

Commentary Resource
Matthew 9:1-8
The New American Commentary
Craig L. Blomberg

9:1 The passage ends with Jesus returning across the lake to his current home in Capernaum (cf. 4:13). Matthew 9:1 is often assumed to introduce the next miracle story rather than to conclude the account of Jesus in Gadara, but the varying locations of the healing of the paralytic in Mark and Luke (Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:17–26) suggest that Matthew is arranging material topically here and that the events of 9:2 do not necessarily follow those of 9:1.⁵²

(c) Healing the Paralytic: Response to Disease (9:2–8)

9:2 Jesus once again encounters a paralytic (recall 4:24; 8:6). The sick man is brought on a stretcherlike cot by an otherwise unidentified group of individuals. “Their” faith most naturally refers to those bringing the paralytic. The spiritual state of the sick man remains unspecified. “Son” implies nothing about the man’s age or relationship to Jesus except that he was younger than Christ. Jesus surprisingly refers not to the man’s physical condition but to his spiritual state, and he takes the initiative to declare the man’s sins forgiven without any prompting from the sick man himself. Onlookers would assume that Jesus was linking the man’s handicap to some sin, a common Jewish presumption (cf. John 9:2), which may or may not have been true in this case.

9:3 The scribes mutter *among themselves* (more likely than NIV “to themselves”). These Jewish leaders interpret Jesus’ declaration of forgiveness as a blasphemous usurping of divine prerogative (Isa 43:25). “This fellow” refers to Jesus disparagingly.

9:4–8 Jesus recognizes their objection. “Knowing their thoughts” does not preclude their having voiced them, and it neither demands nor rules out supernatural insight. Jesus simply stresses that their objections issued from evil hearts (cf. 7:15–20). Their internal disposition is rebelling against God’s will. To justify his behavior, Jesus asks whether it is easier to pronounce a person forgiven or healed. Whichever might be easier to *do*, it was obviously easier to “say” that someone’s sins were forgiven without fear of contradiction. So to prove his authority for making the easier claim, he performs the harder task (the typically Semitic from-the-lesser-to-the-greater logic). So clear is his reasoning for Matthew’s original audience that the quotation is broken off midsentence. At once Jesus commands the paralytic to walk and carry his mat back home, and the man does so. Jesus’ claim is thus vindicated. A key Son of man reference appears here too. As in 8:20, it need mean nothing more than “I,” but “on earth” suggests that Jesus is contrasting his present life with his heavenly preexistence and that Dan 7:13–14 is again in the background.

The crowd is afraid (cf. 8:27 and parallels), probably combining terror and awe, and glorifies God, always an appropriate response to great works performed by his servants. The key Matthean distinctive appears in 9:8, “who had given such authority to men.” The plural may be rhetorical and not refer to anyone other than Jesus. Still, many have assumed that Matthew was foreshadowing Christ’s delegation of his authority to his followers (16:19; 18:19).⁵³ In any event, Matthew’s focus remains Christological. Jesus continues to appear as one with divine authority. Just as Jesus exercised Yahweh’s sovereignty over wind and waves and demonstrated his superiority over Satan’s minions, so now he displays the very authority of God to forgive sins.¹

⁵² Cf. Carson, “Matthew,” 220–21, for detailed explanation and diagrams of the chronologies implied by the various Evangelists at this point.

⁵³ France, *Matthew*, 166.

¹ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 153–154.