

## Laborers for the Harvest

This article on Matthew 9:35–38 is edited from the Ligonier Ministries

Any observant Jew in the first century should be able to look at the circumstances of Jesus' life and see Him as a new Moses due to the remarkable similarities between the two men. As one can see, for example, an evil king tried to eliminate both Jesus and Moses (Ex. 1:8–2:10; Matt. 2:16–18). Likewise, both men give God's law from a mountain (Ex. 32:15–20; Matt. 5–7). Such parallels should be too much for anyone to label mere coincidences. They reveal that our Lord will be a covenant mediator just as Moses himself was.

Lest anyone miss God's providential ordering of Moses' life to match the life of Jesus, the Holy Spirit has also inspired Matthew to depict Jesus as a new Moses in his gospel's structure. Matthew groups the teaching of Christ into five major discourses (5–7; 10; 13; 18; 24–25) just as Moses gave us five books of the Bible — Genesis through Deuteronomy. This helps us see the parallels between Moses and Jesus more clearly than if Matthew had outlined his gospel differently.

Matthew introduced the first major discourse of Jesus with a short summary of His mission in Galilee (4:23), and in today's passage He sets up the second discourse with a similar overview (9:35). This second discourse highlights the mission of the twelve apostles during Christ's earthly ministry, a mission that has application for His entire church as well. These missionaries need to be sent out because the leaders of Israel have not learned their lesson after centuries of the Lord's discipline under the heel of Rome and other foreign powers. As in the days of Ezekiel, the shepherds of the Lord's flock continue to fail to guide Israel in mercy and righteousness (v. 36; see Ezek. 34:1–10). However, all is not lost; with Jesus, the Father is keeping His promise to care for His sheep. As Ezekiel predicted, the Messiah has come to gather God's saints into the fold (vv. 11–24).

Christ, the Good Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (1 Peter 2:25), has enlisted many to help care for His flock and field, as we also see in today's passage (Matt. 9:37–38). Clearly, says Jerome, “an abundant harvest represents all the believing multitude. The few laborers imply the apostles and their imitators who are sent to the harvest” (Commentary on Matthew, 1.9.37).

As we continue to read on in Matthew 10 we will notice that we all can be involved in the shepherding work of Christ. For now, we must observe Jesus' command to pray for harvest workers (Matt. 9:38), a prayer the Lord uses to save His people. John MacArthur writes that “believers' prayers participate in the fulfillment of God's plans” (The MacArthur Bible Commentary, p. 1,140), and so we must go before the Lord diligently and ask Him to raise up workers in His field.