

## The Great Commission

Matt.28:16-20 is the great commission passage which nearly every Christian sees as being about us today. Supposedly, we are to go into all the world to all people, baptizing them and teaching them all things the Lord commanded. Strangely enough, those who grab this verse as being about us today, really understand it as "Send ye therefore..." since out of the millions of Christians worldwide, very few actually go. Here is the passage we are considering;

And the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him. But some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority is given to Me in Heaven and in earth. Therefore go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. And, behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the world. Amen.

Mat 28:16-20

Many Christians who don't or can't go, find consolation in excusing themselves with, I'm married, I have a business, my children are in college, but, having been convinced by our traditions that everyone should go, money is given to the church or missionary outreach so someone else can. But when we read Matthew such opt out clauses don't seem to be present. The Lord didn't say send someone else and when we start excusing ourselves then, whether we like to admit it or not, we are making the Word of God of no effect.

Reading Matthew 10:1-16, we find a commission specifically given to the 12 alone. Let us clearly note who, when and where in this passage;

Jesus sent out these twelve, commanding them, saying, Do not go into the way of the nations, and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans. But rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, proclaim, saying, The kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. You have received freely, freely give. Do not provide gold nor silver, nor copper in your purses,

Mat 10:5-19 see also 23.

This commission was given to 12 people only and in the Promised Land. They would not visit all the cities in Israel before the Lord came, see also Lk.10:1,17. The 12 were empowered with supernatural gifts and instructed to go to Jews only with a gospel or good news which said, the kingdom of heaven is at hand which will be brought in when the Lord comes. Is this command in Matt.10 one which you and I are obliged to undertake? The answer is an obvious no! Some zealous Christians go to Israel as missionaries but I can guarantee not one of them goes out without financial backing and only one change of clothes. Neither can

they raise the dead and heal every kind of sickness. Do we see the confusion that's caused when we think all the N.T. is about us today?

Staying in Matthew, Peter asked the Lord a pertinent question and received some wonderful assurances;

Then answering Peter said to Him, Behold, we have forsaken all and have followed You. Therefore what shall we have? And Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. Mat 19:27-29

We might suffer much for the Lord but are these promises given to the 12 ours? Absolutely not and even the most zealous Christian would acknowledge these are specific promises to a specific small group of 12, just as the commission in chapter 10 was to the same small group.

Notice in chapter 10 and 19 the number associated with Israel, that is the number 12?

I wonder if the great commission was only given to the same disciples and is not a universal commission for you and me today?

So did the disciples to whom the original great commission was given, actually obey it back then? The answer might surprise us.

In Luke 24:45 the Lord opened the disciples understanding to understand the Scriptures and in Acts 1 spoke to them for 40 days about the kingdom which was still at hand or near, back then. But after all this, the Lord gives another commission in Acts 1:8 which is also enabled by supernatural gifts as was the commission in Matt.10.

The commission in Acts 1:8 is as follows;

But you shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you. And you shall be witnesses to Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the end of the earth (ge = land). Act 1:8

Some will argue that this is the Lord fine tuning the Great Commission but is that explanation satisfactory? Surely the great commission was sufficient in itself and if we are to obey the Lord's instructions, then why aren't we following this later instruction in Acts 1:8? Let's not pick and choose now. The answer comes because it was given to those disciples

way back then at the start of Acts and it's not for us but so was the Great Commission given to those disciples. If the word earth is translated land as it is in its first three occurrences (Matt.2:6, 20, 21), then the disciples were to witness only in the Promised Land after they were given the great commission. Perhaps the great commission was future to the Acts 1:8 commission and only to and for those to whom it was originally given?

The Great Commission includes all nations but Peter only speaks to Jews in Acts 2-3 exactly like they were commanded in Matt.10. Why do we know this? Because Peter needed a threefold vision to speak to a gentile, namely Cornelius in Acts 10-11. Have we ever asked ourselves why it was that Peter needed a threefold vision to speak to one of another nation when the Great Commission supposedly included all nations? Here is a section of Acts 10 containing the words of Peter as it relates to Gentiles and the vision;

And he said to them, You know that it is an unlawful thing for a man, a Jew to keep company with or to come near to one of another nation. But God has shown me not to call any man common or unclean. Therefore I came without complaint, being sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me. Act 10:28-29

Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Truly I see that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted with Him. Act 10:34-35

And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. All the Prophets give witness to Him, that through His name whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins. Act 10:42-43

If the great commission included all nations, and certainly prophesy spoke of the Nations hearing the good news, we cannot argue Peter needed to learn of it for he had his mind opened to understand those prophesies. It is interesting to note that even after the vision Peter asks Cornelius why he had sent for him. Don't miss the points here please, Peter said it was unlawful to be in the company of a Gentile after the Great Commission, Peter had to ask what it was Cornelius wanted after the Great Commission and yet Peter knew Gentiles would be saved eventually. The Great Commission certainly does not appear to be relative to Gentiles now does it. Peter acknowledges that all the prophets testified that whoever believes in Christ shall receive forgiveness of sins which includes gentiles. How can our tradition of the Great Commission fit with these facts? It doesn't.

Before this vision, Peter had said in Acts 3:26 "to you first", the "you" means the Jews. If Peter knew it was Jew first followed by Gentiles then the Great Commission was not immediately effective. Perhaps the Great Commission was to Israelites in the world or something future and maybe that's how Peter understood it during Acts.

The Great Commission of Matthew 28 is seen as the ultimate command to witness for believers today. We are presenting Scriptural evidence that this was given to the 11 Apostles only. We are not denying that we should take opportunities to speak to the unsaved about our Lord and His offering on the cross for all people everywhere.

We are members of the Church which is His Body and in the Scriptures which speak of our calling, no such command to go into all the world as per Matt.28 can be found. We do know that;  
[.... God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1Ti 2:3-4](#)

Therefore we should  
[preach the Word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. 2Ti 4:2](#)

Thus far in our examination of the Great Commission, we have compared Scripture with Scripture and found that while it is on the lips of nearly all believers, they don't go but rather send, which is not the command. In other words, while we embrace it as our commission, very few actually obey it.

Prior to Matt.28 we found commissions and promises specifically given to the 12 apostles and the same apostles (minus one) were given the Great Commission. The 12 who were to sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel were the ones given the Great Commission. These same 12 were also promised and empowered with supernatural gifts. If the supernatural gifts accompanied the Great Commission, then we ought to display the same supernatural abilities to raise the dead and heal every kind of sickness and disease but we do not. Again, if we do not possess the powers is the Commission ours?

We also found that Peter, who had his mind opened to understand the Scriptures Lk.24:45, assured his Jewish audience in Acts 3:26 the following;

[You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your Seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed."](#)

Having raised up His son Jesus, God sent Him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you away from his iniquities. Act 3:25-26

Speaking to those who were "the sons of the prophets and of the covenant God made with THEIR fathers", he reminds them that Christ was sent to them first and in them all the families of the earth would be blessed. The Old Testament spoke of salvation going to the ends of the world;

Rejoice, O, nations, with His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His foes and will be merciful to His land, to His people. Deu 32:43

And He said, It is but a little thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to bring back the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You for a light to the nations, to be My salvation to the end of the earth. Isa 49:6

My righteousness *is* near; My salvation has gone out, and My arms shall judge peoples; the coastlands shall wait on Me, and on My arm they shall trust. Isa 51:3-5

So Peter knew all the world would have the opportunity to hear of salvation as he confesses here;

All the Prophets give witness to Him, that through His name whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins. Act 10:42-43

If the Great Commission included the Gentiles, we asked ourselves why it was that Peter needed a threefold vision to go speak to a Gentile, especially if he had been commissioned to include them. Remember Peter's words to Cornelius?

And he said to them, You know that it is an unlawful thing for a man, a Jew to keep company with or to come near to one of another nation. But God has shown me not to call any man common or unclean.

Therefore I came without complaint, being sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me. Act 10:28-29

We have no choice to conclude that Peter did not see the Great Commission as being one to take immediate effect or it was directed only to the nation of Israel dispersed throughout the world. If it wasn't Peter's commission during Acts, then why is it ours now?

Peter wasn't the only one who felt the Great Commission was directed to the nation of Israel.

The Jews who were scattered out of Israel didn't go anywhere because of the great commission but only because of the persecution that arose after Stephen's death, and then they only spoke to Jews;

Then, indeed, they who were scattered abroad by the persecution that rose about Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the Word to no one except the Jews. Act 11:19

It is obvious these scattered Jews did not go according to the Great Commission but only as a result of persecution and they did not preach to any Gentiles.

But what about the Apostles in Jerusalem, did they go into all the world? We note in Acts 15 Apostles and elders had not departed from the capitol. They did not go into all the world;

And certain ones who came down from Judea taught the brothers, *saying*, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

Therefore dissension and not a little disputation occurring by Paul and Barnabas, they appointed Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question.

And arriving in Jerusalem, they were received by the church, and *by* the apostles and elders. And *they* declared all things that God had done with them. Act 15:1-2, 4

We now see a number of groups, years after the Great Commission was given, who have not obeyed it and this includes some of those to whom it was given directly. If they were not obeying it, then why should we?

Thus far we have observed some things which question the orthodox position which assumes that we should obey the Great Commission despite the fact it was given to 11 people only. Here are some of our discoveries.

While all believers today accept this as being about us, hardly anyone obeys it. Perhaps subconsciously it is recognized that Matthew had other promises and commissions which are clearly not ours, see 5:5, 10:1-15, 19:27-30. In other words, we see things in Matthew which are not about us and maybe we are thus less inclined to obey the Great Commission, the last one in the gospel which might not be about us either.

Following the Great Commission, the Lord gives another detailed commission in Acts 1:8. This came after the disciples' minds were opened by the Lord in Lk.24:45 and it was to be undertaken after the Holy Spirit had empowered them, Lk.24:49, Acts 1:4-5. Following the Lord's instruction to wait for the power from on high the disciples asked one question and one question only, which was; "Lord, do You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Does this suggest that the Great Commission was to be implemented after Israel had been restored

nationally? Or more importantly, with this comparison of Scripture the Great Commission was instrumental in bringing in the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. One thing is for certain, the Great Commission is set in the dispensation of the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth which was near back then.

In Acts 11 we read this;

[Then, indeed, they who were scattered abroad by the persecution that rose about Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the Word to no one except the Jews.](#) Act 11:19

If the Great Commission was an immediate and universal one, then the believers who were forced out of Jerusalem certainly did not go according to it. They went because of persecution and when they did go, they spoke to Jews only. But doesn't the Great Commission include Gentiles? Why are we told specifically they only spoke to Jews?

If the Apostles of Acts 15:4 included the 12, then they had not obeyed and gone into all the world some 15 plus years after the command was given. Then even years later, there are thousands of Jews who believed but also remained in Jerusalem as recorded here.

[And on the next day Paul went with us to James. And all the elders were present. And hearing, they glorified the Lord, and said to him, You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who believe, and they are all zealous of the Law.](#)  
Act 21:18-20

Perhaps they also considered the Great Commission was to be implemented after the restoration of Israel. One thing is for certain, they were not going into all the world in immediate obedience to the Great Commission.

Someone might protest that we have very good reasons not to obey the Great Commission today. It is said quite sincerely that we can't all go because some of us have a wife, some of us have businesses to operate, many of us are employed and really, the Lord only meant that some should go because of these "legitimate" caveats. When we read into any command exceptions which are not there, we are making the command convenient to our circumstances which are incorrect. We must not read our culture into the Bible or read our dispensational settings back into a previous one.

When we read the Great Commission we notice the absence of a long list of exceptions, the Lord did not give a long list of outs. No excuse to disobey was either spoken, written or implied. It reminds me of the invitation sent out by a certain man in Luke 14;

And He said to him, A certain man made a great supper and invited many. And he sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, Come, for all things are now ready. And all with one consent began to make excuse.

The first said to him, I have bought a piece of ground, I must go and see it. I beg you, have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I beg you, have me excused.

And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

And coming up that servant reported these things to his lord. And the master of the house, being angry..... Luk 14:17-21

If the Lord was angry when his invitation was rejected by even legitimate excuses, how could we expect any other response? But we can relax because the Great Commission has not been given to us; it was given to 11 men only and relates to the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth, not the Church which is His Body raised and seated where Christ is seated at the Father's right.

The great commission is universally accepted as a command for all Christians today to go into all the world but we have found some Scriptures which suggest that not only the 11 apostles but also those witnessing through Acts did not spread the message under its terms.

If the Great Commission was to all people in all parts of the world why did Peter need a vision to speak to a Gentile and be told that no man was common or unclean Acts 10:15? Those Jews who were scattered after the persecution of Stephen were scattered because of persecution not in obedience to any commission, and they preached to the Jews only, 8:1, 11:19.

From Acts 13 onwards Paul takes center stage with yet another commission as follows;

But the Lord said to him, Go! For this one is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before nations and kings and the sons of Israel. Act 9:15

Then having obtained help from God, I stand until this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said was going to happen; whether the Christ *was* liable to suffer, whether first by a resurrection of *the* dead He was going to proclaim light to the people and to the nations. Act 26:22-23

If we follow Paul's ministry through Acts we find him preaching on the Sabbath days in the synagogue of the Jews and for the most part only preaching to Gentiles after the Jews rejected the message. Like Peter, Paul knew it was Jew first which we see in his ministry and writings during Acts;

But speaking boldly, Paul and Barnabas said, It was necessary for the Word of God to be spoken to you first. But since indeed you put it far from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the nations (Gentiles). Act 13:46

And according to Paul's custom, he went in to them and reasoned with them out of the Scriptures on three sabbaths, Act 17:2

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Rom 1:16

Again we ask ourselves, if the Great Commission was a universal one, why this narrower commission to both Peter and Paul? The Acts period ministry to Jew first then the Gentiles is emphasized in Galatians 2 where we find this clear distinction of direction in Peter, James and John, then Paul;

But on the contrary, seeing that I have been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, as Peter to the circumcision; for He working in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision also worked in me to the nations (Gentiles) and knowing the grace given to me, James, and Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, gave right hands of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we go to the nations, but they to the circumcision. Gal 2:7-9

If Paul had a separate commission which included water baptism for the Jews but not the Gentiles, 1Cor.1:14-17 and if we believe the Great Commission included water baptism, then Paul certainly did not minister according to it during Acts. If Paul the apostle to the Gentiles did not minister under the terms of the Great Commission, why are we trying to do that which was never given us?

If Peter was sent to the Jews according to Galatians 2 and did preach water baptism to the Jews then these different gospel elements again suggest that the Great Commission was not in place and or that it was directed to the Jews only among the nations. Certainly Peter and Paul preached to the Jews first and this dispensational advantage held by the Jews during Acts certainly adds weight to the consideration that the Great Commission was not their authority at that time, or only a commission to and for Israel.

One thing is for certain, we are seeing lots of evidence which denies the universal view that we must obey the Great Commission today but there is more to come as we consider these words regarding it;

Therefore go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. Mat 28:19-20

Is it possible to find anyone at any time during the Acts who actually baptized anyone in the triune name of God? The water baptisms during Acts were for the most part, in the name of the Lord Christ Jesus only; Then Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Act 2:38 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they begged him to stay certain days. Act 10:48 And hearing, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Act 19:5

The water baptisms of Acts, or lack thereof, were not strictly according to the terms of the Great Commission. If the disciples during Acts were not ministering under its authority then we believe the Great Commission has nothing to do with us, the church which is His Body.

The final point in our examination of the Great Commission is found in the last portion of the verse;

Therefore go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. Mat 28:19-20

This commission demands those under its authority teach others to observe all things, whatever the Lord had commanded them. The plural pronoun "them" confirms an earlier observation that this commission was given to 11 people only and whatever the Lord had commanded them, not us today, was that which needed to be taught.

We all rejoice that the Lord Christ Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world but His ministry; His Apostleship, was to the nation of Israel;

And I say, Jesus Christ has become a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, Rom 15:8

Therefore, holy brothers, called *to be* partakers of the heavenly *calling*, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, Hebrews 3:1

And behold, a woman of Canaan coming out of these borders cried to Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is grievously vexed with a demon.

But He did not answer her a word. ..But He answered and said, I am not sent except to the lost sheep of *the* house of Israel. Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, help me! But He answered and said, It is not good to take the children's bread and to throw *it* to dogs. Mat 15:22-26

Jesus sent out these twelve, commanding them, saying, Do not go into the way of the nations, and do not enter into *any* city of *the* Samaritans. But rather go to the lost sheep of *the* house of Israel. Mat 10:5-6

Then answering Peter said to Him, Behold, we have forsaken all and have followed You. Therefore what shall we have? And Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.  
Mat 19:27-28

The Lord was ministering to Israel as recorded in the Gospels, the Bible says so, and it is entirely out of context to take a commission given by the High Priest King of Israel to Israelites who were sent to the nation of Israel and impose it on us Gentile believers today living in a completely different dispensation.

We live in the dispensation of the grace of God which had not been revealed in the earthly ministry of the Lord. Paul writes clearly in Ephesians these words;

This grace is given to me (*who am* less than the least of all saints) to preach the gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ among the nations, and to bring to light what *is* the fellowship of the mystery which from eternity has been hidden in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; Eph 3:8-9

the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. Col 1:26

The Lord's commands to us have been revealed after Acts 28, when the nation of Israel was placed to one side for a season. His commands to us are found in Paul's post Acts letters, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon.

There is no time and space to list all the things the Lord commanded those disciples, but His ministry was according to the Law and the Prophets and the Law and the Prophets spoke of the great kingdom out of heaven on the earth with Israel as the channel of blessing to the entire world;

Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to destroy but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, Till the heaven and the earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall in any way pass from the Law until all is fulfilled. Therefore

whoever shall relax one of these commandments, the least, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven. But whoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven. Mat 5:17-19

The Great Commission was given to Israelites, Israelites who were not to relax (loosen, break, set aside) one of the commandments found in the Law. Israelites who were promised 12 thrones on which they would judge Israel. Israelites who were sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

This direction of the Great Commission is confirmed irrefutably in the mouth of Peter, one to whom the Great Commission was given. When speaking to Cornelius, Peter says;

[And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead.](#) Act 10:42

The Great Commission was given to 11 disciples who had been commanded to speak to Israel. They lived in Israel and were told to go into all the world (to Israelites), whereas we are already in the world. The Great Commission is not, and has never been a commission given to us Gentiles living in a dispensation not found in the Law and the Prophets.

Brian R Kelson

[brianActs28@gmail.com](mailto:brianActs28@gmail.com)

[www.acts28.net](http://www.acts28.net)