of the twelve apostles. The 12 are always listed in a similar order (cf. Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:13–16; Acts 1:13). Peter is always named first. The list contains 3 groups of 4. The 3 subgroups are always listed in the same order, and the first name in each subgroup is always the same, though there is some variation in the order within the subgroups—but Judas Iscariot is always named last. **Peter... Andrew ... James ... and John.** The first subgroup of 4 are the most familiar to us. These two sets of brothers, all fishermen, represent an inner circle of disciples often seen closest to Jesus (see *note* on 17:1). **James the son of Alphaeus.** There are 4 men in the NT named James: 1) the Apostle James, brother of John (see *note* on 4:21); 2) the disciple mentioned here, also called "James the Less" (Mark 15:40); 3) James, father of Judas (not Iscariot, Luke 6:16); and 4) James, the Lord's half-brother (Gal. 1:19; Mark 6:3), who wrote the epistle that bears the name. He also played a leading role in the early Jerusalem Church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; Gal. 1:19).

10:3 Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus. Elsewhere he is called Judas, son

of James (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13).

10:4 Simon the Cananite. The better manuscripts read “Cananaean”—a term for the party of the Zealots, a group determined to overthrow Roman domination in Palestine. Acts 1:13 refers to him as “Simon the Zealot.” Simon was probably a member of the Zealot party before coming to Christ. *See note on Mark 3:18.*

10:5–11:1 This is the second of 5 major discourses recorded in Matthew (see Introduction: Historical and Theological Themes).

10:5 Do not go into the way of the Gentiles. Christ did not forbid the disciples to preach to Gentiles or Samaritans if they encountered them on the way, but they were to take the message first to the covenant people, in the regions nearby (cf. Rom. 1:16).

10:6 lost sheep of the house of Israel. Cf. 15:24; Jer. 50:6. Jesus narrowed this priority even more when He said the gospel was only for those who knew they were spiritually sick (9:13) and needed a physician (Luke 5:31, 32).

10:7 at hand. *See note on 3:2.*

10:8 Freely you have received, freely give. Jesus was giving them great power, to heal the sick and raise the dead. If they sold these gifts for money, they could have made quite a fortune. But that would have obscured the message of grace Christ sent them to preach. So he forbade them to charge money for their ministry. Yet they were permitted to accept support to meet their basic needs, for a workman is worthy of such support (v. 10).

10:9, 10 *See note on Luke 9:3.* The restrictions on what they were to carry were unique for this mission. See Luke 22:36 where, on a later mission, Christ gave completely different instructions. The point here was to teach them to trust the Lord to supply their needs through the generosity of the people to whom they ministered, and to teach those who received the blessing of their ministry to support the servants of Christ. Cf. 1 Tim. 5:18.

10:13 peace. This is equivalent to the Heb. “shalom” and refers to prosperity, well being, or blessing.

10:14 hear your words. The priority was to preach that the King had come and His kingdom was near. The message was the main thing. The signs and wonders were to authenticate it. **shake off the dust from your feet.** It was common for Jews to shake the dust off their feet—as an expression of disdain—when returning from Gentile regions. Paul and Barnabas also did this when expelled from Antioch (Acts 13:51). This was a visible protest, signifying that they regarded the place as no better than a pagan land.

10:15 Sodom and Gomorrah. Those cities and the entire surrounding region were judged without warning, and with the utmost severity. *See notes on Gen. 19:1–29.*

10:16 wolves. Used to describe false prophets who persecute the true ones and seek to destroy the Church (cf. 7:15; Luke 10:3; Acts 20:29). *See note on Luke 10:3.*

10:17 deliver you up. This is a technical word, in this context, used for handing over a prisoner for punishment. Persecution of believers has often been the official policy of governments. Such persecutions give opportunity for testifying to the truth of the gospel. Cf. John 16:1–4; 2 Tim. 4:16.

10:19 do not worry. *See note on Luke 12:11.*

10:21–23 These verses clearly have an eschatological significance that goes beyond the disciples’ immediate mission. The persecutions he describes seem to belong to the

tribulation period that precedes Christ's second coming, alluded to in v. 23.

10:22 he who endures ... end. See *note* on 24:13.

10:24 not above. If the Teacher (Christ) suffers, so will His pupils. If they attack the Master (Christ) with blasphemies, so will they curse the servants. This was the promise of persecution. Cf. John 15:20.

10:25 Beelzebub. The Philistine deity associated with satanic idolatry. The name came to be used for Satan, the prince of demons (see *notes* on 2 *Kin.* 1:2; *Luke* 11:15).

10:28 fear Him. God is the one who destroys in hell. Cf. *Luke* 12:5. Persecutors can only harm the body.

10:29 apart from your Father's will. Not merely "without His knowledge"; Jesus was teaching that God providentially controls the timing and circumstances of such insignificant events as the death of a sparrow. Even the number of hairs on our heads is controlled by His sovereign will (v. 30). In other words, divine providence governs even the smallest details and even the most mundane matters. These are very powerful affirmations of the sovereignty of God.

10:32 confesses Me. The person who acknowledges Christ as Lord in life or in death, if necessary, is the one whom the Lord will acknowledge before God as His own. See *notes* on 13:20; 2 *Tim.* 2:10–13.

10:33 See *note* on *Luke* 12:9.

10:34 not ... peace but a sword. Though the ultimate end of the gospel is peace with God (*John* 14:27; *Rom.* 8:6), the immediate result of the gospel is frequently conflict. Conversion to Christ can result in strained family relationships (vv. 35, 36), persecution, and even martyrdom. Following Christ presupposes a willingness to endure such hardships (vv. 32, 33, 37–39). Though He is called "Prince of Peace" (*Is.* 9:6), Christ will have no one deluded into thinking that He calls believers to a life devoid of all conflict.

10:35, 36 Quoted from *Mic.* 7:6.

10:38 take his cross. Here is Jesus' first mention of the word "cross" to His disciples (see *note* on 16:21). To them it would have evoked a picture of a violent, degrading death (see *note* on 27:31). He was demanding total commitment from them—even unto physical death—and making this call to full surrender a part of the message they were to proclaim to others. This same call to life-or-death devotion to Christ is repeated in 16:24; *Mark* 8:34; *Luke* 9:23; 14:27. For those who come to Christ with self-renouncing faith, there will be true and eternal life (v. 39).

10:40 He who receives you receives Me. Christ lives in His people. They also come in His name as His ambassadors (2 *Cor.* 5:20). Therefore, how they are treated is how He is treated (cf. 18:5; 25:45; *Luke* 9:48).

10:41 in the name of a prophet ... in the name of a righteous man. This expands on the principle of v. 40. To welcome Christ's emissaries is tantamount to welcoming Him (cf. 25:40).

10:42 little ones. Believers. See *notes* on 18:3–10; 25:40.