

Commentary Resource
Matthew 10:1-15
The New American Commentary
Craig L. Blomberg

Commissioning the Twelve (10:1–4)

10:1 “His ... disciples” suggests that the Twelve have already been chosen (see under 5:1), but to date they have apparently always accompanied Jesus. Now he is sending them out on their own in twos (Mark 6:7). Matthew pairs their names accordingly. This grouping no doubt enabled the disciples to support, protect, and empower each other better than if each went alone, and it perhaps was patterned after the law that required at least two witnesses (Deut 19:15). By not staying together as a larger group, the disciples also maximized their ability to reach large numbers of people. Timeless principles for discipleship and missions appear here.⁶ The mission of the Twelve further provides incidental support for the careful preservation of the Jesus-tradition from these early days on, as the disciples, through repetition, would have begun to tell the story of Jesus in somewhat standardized form.⁷ Verse 7 makes plain they will preach, but here Matthew focuses on their mighty deeds. Jesus transfers the same miracle-working authority to his disciples on which he himself drew. Matthew again carefully distinguishes exorcisms and healings, and the end of v. 1 repeats verbatim the end of 9:35. Matthew 17:20 (cf. Mark 9:29), however, shows that the disciples cannot automatically draw on this power apart from faith and prayer.

10:2–4 Only here does Matthew label the Twelve “apostles,” *those sent out on a mission*,⁸ and he names them for his readers’ benefit. He has previously introduced only five of them (4:18–22; 9:9–13).⁹

“Simon” comes from the Hebrew for *hearing*. He is also called Peter or Cephas, meaning *rock*, in Greek and Aramaic, respectively. The significance of his nickname appears in 16:16–19. The leader and frequent spokesman for the Twelve, he three times denied Jesus (cf. 26:69–75) but was later restored to fellowship (John 21:15–19). The first leader of the Jerusalem church, from Pentecost until his arrest and escape from prison (Acts 1–12), he subsequently ministered to churches in Asia, Pontus, Bithynia, Galatia, and Cappadocia (1 Pet 1:1), to which he wrote (or substantially influenced the composition of) 1 and 2 Peter. Reasonably strong Christian tradition places him in Rome by the early 60s, where he became the bishop of the church in that city (perhaps reflected already in 1 Pet 5:13). *Apocalypse of Peter* 37 narrates his martyrdom by upside-down crucifixion, probably in the late 60s.¹⁰

“Andrew” comes from the Greek for *manliness*. Like Peter, his brother, Andrew was originally a fisherman from Bethsaida (John 1:44). He was the first-known disciple of John the Baptist to begin to follow Christ (John 1:40).

“James” comes from the Hebrew *Jacob*, meaning *he who grasps the heel* (see Gen 25:26). Another Galilean fisherman and son of Zebedee (4:21–22), he was executed by Herod Agrippa I not later than A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2). He is therefore to be distinguished from the James who wrote the epistle of that name and who was the leader of the church in Jerusalem after Peter’s departure.

“John” in Hebrew means *the Lord is gracious*. He was James’s brother. Like Peter and James, he formed part of the inner circle of the three disciples closest to Jesus (see comments under 4:21–22). The Fourth Gospel, three Epistles, and the Book of Revelation are all attributed to him, the last of these while he was exiled for his faith on the island of Patmos, probably under the emperor Domitian in the mid-90s. Strong, early church tradition associates his ministry with Ephesus, combating the Gnostic teacher Cerinthus. Reasonably strong, though sometimes conflicting tradition maintains that he was the only one of the Twelve not to die a martyr’s death for his faith. He would thus have lived to quite an old age—at least into his eighties or nineties.

“Philip” comes from the Greek for *horse lover*. With Simon and Andrew, he was one of Jesus’ earliest disciples. He too was from Bethsaida (John 1:43–48) and is to be distinguished from Philip the “deacon” of Acts 6:5 and 8:26–40.

⁶ E.g., M. Green (*Matthew for Today* [Dallas: Word, 1989], 109–12): Mission is “crucial,” “shared,” “sustained,” “complex,” “strategic,” “demanding,” and “Jesus-shaped.”

⁷ See esp. H. Schürmann, “Die vorösterlichen Anfänge der Logientradition,” in *Der historische Jesus und der kerygmatische Christus*, ed. H. Ristow and K. Matthiae (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1960), 342–70.

⁸ Luke’s technical use of the term “apostle” as equivalent to one of the Twelve (see Acts 1:12–26) is the most well known. But Paul used it in its broader sense for people like Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), James, the Lord’s brother (Gal 1:19), and Titus (2 Cor 8:23). The spiritual gift of apostleship (Eph 4:11) should probably thus be roughly equated with “missionary” or “church-planter.” Cf. further E. von Eicken, H. Linder, D. Müller, and C. Brown, “ἀποστέλλω,” in *DNTT* 1:126–37.

⁹ On the details of what can be known about each apostle in Scripture, later history, and legend, see E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, ed. W. Schneemelcher (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 23–578, esp. 45–66 and the entries under each man’s name in *ISBE*.

¹⁰ Cf. further C. P. Thiede, *Simon Peter: From Galilee to Rome* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986); R. E. Brown, et al., eds., *Peter in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973); O. Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953).

“Bartholomew” comes from the Hebrew for *son of Talmi*. Probably he is the same person as Nathanael, Philip’s companion in John 1:45–49. His home would then have been Cana (John 21:2). Matthew likewise groups Philip and Bartholomew together.

“Thomas” stems from the Hebrew for *twin* (John 11:16). He became famous for doubting the resurrection of Jesus until he personally saw and felt the Lord’s risen body (John 20:24–28). Thomas’s lack of understanding appears already in John 14:5. Possibly reliable later tradition associates him with the establishment of the church in India.

“Matthew” comes from the same Hebrew phrase as Nathanael (*God has given*). He was also called Levi, a converted tax collector, and had this Gospel attributed to him. For his call see comments under 9:9–13.

James, son of Alphaeus, is also called *ho mikros* in Mark 15:40 (*the small one* or “the younger”), presumably to distinguish him in age or size from James, son of Zebedee. Little else is known for sure about him.

Thaddaeus is also called Lebbaeus in some textual variants and Judas son of James in Luke 6:16. The first two are probably nicknames of devotion or endearment, coming from the Hebrew *taday* (*breast*) and *leb* (*heart*).

Simon, *ho Kananaios* (the Cananean—NIV “the Zealot”), was a man whose nickname meant *zealous one*, probably not yet in the sense of a member of the later, more formal political movement known as the Zealots but as one of the predecessors of that movement whose revolutionary aspirations for Israel against Rome perhaps led him to engage in terrorist activities against the government. Contra the NIV, only Luke actually uses the word “zealot” (*zēlōtēs*, Luke 6:15).

Judas Iscariot, infamous for betraying Jesus (26:47–50), was the treasurer for the Twelve (John 12:6). “Iscariot” is usually interpreted as Hebrew for *man of Keriath*, the name of cities in both Judea and Moab, which could make Judas the only non-Galilean of the Twelve. Others take Iscariot as from a word for *assassin* or from a term meaning *false one*.¹¹ He ended his life by regretting his betrayal (27:1–10), hanging himself, and falling from the rope so that “all his bowels gushed out” (Acts 1:18–19, KJV).¹²

The number twelve would certainly have called to mind the twelve tribes of Israel and suggests that Jesus is constituting a community of followers, in conscious opposition to the current leadership of Israel, as the new recipients of God’s revelation and grace. Only Matthew specifically calls Simon the “first,” which fits a special prominence given to him in this Gospel (but see comments under 16:13–20). Only Matthew also reminds readers of his own background, perhaps specifically to recall 9:9–13.

THE IMMEDIATE CHARGE (10:5–16)

10:5–6 Only Matthew includes vv. 5–6, a distinctively particularist text. But these restrictions do not contradict the Great Commission (28:18–20). Even 10:18 anticipates the disciples going into Gentile territory. Instead, Jesus’ commands fit the larger pattern of his own ministry prior to his death and match the missionary priority Paul himself maintained throughout Acts (e.g., 13:46; 18:6; 19:9; 28:25–28) and articulated in Rom 1:16 (“first for the Jew, and then for the Gentile”).¹³ It is not clear that even the end of Acts heralds a change in strategy,¹⁴ and it is at least possible that God intended Israel to be the first mission field in every era of Christian history.¹⁵ Even if this is not the case, it certainly does not justify relegating the Jews to the relatively low position in Christian missionary strategy they have usually been assigned. The “lost sheep” of “Israel” (literally, *of the house of Israel*) does not refer to a portion of the nation but to all the people (see 9:36; cf. Jer 50:6).

10:7–8a Jesus previously commissioned the disciples to exorcise the demons and to heal the sick (v. 1). Now he tells them they must preach as well (v. 7). Their message remains identical to that of John the Baptist and Jesus (3:2; 4:17). Their miracle-working ministry is also restated and itemized. Jesus has already performed healings in each of these categories; all but the curing of lepers (probably a coincidental omission) will explicitly reappear in Acts through the ministries of various Christians (e.g., Acts 3:1–10; 8:7, 13; 9:32–43; 14:8–10; 19:13–16; 20:7–12). Even though not all of the commands of vv. 5–16 remain normative today (most notably vv. 5–6 and 8b–10a), the fact that miraculous healings continue after Jesus’ resurrection, coupled with the lack of exegetical support for views that see gifts of healings as ceasing at the end of the apostolic age, suggests that believers in all eras may expect supernatural healings from time to time.¹⁶ Verse 8 has regularly been taken as support for modern medical missions as well; appropriate as these may be, they are not what Jesus envisions here.

¹¹ For a good discussion of these and still further suggestions, see S. T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Hoboken, N.J.: KTAV, 1987), 179.

¹² Historical and theological studies of Judas often try to account for his behavior with a variety of speculative hypotheses. One of the better, recent treatments is D. Roquefort, “Judas: une figure de la perversion,” *ETR* 58 (1983): 501–13.

¹³ So also J. J. Scott, “Gentiles and the Ministry of Jesus: Further Observations on Matt. 10:5–6; 15:21–28,” *JETS* 33 (1990): 161–69. Cf. esp. A. Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Social History* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1988).

¹⁴ See esp. R. C. Tannehill, “Rejection by Jews and Turning to Gentiles: The Pattern of Paul’s Mission in Acts,” in *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People: Eight Critical Perspectives*, ed. J. B. Tyson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 83–101.

¹⁵ See esp. Bruner, *Christbook*, 372.

¹⁶ See M. M. B. Turner, “Spiritual Gifts Then and Now,” *VE* 15 (1985): 7–64; D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987).

10:8b–10 The blessings associated with discipleship come solely by grace and must be similarly imparted (v. 8b). Dependence on benefactors is to be illustrated by traveling as simply as possible. All the resources the disciples need—money, travel provisions, and extra clothing—will be given to them (v. 11) by those who accept their ministry (vv. 9–10). The metal coins were carried in money belts. The “bag” was either a knapsack or beggar’s bag. The “tunic” was the garment under one’s cloak; the “staff,” a walking stick. Paul appeals to the principle of v. 10b in 1 Tim 5:18 (and even refers to the parallel account in Luke 10:7 as “Scripture”) to support his contention that congregations must generously support their full-time ministers. On the other hand, as v. 8b hints at here, and as texts such as 1 Cor 9:12b, 15–18 make more explicit, there are times when Christian ministers should refuse remuneration for the sake of the gospel. When Christians accept money for ministry, they ought never view it as a wage but as a gift. D. A. Carson comments, “The church does not *pay* its ministers; rather, it provides them with resources so that they are able to serve freely.”¹⁷

There are scriptural paradigms for missionary and ministry activity that recognize dependence both on others’ support and on one’s own resources earned through a different trade (cf. 1 Cor 9:1–18; Phil 4:10–19). Neither may be made absolute. What is most likely to advance the gospel in an honorable way should be adopted in any given context. A serious danger of paid ministry is that preachers will tailor their message to suit their supporters. A key problem with “tentmaking” is a lack of accountability of ministers to those with whom they work. Luke 22:35–38 specifically revokes the commands to travel with great urgency and unprotected. But Matt 7:6 recalls the timeless principle that one should not remain ministering indefinitely to a hostile audience.

A famous so-called contradiction appears between v. 10 and its parallels (Mark 6:8–9; Luke 9:3). Did Jesus permit or prohibit a staff and sandals¹⁸ If Matthew’s account is composite, this verse may have originally applied to the sending of the seventy-two (Luke 10:1–12), which likely included the Twelve, at which time Jesus’ instructions differed slightly from those he gave just to the Twelve. That 9:37–38 and 10:10b find their only parallels in Luke 10:2 and 7b may support this reconstruction.¹⁹ At any rate, all accounts agree on Jesus’ central theme of the simplicity, austerity, and urgency of the mission. The point of Jesus’ strictness is not to leave his disciples deprived and defenseless but dependent on others for their *nourishment* (“keep,” v. 10) in every area of life.

10:11–15 As they enter each new location, the disciples must look for those who are open to their message and ministry. Such people will provide the characteristic hospitality given to friends and respected people who traveled in the ancient Roman world (bed and board). Such hospitality proved vital, given the generally nefarious state of public lodging—hotbeds of piracy and prostitution. “Worthy” in v. 11 is the same word translated “worth” in v. 10 and “deserving” in v. 13. In light of v. 14, the term must refer to the response of welcoming the disciples, not to any necessary merit or virtue in the individuals. The disciples must remain with such worthy people to avoid accusations of favoritism or the jealousies of competition among potential hosts. On the “greeting,” see comments under 5:47. To give or return “peace” meant *to bless or retract a blessing from an individual or a household*. Shaking the dust off one’s feet was a ritual of renunciation used by Jews when they returned to Israel from Gentile territories (cf. Paul’s Christian modification of this practice in Acts 13:51). Rejecting the disciples’ message is thus seen as a serious sin, indeed, worse even than the gross rebellion of Sodom and Gomorrah in Old Testament times (cf. Gen 18:20–19:28). The increasing culpability of such rejection probably stemmed from the fact that God’s revelation in Christ was that much clearer and more immediate.²⁰ Verse 15 also suggests that there are degrees of eternal punishment (a doctrine taught more explicitly in Luke 12:47–48).

Treating an entire “home” (vv. 11–13) or “town” (vv. 14–15) on the basis of the actions of one person within it reflects the corporate solidarity common in much of antiquity and in many parts of the world today, in which the decisions of a key individual are owned by an entire community. Church growth specialists fearful of the genuineness of modern-day group responses are increasingly moderating such skepticism. The picture of the church as a household has also been profitably expounded.²¹ Radical Western democratic individualism is a relatively new sociological phenomenon and often gets in the way of genuine discipleship, in which decisions affecting entire congregations should be made corporately and not so much by majority vote as by common consensus under the Spirit’s guidance.¹

¹⁷ D. A. Carson, *When Jesus Confronts the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 125.

¹⁸ See B. Ahern, “Staff or No Staff?” *CBQ* 5 (1943): 332–37, for a survey of various possible solutions.

¹⁹ Cf. C. L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987), 145–46; G. R. Osborne, “The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism,” *JETS* 22 (1979): 314.

²⁰ Cf. E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (Richmond: John Knox, 1975), 240–41: “‘Post-Christian’ man is a different man from the heathen, to whom the Word of Jesus has not yet come”; i.e., he will be judged more severely. Cf. also H. N. Ridderbos (*Matthew*, BSC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987], 200): “No one can encounter Jesus without increasing his responsibility and, if he is unbelieving, his guilt.”

²¹ M. H. Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics, and Justice in Matthew* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

¹ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 167–173.