



**TRANSFORMATIONAL TEACHER TRAINING**

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Lewisville, TX 75067**

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# **BIBLE TRANSLATIONS**

## Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed and made appointment with them. And when they saw Him, they fell down and worshiped Him; but some doubted. Jesus approached and, breaking the silence, said to them, All authority (all power of rule) in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go then and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you all the days (perpetually, uniformly, and on every occasion), to the [very] close and consummation of the age. Amen (so let it be).

AMP

But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had given them orders to go. And when they saw him they gave him worship: but some were in doubt. And Jesus came to them and said, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go then, and make disciples of all the nations, giving them baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to keep all the rules which I have given you: and see, I am ever with you, even to the end of the world.

BBE

16 Jesus' eleven disciples went to a mountain in Galilee, where Jesus had told them to meet him. They saw him and worshiped him, but some of them doubted. Jesus came to them and said: I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.

CEV

Well, the eleven students traveled to Alabama, to the mountain which Jesus had selected for them. When they saw him they accepted him as their Lord, but some couldn't make up their minds. Jesus came over to them and said, "Every right to rule in both the spiritual and physical realms has been given to me. As you travel, then, make students of all races and initiate them into the family of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to live by all that I outlined for you. And you know, I am right in there with you—all the time—until the last inning."

The Cotton Patch Gospel

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

HDNT (ESV)

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had said they would find him. There they met him and worshiped him—but some of them weren't sure it really was Jesus! He told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and earth. Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this—that I am with you always, even to the end of the world."

The Living Bible

Meanwhile, the eleven disciples were on their way to Galilee, headed for the mountain Jesus had set for their reunion. The moment they saw him they worshiped him. Some, though, held back, not sure about worship, about risking themselves totally. Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold

name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."

#### The Message

So the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain Jesus had designated. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

#### NET

Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

#### NLT

16 Now, the eleven disciples went on their way to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And having seen Him, they worshipped Him, prostrating themselves on the ground before Him. But some doubted. And Jesus, having come, spoke to them, saying, There was given to me all authority in heaven and upon earth. Having gone on your way therefore, teach all the nations, making them your pupils, baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to be attending to carefully, holding firmly to, and observing all, whatever things I enjoined upon you. And behold, as for myself, with you I am all the days until the consummation of the age.

#### WUESTNT

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority is given to me in heaven and upon earth. Go ye therefore, 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 have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, [even] to the end of the world. Amen.

Revised Webster's

And the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mount where Jesus appointed them, and having seen him, they bowed to him, but some did waver. And having come near, Jesus spake to them, saying, 'Given to me was all authority in heaven and on earth; having gone, then, disciple all the nations, (baptizing them—to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all, whatever I did command you,) and lo, I am with you all the days—till the full end of the age.'

YLT

Matthew 28:16-20 The Voice (VOICE)

<sup>16</sup> The eleven disciples, *having spoken to the Marys*, headed to Galilee, to the mountain where they were to meet Jesus. <sup>17</sup> When the disciples saw Jesus there, many of them fell down and worshiped, *as Mary and the other Mary had done*. But a few hung back. They were not sure (*and who can blame them?*). <sup>18</sup> Jesus came forward and addressed *His beloved disciples*.

**The disciples don't know what to think or how to act. Nothing like this has ever happened before.**

**Jesus:** I am here speaking with all the authority of God, *who has commanded Me to give you this commission*: <sup>19</sup> Go out and make disciples in all the nations. Ceremonially wash them through baptism in the name of the *triune God*: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Then disciple them. *Form them in the practices and postures that I have taught you*, and show them how to follow the commands I have laid down for you. And I will be with you, day after day, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:16-20 Disciples' Literal New Testament (DLNT)

Jesus Commissions The Eleven To Make Disciples of All Nations

<sup>16</sup> And the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus ordered them. <sup>17</sup> And having seen Him, they worshiped *Him*. But the <sup>[a]</sup>ones doubted<sup>[b]</sup>. <sup>18</sup> And having come to *them*, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth was

given *to* Me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore having gone, make-disciples-of <sup>[c]</sup> all the nations, baptizing them in the name *of* the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to keep all that I commanded you. And behold— **I** am with you all the days until the conclusion *of* the age”.

**Footnotes:**

- a. [Matthew 28:17](#) As in [26:67](#), this could mean ‘others doubted’; or, ‘some *of the eleven* doubted’. Some think this is the appearance to 500 people mentioned in [1 Cor 15:6](#).
- b. [Matthew 28:17](#) Or, hesitated. Perhaps Matthew means they were unsure it was really Jesus, until He came to them, [v 18](#).
- c. [Matthew 28:19](#) This is the command. Included in the carrying out of this command is the going, the baptizing, and the teaching.

# WORD STUDIES



# **MATTHEW**

## **A HANDBOOK ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

BY

**Barclay M. Newman**

AND

**Philip C. Stine**

UBS Handbook Series

UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES  
New York

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<sup>1</sup>Newman, Barclay Moon ; Stine, Philip C.: *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*. New York : United Bible Societies, 1992 (UBS Helps for Translators; UBS Handbook Series)

*Matthew 28.16.*

*Now* is merely a transition marker introducing a new scene, and renders a Greek particle often translated “but.”

*The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them:* the reference is to verse 10, according to which Jesus had told the women to inform his “brothers” to go to Galilee, where they would see him. The noun “disciple” is first used in 5.1, as is the word *mountain*. It is doubtful that any specific *mountain* is in mind; it is important to remember that in Jewish thought hills and mountains are places of divine revelation.

*The mountain to which Jesus had directed them* may be expressed as “the mountain that Jesus had told them they should go to.”

*Matthew 28.17.*

The verse says *when they saw him*, leaving it clear that Jesus appeared to them when they reached the mountain. In many languages this is not possible, so translators have had to begin this verse by saying “There they saw Jesus, and when they saw him ....”

*Worshiped* translates a verb frequently used in this Gospel (see 2.2; 28.9 for its first and most recent occurrences). *Him* is not found in all Greek manuscripts, but many languages will require that the verb be accompanied by an object indicating the one to whom their worship was directed.

*But some doubted* (so also NIV, Lu) appears in TEV as “*even though some ... doubted.*” NAB renders as though their doubt was something that took place prior to the resurrection appearance (“those who had entertained doubts”), although it follows with a footnote (“literally, ‘some doubted’ ”). NJB offers the time perspective of NAB as a possibility in its alternative reading (“though some had hesitated”), but the translators confess that this has less grammatical support than the reading which they place in the text (“though some hesitated”). As a matter of fact, it is difficult to find any grammatical support for the interpretation of NAB; it appears rather to be an attempt to force a theological judgment on the text.

The clause is also difficult to interpret for other reasons. First, *some* may refer exclusively to the eleven disciples (“some of the disciples”) or to others outside the group of the disciples (“some other disciples”). But even if the exegesis of RSV and TEV (*the eleven*) is accepted, then two possibilities still result: (1) “All eleven of the disciples worshiped Jesus, even though some of them had their doubts”; and (2) “Some of the eleven disciples worshiped Jesus, but others of them only doubted.” If the alternative exegesis is followed, then once again two possibilities result: (1) “The eleven disciples worshiped Jesus, while a larger group of disciples who were there only doubted”; and (2) “The eleven disciples worshiped Jesus, as did some others in the larger group of disciples who were there, but others of them doubted.”

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NIV New International Version

TEV Today’s English Version

NAB New American Bible

NJB New Jerusalem Bible

RSV Revised Standard Version

The second major concern is that of the time perspective of the two events (“doubting” and “worshiping”), which Matthew almost with certainty regards as simultaneous. Moreover, since he specifically identifies only the eleven as the participants in the event, it is logical to conclude that he conceives of them all as both doubting and believing. The nearest grammatical antecedent to this construction is found in 26.66, where “they” in Greek is the same as *some* here: “They answered, ‘He deserves death.’ ” This cannot possibly be taken to mean “Some of them answered”; it must mean “They all answered.” On the basis of this grammatical pattern, one is forced to conclude: all eleven saw him, all eleven worshiped him, and yet all eleven doubted! Thus one can translate “When they saw him, they worshiped him, even though they were not completely sure that it was Jesus.” In this same regard it is of interest to note that the only other occurrence of the verb “doubt” in Matthew’s Gospel has the disciples as its subject (14.31). *Doubted* is often expanded to “doubted it was Jesus” or “were not sure it was really him.” It is also “them” (that is, the eleven) to whom the risen Lord announces his authority (verse 18), gives the commission (verses 19–20a), and grants the promise of his presence (verse 20b). It is this word that dispels doubt and evokes faith!

*Matthew 28.18.*

*Jesus came* translates the same verb used of Jesus in 17.7. TEV renders it as “drew near,” which is more natural in English.

*All authority ... has been given to me* may need to be reformulated as an active construction with God as the expressed agent: “God has given me all authority” (GeCL). Or, on the basis of verse 19, it may be even better to render “My Father (in heaven) has given me all authority.”

Jesus first declares his *authority* in 7.29; see discussion there for the other places where similar declarations are made of Jesus. *All authority in heaven and on earth* may need to be expressed as “complete authority over all (living) creatures in heaven and on earth.”

*Matthew 28.19.*

*Go ... baptizing ... teaching* (verse 20) are each participles dependent upon the main verb *make disciples of*. But in such a construction it is not uncommon for the participles themselves to assume the force of an imperative. However, the command to *make disciples* is the primary command, while the commands to baptize and teach are ways of fulfilling the primary command. TEV, NJB, GeCL, Lu, together with a number of other modern translations, translate all of the four verb forms as imperatives: “*Go ... make ... disciples ... baptize ... teach* (verse 20)” (TEV). Of the contemporary translations, RSV and NIV are in the minority as they follow the pattern set by KJV, which renders “baptizing” and “teaching” as participles.

*All nations* (TEV “*all peoples everywhere*”) continues the concept of all-inclusiveness which is emphasized throughout verses 18b–20: “All authority ... all nations ... all that I have commanded ... always.”

*Make disciples of* is also used with a causative force in Acts 14.21; the only other occurrences of this verb in the New Testament are in Matthew 13.52 (“has been trained”) and 27.57 (“was a

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GeCL German common language version

Lu Luther revised (German)

KJV King James Version

disciple”). The notion of discipleship is integral to the Gospel of Matthew, where the noun “disciple” is used seventy-two times.

To *make disciples of all nations* has been translated by Brc as “make the people of all nations my disciples.”

The disciples are to proceed with their work by *baptizing* the people of all nations. (Notice that in most languages one can baptize people, not nations.) “Baptism” was discussed at 3.1.

That baptism should be *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* is stated only here in the New Testament. In fact a trinitarian formula is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in 2 Corinthians 13.14 (TEV 13.13), where it forms part of a benediction.

Elsewhere in the New Testament baptism is done only “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2.38); “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8.16).

*In the name of* means “by the authority of”; most translations retain the literal form, perhaps under the influence of church tradition. In some cases the phrase will have to be used with all three authorities, as in “in the name of the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit.”

There will be languages where *the Father* will have to be “God the Father,” but it would not be normal to render *the Son* by “Jesus the Son,” if for no other reason than that it is Jesus himself speaking here. “God the Son” is certainly the way most churches understand this phrase, but it should not be added to the translation. (On the other hand “God the Father” will have been used by many throughout the Gospel of Matthew.)

For *Holy Spirit* see discussion at 1.18.

*Matthew 28.20.*

*Teaching* is best interpreted as the equivalent of an imperative (see comment at verse 19).

Some translations render *them* to include only those who have been baptized, and others make it refer to the people of all nations. Probably a reference to all people is more natural, since the command of Jesus does not say to baptize only some, and translators should not be specific in this verse in a way the text is not.

*Observe* is used of commandments in 19.17 and of instructions in 23.3; it is also the same verb translated “keep watch” in 27.36, 54, and the participle “guards” (28.4) is also derived from this same verb. Here translators can say “to do all the things I have commanded you” or “to live according to my commandments to you.”

*Commanded* is first used in 4.6 (translated “give ... charge of”); it is found elsewhere in 15.4; 17.9; 19.7. Commentators note that the construction *all that I have commanded* is similar to one that is frequently employed in the Septuagint of God’s commands to Israel (for example, Exo 7.2; 23.22; 29.35; 31.11; Deut 1.41; 4.2; 6.6). Translators can have either “everything I have commanded you” or “all the commands I have given you” (so Brc).

The expression *and lo* is not natural in contemporary English, so most translators drop it. But sometimes it is rendered as “And it will be” or “it will happen that.”

*I am with you always* also has its roots in the Old Testament (see Exo 3.12; Josh 1.5, 9; Isa 41.10; 43.5). It is often more natural to say “I will be with you always (or, at all times).”

*The close of the age* is the same expression used in 13.39. The period indicated here is that which extends from the time of Christ's resurrection-exaltation to the end of the world. Translators can have "until the end of the world (or, the end of time)."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Newman, Barclay Moon ; Stine, Philip C.: *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*. New York : United Bible Societies, 1992 (UBS Helps for Translators; UBS Handbook Series), S. 884

# WORD PICTURES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Convention<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Robertson, A.T.: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, 1997

*Matthew 28:17*

**But some doubted** (οἱ δε ἐδίστασαν [*hoi de edistasan*]). From δις [*dis*] (in two, divided in mind). Cf. Matt. 14:31. The reference is not to the eleven who were all now convinced after some doubt, but to the others present. Paul states that over five hundred were present, most of whom were still alive when he wrote (I Cor. 15:6). It is natural that some should hesitate to believe so great a thing at the first appearance of Jesus to them. Their very doubt makes it easier for us to believe. This was the mountain where Jesus had promised to meet them. This fact explains the large number present. Time and place were arranged beforehand. It was the climax of the various appearances and in Galilee where were so many believers. They worshipped (προσεκυνήσαν [*prosekunēsan*]) Jesus as the women had done (28:9). He is now their Risen Lord and Saviour.

*Matthew 28:18*

**All authority** (πᾶσα ἐξουσία [*pāsa exousia*]). Jesus came close to them (προσελθὼν [*proselthōn*]) and made this astounding claim. He spoke as one already in heaven with a world-wide outlook and with the resources of heaven at his command. His authority or power in his earthly life had been great (7:29; 11:27; 21:23f.). Now it is boundless and includes earth and heaven. **Hath been given** (ἐδόθη [*edothē*]) is a timeless aorist (Robertson, *Grammar*, pp. 836f.). It is the sublimist of all spectacles to see the Risen Christ without money or army or state charging this band of five hundred men and women with world conquest and bringing them to believe it possible and to undertake it with serious passion and power. Pentecost is still to come, but dynamic faith rules on this mountain in Galilee.

*Matthew 28:19*

**All the nations** (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη [*panta ta ethnē*]). Not just the Jews scattered among the Gentiles, but the Gentiles themselves in every land. And not by making Jews of them, though this point is not made plain here. It will take time for the disciples to grow into this *Magna Charta* of the missionary propaganda. But here is the world program of the Risen Christ and it should not be forgotten by those who seek to foreshorten it all by saying that Jesus expected his second coming to be very soon, even within the lifetime of those who heard. He did promise to come, but he has never named the date. Meanwhile we are to be ready for his coming at any time and to look for it joyfully. But we are to leave that to the Father and push on the campaign for world conquest. This program includes making disciples or learners (μαθητεύσατε [*mathēteusate*]) such as they were themselves. That means evangelism in the fullest sense and not merely revival meetings. Baptism in (εἰς [*eis*], not *into*) the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the name of the Trinity. Objection is raised to this language in the mouth of Jesus as too theological and as not a genuine part of the Gospel of Matthew for the same reason. See Matt. 11:27, where Jesus speaks of the Father and the Son as here. But it is all to no purpose. There is a chapter devoted to this subject in my *The Christ of the Logia* in which the genuineness of these words is proven. The name of Jesus is the essential part of it as is shown in the Acts. Trine immersion is not taught as the Greek Church holds and practices, baptism in the name of the Father, then of the Son, then of the Holy Spirit. The use of name (ὄνομα [*onoma*]) here is a common one in the Septuagint and the papyri for power or authority. For the use of εἰς [*eis*] with ὄνομα [*onoma*] in the sense here employed, not meaning *into*, see Matt. 10:41f. (cf. also 12:41).

*Matthew 28:20*

**Teaching them** (διδασκοντες αὐτους [*didaskontes autous*]). Christians have been slow to realize the full value of what we now call religious education. The work of teaching belongs to the home, to the church (sermon, Sunday school, young people's work, prayer-meeting, study classes, mission classes), to the school (not mixing of church and state, but moral instruction if not the reading of the Bible), good books which should be in every home, reading of the Bible itself. Some react too far and actually put education in the place of conversion or regeneration. That is to miss the mark. But teaching is part, a weighty part, of the work of Christians.

**I am with you** (ἐγὼ μετὰ ὑμῶν [*egō meta humōn*]). This is the amazing and blessed promise. He is to be with the disciples when he is gone, with all the disciples, with all knowledge, with all power, with them all the days (all sorts of days, weakness, sorrows, joy, power), till the consummation of the age (ἐως της συντελειας του αἰωνος [*heōs tēs sunteleias tou aiōnos*]). That goal is in the future and unknown to the disciples. This blessed hope is not designed as a sedative to an inactive mind and complacent conscience, but an incentive to the fullest endeavor to press on to the farthest limits of the world that all the nations may know Christ and the power of his Risen Life. So Matthew's Gospel closes in a blaze of glory. Christ is conqueror in prospect and in fact. Christian history from that eventful experience on the Mountain in Galilee has been the fulfilment of that promise in as far as we allow God's power to work in us for the winning of the world to Christ, the Risen, all powerful Redeemer, who is with his people all the time. Jesus employs the prophetic present here (εἰμι [*eimi*], I am). He is with us all the days till he comes in glory.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Robertson, A.T.: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, 1997, S. Mt 28:17-20



# WORD STUDIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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*Volume I*

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

EPISTLES OF PETER, JAMES, AND JUDE

WM. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING CO.

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN, U.S.A.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Vincent, Marvin Richardson: *Word Studies in the New Testament*. Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002, S. 1:iii

17. **Worshipped** (προσεκύνησαν). As in ver. 9. Prostrated themselves. The first time that the disciples are described as doing so.

18. **Came to**. Verse 17 evidently describes the impression made by seeing him at a distance. Possibly from feelings of modesty they had not ventured close to him. Jesus now approaches and addresses them.

**Spake — saying** (ἐλάλησεν — λέγων). Two different words are here used to express speech, with a nice distinction which can hardly be conveyed without paraphrase. The verb λαλεῖν is used of speaking, in contrast with or as a breaking of silence, voluntary or imposed. Thus the dumb man, after he was healed, *spake* (ἐλάλησεν); and Zacharias, when his tongue was loosed, *began to speak* (ἐλάλει). In the use of the word the writer contemplates the *fact* rather than the *substance* of speech. Hence it is used of God (Heb. 1:1), the point being, not *what* God said, but the fact that he spake to men. On the contrary, λέγειν refers to the *matter* of speech. The verb originally means to *pick out*, and hence to use words *selected* as appropriate expressions of thought, and to put such words together in orderly discourse. Here, then, we have Jesus first *breaking silence* (ἐλάλησεν), and then *discoursing* (λέγων).

**Power** (ἐξουσία). Better, *authority*, as Rev.

**Is given** (ἐδόθη). Lit., *was given*, by the divine decree.

19. **Teach** (μαθητεύσατε). Rev., rightly, *make disciples of*.

**In the name** (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα). Rev., correctly, “*into the name*.” Baptizing *into* the name has a twofold meaning. 1. *Unto*, denoting *object* or *purpose*, as εἰς μετάνοιαν, *unto repentance* (Matt. 3:11); εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, *for the remission of sins* (Acts 2:38). 2. *Into*, denoting *union* or *communion with*, as Rom. 6:3, “baptized *into* Christ Jesus; *into* his death;” i.e., we are brought by baptism into fellowship with his death. Baptizing into the name of the Holy Trinity implies a spiritual and mystical union with him. Εἰς, *into*, is the preposition commonly used with *baptize*. See Acts 8:16; 19:3, 5; 1 Cor. 1:13, 15; 10:2; Gal. 3:27. In Acts 2:38, however, Peter says, “Be baptized *upon* (ἐπὶ) the name of Jesus Christ; and in Acts 10:48, he commands Cornelius and his friends to be baptized *in* (ἐν) the name of the Lord. To be baptized *upon* the name is to be baptized on the confession of that which the name implies: *on the ground of* the name; so that the name Jesus, as the contents of the faith and confession, is the ground upon which the becoming baptized rests. *In* the name (ἐν) has reference to the *sphere* within which alone true baptism is accomplished. The *name* is not the mere *designation*, a sense which would give to the baptismal formula merely the force of a *charm*. The *name*, as in the Lord’s Prayer (“Hallowed be thy name”), is the expression of the sum total of the divine Being: not his *designation* as God or Lord, but the formula in which all his attributes and characteristics are summed up. It is equivalent to his *person*. The finite mind can deal with him only through his name; but his name is of no avail detached from his nature. When one is baptized into the name of the Trinity, he professes to acknowledge and appropriate God in all that he is and in all that he does for man. He recognizes and depends upon God the Father as his Creator and Preserver; receives Jesus Christ

as his only Mediator and Redeemer, and his pattern of life; and confesses the Holy Spirit as his Sanctifier and Comforter.

**Alway** (πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας). Lit., *all the days*. Wyc., *in all days*.

20. **End of the world** (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). Rev., in margin, and lit., *consummation of the age*. The current age is meant; and the *consummation* is coincident with the second coming of Christ, after the Gospel shall have been proclaimed throughout the world. “The Saviour’s mind goes no farther; for after that, evangelizing work will cease. No man, after that, will need to teach his neighbor, saying, ‘Know the Lord’ ” (Jer. 31:34:) (Morison “On Matthew”).

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Wyc. Wycliffe’s Version of the New Testament.

<sup>6</sup>Vincent, Marvin Richardson: *Word Studies in the New Testament*. Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2002, S. 1:148-150

## Notes for The NET Bible®



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#### Notes for 28:16

<sup>22</sup> **tn** Here *δέ* (*de*) has been translated as “so” to indicate the implied result of Jesus’ instructions in v. 10.

#### Notes for 28:17

<sup>23</sup> **tn** Here *καί* (*kai*) has not been translated.

<sup>24</sup> **tn** The word “him” is not in the Greek text, but is implied. Direct objects were frequently omitted in Greek when clear from the context.

<sup>25</sup> **tn** The Greek text reads here *οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν* (*hoi de edistasan*). Some scholars argue that the article is functioning like a personal pronoun, thus “they doubted” (e.g., D. A. Hagner, *Matthew* [WBC], 2:884). If so, then all the disciples would be in view. The translation of the text takes *οἱ* as an alternative pronoun which has a partitive notion (i.e., some of the disciples doubted, but not all). The difficulty with the personal pronoun view is that there are no examples of it in Matthew in which the same subject immediately precedes with its own verb (as would be the case in “they worshiped...they doubted”). Such, in fact, would be quite awkward, for the article would be unnecessary since the pronominal referent is already embedded in the verb. The only reason for the article here would be to distinguish the subject in some way; but if the same subject is in view, no distinction is being made.

#### Notes for 28:18

<sup>26</sup> **tn** *Grk* “coming, Jesus spoke to them, saying.” The participle *λέγων* (*legōn*, “saying”) is redundant in contemporary English and has not been translated. Here *καί* (*kai*) has been translated as “then” to indicate the implied sequence of events within the narrative.

#### Notes for 28:19

<sup>27</sup> **tn** “Go...baptize...teach” are participles modifying the imperative verb “make disciples.” According to *ExSyn* 645 the first participle (*πορευθέντες*, *poreuthentes*, “Go”) fits the typical structural pattern for the attendant circumstance participle (aorist participle preceding aorist main verb, with the mood of the main verb usually imperative or indicative) and thus picks up the mood (imperative in this case) from the main verb (*μαθητεύσατε*, *mathēteusate*, “make disciples”). This means that semantically the action of “going” is commanded, just as “making disciples” is. As for the two participles that follow the main verb (*βαπτίζοντες*, *baptizontes*, “baptizing”; and *διδάσκοντες*, *didaskontes*, “teaching”), these do not fit the normal pattern for attendant circumstance participles, since they are present participles and follow the aorist main verb. However, some interpreters do see them as carrying additional imperative force in context. Others regard them as means, manner, or even result.

<sup>28</sup> **tc** Although some scholars have denied that the trinitarian baptismal formula in the Great Commission was a part of the original text of Matthew, there is no ms support for their

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<sup>7</sup>Biblical Studies Press: *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*. Biblical Studies Press, 2006; 2006

contention. F. C. Conybeare, “The Eusebian Form of the Text of Mt. 28:19, ” *ZNW* 2 (1901): 275-88, based his view on a faulty reading of Eusebius’ quotations of this text. The shorter reading has also been accepted, on other grounds, by a few other scholars. For discussion (and refutation of the conjecture that removes this baptismal formula), see B. J. Hubbard, *The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning* (SBLDS 19), 163–64, 167–75; and Jane Schaberg, *The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit* (SBLDS 61), 27–29.

### Notes for 28:20

<sup>29</sup> **tn** The Greek word ἰδοὺ (*idou*) has been translated here as “remember” (BDAG 468 s.v. 1.c).

<sup>30</sup> **sn** *I am with you*. Matthew’s Gospel begins with the prophecy that the Savior’s name would be “Emmanuel, that is, ‘God *with* us,’” (1:23, in which the author has linked Isa 7:14 and 8:8, 10 together) and it ends with Jesus’ promise to be *with* his disciples forever. The Gospel of Matthew thus forms an inclusio about Jesus in his relationship to his people that suggests his deity.

<sup>31</sup> **tc** Most MSS (A<sup>c</sup> Θ f<sup>13</sup> M it sy) have ἀμήν (*amēn*, “amen”) at the end of v. 20. Such a conclusion is routinely added by scribes to NT books because a few of these books originally had such an ending (cf. Rom 16:27; Gal 6:18; Jude 25). A majority of Greek witnesses have the concluding ἀμήν in every NT book except Acts, James, and 3 John (and even in these books, ἀμήν is found in some witnesses). It is thus a predictable variant. Further, no good reason exists for the omission of the particle in significant and early witnesses such as ⱼ A\* B D W f<sup>1</sup> 33 *al* lat sa.

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*ZNW Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* (a journal)

SBLDS Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series (a series of published dissertations)

<sup>8</sup>Biblical Studies Press: *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*. Biblical Studies Press, 2006; 2006, S. Mt 28:16-20

# **STUDY BIBLES**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

**THE**

**KING JAMES**

**STUDY BIBLE**

THOMAS NELSON PUBLISHERS  
Nashville

**The King James Version Study Bible**  
(previously published as The Liberty Annotated Study Bible and as  
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<sup>9</sup> *King James Version Study Bible* . electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1988, S. Ge 1:1



**28:16, 17.** Now instead of sending His disciples back to the house of Israel, they are sent into all the world. The kingdom rejected by the Jews will now be offered to the Gentiles in accordance with Jesus' earlier parables. This appearance in **Galilee** is not to be confused with the appearances at Jerusalem and is probably the same as the appearance to "above five hundred brethren" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:6), with the **eleven** being among them. This is further implied by the statement **they worshiped him: but some doubted**, which would be unlikely of the Eleven after the earlier appearances and the "doubting Thomas" incident. The Greek verb *distazō* may also be translated "hesitated" in the sense that while they obviously saw Him, they hesitated to offer Him such unbounded worship.

**28:18–20.** The Great Commission brings the first Gospel to its grand finale. Christianity is not represented here as the mere reverential devotion of disappointed men who honor their martyred leader. Here is a far different scene. The triumphant, living Lord sends forth His ambassadors to proclaim His gospel throughout all the world. The Great Commission is not just an order but a pronouncement of victory (*mundus regium Christi*) by the risen Savior through His disciples. **All power** or authority (Gr. *exousia*) is now in the hands of Christ, in heaven and on the earth. On the basis of that authority and power the Christian disciple is to carry out the Great Commission of the church. **Go ye**, though a participle, conveys the force of a command: "Go." In other words, the idea expressed is that you must go and make disciples. **Teach all nations** can be translated "disciple all nations." Thus the converting influence of the gospel is indicated here. The "all nations" clearly indicates that the commission to the church is a worldwide one, encompassing the entire missionary effort. The church is not to be merely "missionary-minded." The church is the vehicle of Christ's mission to the world.

**Baptizing** the converted disciples is the first step of outward obedience to the Lord. "Baptize" (Gr. *baptizō*) is an English transliteration, and means to "dip," or "immerse," thus indicating its proper mode. Nowhere does this term ever indicate "sprinkling" or "pouring." These converts are to be baptized **in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**. The "name" is singular, followed by an elliptical clause indicating that one name is the name of each person of the Trinity. While baptismal references in Acts refer to being baptized in Jesus' name (emphasizing His deity as Savior), they in no way eliminate or contradict the significance of this formula given by Christ Himself.

The closing promise, though given to the apostles, is transmitted by every generation of believers (cf. John 17:20). Christ's promise of His presence, **I am with you always**, guarantees the success of the church's mission because it is really His mission carried out by His called-out disciples. The phrase **unto the end of the world** means until the end of the "age" (Gr. *aiōn*). Therefore Christ's empowerment of the church to evangelize the world is available in every age, even unto the end of the church age. In comparing the Great Commission with Jesus' promise to continually build His church (ch. 18), we must conclude that He intended His church always to be spiritually militant and evangelistically aggressive as we take His claims of lordship to the entire world of our generation.

### Trinity

**28:19.** Trinity designates one eternal God in unity, yet existing in three eternal persons. The members of the Trinity are equal in nature, distinct in person, and subordinate in duties.

**Illustration:** As the Son is eternally begotten by the Father, so Jesus is submissive to do the

work of the Father, yet equal in nature to Him. The Father is the source of authority, the Son is the channel, and the Holy Spirit the agent whereby authority is exercised. **Application:** Because each member of the Trinity is God, *and* a distinct person, each should be so recognized in worship by the Christian (Gen. 48:15; Num. 6:24–26; Is. 6:3). (First Reference, Gen. 1:26; Primary Reference, Matt. 28:19; cf. Matt. 6:9.)

### **Deity of the Holy Spirit**

**28:19.** There is no shortage of biblical evidence for the deity of the Holy Spirit. He is spoken of in Scripture as God. The attributes of God are assigned to Him, He is engaged in the work of God, and He receives honor due only to God. Further, He was recognized as God by the early church both in the baptismal formula (v. 19) and in the apostolic benediction (2 Cor. 13:14). Finally, the words of the Holy Spirit are recognized as being the words of God. **Illustration:** The apostle Paul recognized the deity of the Holy Spirit in his ministry when he followed the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:7). **Application:** One of the biblical characteristics of believers is that they are led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14). (First Reference, Gen. 1:2; Primary Reference, Matt. 28:19; cf. John 15:26.)

### **Purpose of the Church**

**28:19.** The controlling purpose of the local church is to make disciples of all kinds of people. Those who are evangelized and converted should then be baptized, attesting to their identification with Christ and the local body of believers. The final phase of the Great Commission is to train disciples in Christian knowledge and for effective service. A church cannot choose one aspect of its responsibility and neglect the others. The Great Commission is a simple command with three steps—evangelism, baptism, and education. **Illustration:** The Great Commission is the strategy by which the church at Jerusalem saturated its community with the gospel. **Application:** Every Christian should determine that his ministry for Christ in the church upholds God’s objectives for that institution. (First Reference, Matt. 16:18; Primary Reference, Matt. 28:19; cf. Phil. 1:27.)

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<sup>10</sup> *King James Version Study Bible* . electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1988, S. Mt 28:16

# Nelson Study Bible

New King James Version

Earl D. Radmacher, Th.D.  
General Editor

Ronald B. Allen, Th.D.  
Old Testament Editor

H. Wayne House, Th.D., J.D.  
New Testament Editor

THOMAS NELSON PUBLISHERS  
Nashville

**The Nelson Study Bible**  
**New King James Version**

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<sup>11</sup>Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *The Nelson Study Bible : New King James Version*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1997, S. Ge 1:1

**28:16, 17** When **the eleven disciples went away into Galilee** they were probably accompanied by many more people. This may be the appearance to more than five hundred people mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:6. This may explain why **some doubted**; after all, the eleven were confirmed believers in the resurrected Christ by this time (see John 20:19–28).

**28:18 All authority has been given** to Jesus, although He is not yet exercising all of it (see Phil. 2:9–11; Heb. 2:5–9; 10:12, 13; Rev. 3:21). He will manifest this power when He returns in all His glory (see 19:28; 1 Cor. 15:27, 28; Eph. 1:10). The word *authority* normally refers to delegated authority (as in 8:9; 9:6, 8; 10:1; 21:23, 24, 27). The Father would give this authority to the Son (Phil. 2:9–11). Here the Lord Jesus may have been recalling the prophecy recorded in Dan. 7:13, 14.

**28:19, 20 Therefore** shows that the Great Commission rests on the authority of Christ. Because He has authority over all, everyone needs to hear His gospel. While vv. 18–20 are commonly known as the Great Commission, they should not be thought of as the first call for world evangelism. See Gen. 12:1–3 for God’s command that Abraham and his descendants should be a blessing to all nations. **make disciples:** Making *disciples* involves three steps: going, baptizing, and teaching. It was assumed that when a person trusted in the Lord Jesus, he or she would be baptized. The word **name** is singular, although it is the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together. This verse is another indication that God is one in three Persons. **I am with you always** demonstrates that Jesus is the true Immanuel, “God with us” (see 1:23; Heb. 13:5, 6; Rev. 21:3).

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<sup>12</sup>Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *The Nelson Study Bible : New King James Version*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1997, S. Mt 28:16

THE  
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LIFE PRINCIPLES BIBLE  
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GENERAL EDITOR

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<sup>13</sup>Stanley, Charles F.: *The Charles F. Stanley Life Principles Bible : New King James Version*. Nashville, TN : Nelson Bibles, 2005

➤ **28:17** — *When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.*

God has set up this world so that an element of faith is always required to connect with Him. Why did some doubt? Had Jesus' appearance dramatically changed? The real question is, *will we trust Him?*

➤ **28:18, 19** — *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations .... ”*

We can confidently bring the truth of Jesus to the world because we have Jesus' divine authority to back it up. Our job is to be His faithful messengers; His job is to prosper His Word.

## ANSWERS TO LIFE'S QUESTIONS

Do I have a role to play in  
communicating God's truth to  
others?

**MATT. 28:19 20**

God never gives us anything to keep for ourselves. Whether it is money, insight, or truth, He calls us to share it.

Jesus told us to make disciples of all the nations, “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19, 20). Just before He ascended to heaven, He told His disciples, “you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Jesus let His disciples know that they were not to keep the truth He had taught them in some personal reservoir of knowledge. They were to give away everything they had received.

Paul admonished his young pupil, Timothy, to communicate the truth he had learned to others who would, in turn, pass it along (2 Tim. 2:2). Elsewhere he noted that we are “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20). The sole purpose of ambassadors is to relay the policies and decisions of their superiors to the people of the countries where they serve. We have an obligation to declare the divine plan and scriptural policies of our Master.

Each of us communicates something by what we say and don’t say, by what we do and fail to do. A father who never reads the Bible states that he’s smart enough to make his own decisions without input from God. The child who never sees her parents praying learns that trials and tribulations can be handled without any direction from the Lord. On the other hand, a father who tells his family, “We are going to trust the Lord to provide us with what we need,” declares that God can be trusted in every facet of life.

Even when we remain silent, we subtly state something. Although the apostle Peter recognized the Gentiles as rightful recipients of God’s grace, he developed the bad habit of withdrawing from them during meals. His fellow Jews soon picked up on his prideful practice, with the result “that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy” (Gal. 2:13). Without a word, Peter had effectively sent a message that the Gentiles were inferior.

We must honestly evaluate our responses to God’s communications. Are we deliberately and daily applying what God has taught us over the years? When we comprehend the truth, are we conforming ourselves

to the image of Christ? Are we then communicating this truth to others?

*See the Life Principles Index for further study:*

21. *Obedience always brings blessing.*
25. *God blesses us so that we might bless others.*

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<sup>14</sup>Stanley, Charles F.: *The Charles F. Stanley Life Principles Bible : New King James Version*. Nashville, TN : Nelson Bibles, 2005, S. Mt 28:17-20



*The*  
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<sup>15</sup>MacArthur, John Jr: *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S.  
Ge 1:1

**28:16 the eleven disciples.** This does not mean that only the 11 were present. The fact that some there “doubted” (v. 17) strongly suggests that more than the 11 were present. It is likely that Christ arranged this meeting in Galilee because that was where most of His followers were. This seems the most likely location for the massive gathering of disciples Paul describes in 1 Cor. 15:6 (*see note on v. 7*).

**28:17 but some doubted.** That simple phrase is one of countless testimonies to the integrity of Scripture. The transparent honesty of a statement like this shows that Matthew was not attempting to exclude or cover up facts that might lessen the perfection of such a glorious moment.

**28:18 All authority.** See 11:27; John 3:35. Absolute sovereign authority—lordship over all—is handed to Christ, “in heaven and on earth.” This is clear proof of His deity. The time of His humiliation was at an end, and God had exalted Him above all (Phil. 2:9–11).

**28:19 therefore.** I.e., on the basis of His authority, the disciples were sent to “make disciples of all nations.” The sweeping scope of their commission is consummate with His unlimited authority. **in the name of the Father ... Son and ... Holy Spirit.** The formula is a strong affirmation of trinitarianism.

**28:20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.** The kind of evangelism called for in this commission does not end with the conversion of the unbeliever. **I am with you.** There’s a touching echo of the beginning of Matthew’s gospel here. Immanuel (1:23) “which is translated, ‘God with us’”—remains “with” us “even to the end of the age”—i.e., until He returns bodily to judge the world and establish His earthly kingdom.

<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>MacArthur, John Jr: *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Word Pub., 1997, c1997, S. Mt 28:16

# SPIRIT FILLED LIFE STUDY BIBLE

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*Unveiling All God's Fullness*  
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**28:17** Though **some doubted**, it is important to note that the church's "Great Commission" is born in a context of worship.

## KINGDOM DYNAMICS

**28:18 Commissioned Under the King's Call, WORLD EVANGELISM.** Since Matthew's theme is Christ as King, it is unsurprising Jesus' final commission to His disciples reflects His global perspective. In teaching kingdom life and principles ("kingdom" appears over 50 times in Matt.), Jesus leads His followers to think, live, and pray that His kingdom come to our entire planet (6:10). In ch. 13, His parables illustrated the kingdom's global expansion (v. 33). As His disciples began to minister, He told them to preach everywhere: "The kingdom of God is at hand." Then, before His ascension, the King gave the Great Commission. This climaxing command to go to all nations directed that their teaching and preaching seek to bring all nations into His kingdom (28:18-20). Prophetically, He forecast that the end would come only as "this gospel of the kingdom" was preached "in all the world as a witness to all nations" (24:14). "Nations" (Greek *ethne*) means "people groupings"—today, about 22,000 on this globe.

**28:18** See section 7 of Truth-In-Action through the Synoptics at the end of Luke.

**28:18** The humiliated Servant is now the exalted Lord, having received the authority promised in Dan. 7:14.

**28:19** While Jesus' ministry had been to Israel (see 10:5, 6), proclamation of and adherence to His lordship is extended to **all the nations**. **Disciples** are to acknowledge openly their allegiance to Christ by the seal of water baptism, which is ministered under the authority of the entire godhead.

## WORD WEALTH

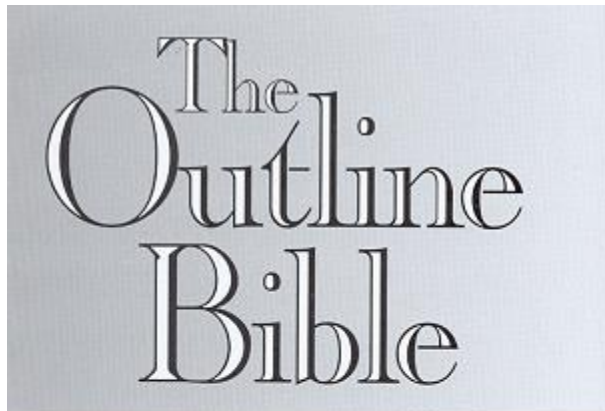
**28:20 age, *aion*** (ah-ee-ohn); Strong's #165: Denotes an indefinitely long period, with emphasis on the characteristics of the period rather than on its duration. In idiomatic usage it designates "forever" or "forever and ever" (21:19; Rom. 16:27; Eph. 3:21). The word is also used as a designation for the present age (Matt. 12:32; 13:22; 1 Tim. 6:17) and for the time after Christ's Second Coming (Mark 10:30; Luke 20:35).

**28:20** The content of the apostles' future teaching will stem from what Jesus had **commanded** them. Jesus assures them of His constant presence as they go on their divinely commanded mission.

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<sup>18</sup> *Spirit Filled Life Study Bible*. electronic ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1991



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<sup>19</sup>Willmington, H. L.: *The Outline Bible*. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 1999

## SECTION OUTLINE TWENTY-SEVEN (MATTHEW 28)

In this final chapter, Matthew records two postresurrection appearances of Jesus.

### I. Jesus' Appearance to Two Women (28:1–15)

#### A. The action preceding this appearance (28:1–8)

1. *The arrival at the tomb* (28:1): Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to the tomb.
2. The angel beside the tomb (28:2–8)

#### B. His radiance (28:2–4): His face shines like lightning, and his clothing is a brilliant white, causing the guards to become as dead men in their fear!

#### C. His reassurance (28:5–6): He announces the resurrection of Christ from the dead!

#### D. His request (28:7–8): The women are to tell the disciples this glorious news, informing them the Savior will meet them in Galilee.

#### E. The action during this appearance (28:9–10)

1. The women meet Jesus (28:9a).
2. The women hear Jesus (28:9b).
3. The women worship Jesus (28:9c).
4. *The women obey Jesus* (28:10) : Again they are to remind the disciples concerning the Galilean meeting.

#### F. The action following this appearance (28:11–15): The frightened guards tell the chief priests what happened at Jesus' tomb.

1. *First they tell the truth* (28:11): The soldiers give a factual account concerning what happened at the tomb.
2. *Then they sell the truth* (28:12–15): For a sum of money they agree to lie, claiming the disciples of Jesus stole his body!

### II. Jesus' Appearance to the Eleven Disciples (28:16–20)

#### A. The mountain (28:16): They meet on a mountain in Galilee as he had instructed them.

- B. The mixed reaction (28:17): Some worship him, while others still doubt.
- C. The mandate (28:18–20)
  - 1. *Jesus' authority* (28:18) : He has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.
  - 2. *Jesus' assignment* (28:19–20a): They are to reach and teach all nations.
  - 3. *Jesus' assurance* (28:20b): He will always be with them!

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<sup>20</sup>Willmington, H. L.: *The Outline Bible*. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 1999, S. Mt 28:20

# COMMENTARIES



# NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

*By*  
WILLIAM HENDRIKSEN  
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*of the*  
*Gospel According to Matthew*  
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<sup>21</sup>Hendriksen, William ; Kistemaker, Simon J.: *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*. Grand Rapids : Baker Book House, 1953-2001 (New Testament Commentary 9),  
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28:16–20 *The Great Claim; The Great Commission; The Great Comfort*  
Cf. Mark 16:14–18; Luke 24:36–49; John 20:19–23; Acts 1:9–11

16 So the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them to go. 17 And when they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came nearer and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in(to) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and remember, I am with you day in day out until the close of the age.”<sup>905</sup>

**16. So the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them to go.** Note “eleven.” Judas has gone to “his own place” (Acts 1:25). These eleven went to Galilee, for that is where Jesus had promised to meet them (26:32), and where the women, upon the instruction of the angel and of Jesus himself (28:7, 10) had directed them to go. In the previous references no mention was made of any mountain. Whether this can be explained by assuming that such passages as the ones already mentioned—26:32; 28:7, 10 and their parallels in Mark—give us an abbreviated account of what was spoken, or whether the risen Savior had indicated this mountain at one of his other appearances, we do not know.

What we do know is that it was certainly kind of the risen Savior to meet with his disciples at a place in the neighborhood of where their homes were, and where many friends and fellow believers were living. This mountain must have been a place of picturesque scenery and subdued quietness—away from the turmoil of the busy cities and villages. Above all, a scene of tender reminiscences, both for Jesus himself and for his followers, reminding them of what had happened earlier; perhaps on this particular elevation, perhaps on others (Matt. 5:1; 14:23; 15:29; 17:1; Mark 3:13; John 6:3, 15). It was on a mountain that Jesus had called his disciples; it was also on a mountain that he would take his leave from them.

About a dozen appearances of the risen Christ are recorded in Scripture. See the list, together with references, in N.T.C. on the Gospel according to John, Vol. II, p. 477. It is very well possible that the present appearance to the eleven coincides with, or is part of, the appearance to “the five hundred brothers” (I Cor. 15:6), the majority of whom were still alive when Paul wrote I Corinthians.

When the Lord ascended to heaven this event occurred not in Galilee but from the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem. For that story one must turn to Luke 24:50, 51; and to Acts 1:4–11. Except for the summarizing statement in the disputed portion of Mark’s Gospel (see Mark 16:19), the *story* of the ascension is found only in the writings of Luke. But the *fact* itself is confirmed by ever so many passages (e.g., John 6:62; 14:2, 12; 16:5, 10, 16, 17, 28; 17:5; 20:17; Eph. 1:20–23; 4:8–10; Phil. 2:9; I Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:3; 2:9; 4:14; 9:24; Rev. 12:5).

Returning then to Galilee, and to the account of the last appearance of Jesus that is recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, and may have taken place very shortly before the ascension, we read: **17. And when they saw him, they worshiped him, but some doubted.** When the disciples suddenly saw Jesus they fell down before him in the act of worship.<sup>906</sup> Some, however, doubted.

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<sup>905</sup> Or: the consummation of the age. Or: the end of the world.

<sup>906</sup> The verb is προσεκύνησαν, third per. pl. aor. indic. of προσκυνέω. In the Gospel according to Matthew this verb occurs again and again (2:2, 8, 11; 4:9, 10; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 18:26; 20:20; 28:9,

From the very beginning the disciples had difficulty believing that Jesus had actually risen from the dead (Luke 24:10, 11). When ten finally believed it, one (Thomas) was still unconvinced. He, too, became convinced (John 20:24–29). Must we believe that shortly before the ascension there were still a few of the disciples who disbelieved the fact of Christ's resurrection? Probably not. Of that fact all, no doubt, were by this time thoroughly convinced. However, another question was whether *this* man, who suddenly appears to them here in Galilee, was the risen Christ. Was he perhaps someone else?

Many solutions have been offered with respect to this problem. Could it be that the most simple one is also the best, namely, that at first this mysterious person appears to them from a considerable distance? He then steps closer, and the doubt disappeared, though this is not recorded in so many words. What we read is: **18. Then Jesus came nearer and spoke to them, saying....** Jesus steps forward, so that they may be able to see and hear him better. Then follows the great claim, the great commission, and the great comfort.

#### *The Great Claim*

**All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.** Cf. Dan. 7:14; Matt. 16:28; 24:30; 26:64. Jesus is here claiming all power and right to exercise it. When he says, "To me has been given" we naturally interpret this to mean that he is referring to a gift he has received as Resurrected Mediator. One might add: "as a reward upon his accomplished mediatorial work, the atonement which he rendered." But did he not make a somewhat similar claim long before his death and resurrection? See 11:27. Not only this, but did he not, even during the days of his humiliation, exercise power over every sickness, including leprosy, and over hunger, demons, winds and waves, human hearts, death even? Did he not prove this on many occasions? True, but there is, nevertheless, an important difference. Before his triumph over death the enjoyment of that gift was always in some way curtailed. For example, he must tell the leper not to make known that he was cured (8:4). The blind men whose eyes were opened receive a similar order (9:30). He is kept from calling on the Father to send legions of angels to rescue him (26:53). To be sure, he himself does not desire this help, but self-restraint is also restraint. He does indeed raise from the dead the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow at Nain, and Lazarus. At the moment of his death some saints are raised. But though all of this was indeed astounding, it is not the same as actually exercising unlimited power over both heaven and earth, having it proclaimed everywhere without any restriction, and then at the end of the age raising *all* the dead, and judging *all* men. It is the investiture of the risen Christ with such unrestricted, universal sovereignty, that Jesus now claims and which, especially within a few days, that is after his ascension to heaven, he is beginning to exercise. That is the reward upon his labors (Eph. 1:19–23; Phil. 2:9, 10; Rev. 5; etc.).

Why does Jesus make known this claim? Answer: so that when he now commissions his apostles to proclaim the gospel throughout the world, they may know that moment by moment, day by day, they can lean on him. Is not this the clear teaching of such precious passages as John 16:33; Acts 26:16–18; Phil. 4:13; and Rev. 1:9–20? Not only this, but these apostles and those that follow afterward must demand that everyone, *in every sphere of life*, shall joyfully acknowledge Jesus as "Lord of lords and king of kings" (Rev. 17:14). "The Great Claim" is therefore a fitting introduction to:

#### *The Great Commission*

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17). It indicates dropping to one's knees in worship or in worshipful adoration. See especially on 2:11; 8:2; and 14:33.

**19, 20a. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in(to) the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** We might say that this passage is of such fundamental significance that something should be said about each word or combination of words.

*“Go”*

This stands in rather sharp contrast to “Go not” of 10:5. Cf. 15:24. It is clear that the particularism of the pre-resurrection period has now definitely made place for universalism. Not as if Jesus has changed his mind. It is very clear from the story of the non-Jewish wise men (2:1–12), who came to worship the newborn King, and from such other passages as 8:11, 12; 15:28; 21:43; 22:8–10, that from the very beginning the evangelization of the world was included in the purpose of God. See also John 3:16; 10:16. Matthew too, as has been pointed out, had nothing less than this in mind. But as was stated in connection with 10:5, “In God’s plan it was *from Jerusalem* that the gospel must spread out among the nations.” Cf. Acts 1:8. Therefore the divinely instituted order was, “To the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). The time to make earnest preparations for the propagation of the gospel throughout the world had now arrived.

“Go” also implies that the disciples—and this holds for God’s children in general—must not concentrate all their thought on “coming” to church. They must also “go” to bring the precious tidings to others. Of course, they cannot “go” unless they have first of all “come,” and unless they keep coming as well as going. They cannot give unless they are willing to receive.

*“Therefore”*

This has already been explained in connection with “The Great Claim.” Briefly it means: Go, *a.* because your Lord has so ordered; *b.* because he has promised to impart all the needed strength; and *c.* because he is worthy of the homage, faith, and obedience of all men.

*“Make Disciples”*

Literally the original says, “Having gone, therefore, make disciples....” In such cases the participle as well as the verb that follows it can be—in the present case must be—interpreted as having imperative force. “Make disciples” is by itself an imperative. It is a brisk command, an order.

But just what is meant by “make disciples”? It is not exactly the same as “make converts,” though the latter is surely implied. See above on 3:2; 4:17. The term “make disciples” places somewhat more stress on the fact that the mind, as well as the heart and the will, must be won for God. A disciple is *a pupil, a learner*. See on 13:52. Also, see on 11:29 for words related to it in the English language.

The apostle, then, must proclaim the truth and the will of God to the world. It is necessary that sinners *learn* about their own lost condition, God, his plan of redemption, his love, his law, etc. This however, is not enough. True *discipleship* implies much more. Mere mental understanding does not as yet make one a disciple. It is part of the picture, in fact an important part, but only a part. The truth learned must be practiced. It must be appropriated by heart, mind, and will, so that one *remains* or *abides* in the truth. Only then is one truly Christ’s “disciple” (John 8:31).

Not every person who presents himself as a candidate for church membership should immediately be accorded all the rights and privileges pertaining to such membership. There are expositors who place all the emphasis on “The wedding-hall was filled with guests” (Matt. 22:10). They forget verses 11–14.

*“Of All the Nations”*

See above, under the heading “Go.”

*“Baptizing Them in(to) the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”*

The main verb is “Make disciples.” Subordinate to this are: *a.* baptizing them, and *b.* teaching them. In such a construction it would be completely wrong to say that because the word *baptizing* precedes the word *teaching*, therefore people must be baptized before they are taught. It is rather natural that baptizing is mentioned first, for while a person is baptized once (ordinarily), he continues throughout his life to be taught.

The concepts “baptizing” and “teaching” are simply two activities, in co-ordination with each other, but both subordinate to “make disciples.” In other words, by means of being baptized and being taught a person becomes a disciple, with the understanding, of course, that this individual is ready for baptism and is willing to appropriate the teaching. —The context makes very clear that Jesus is here speaking about those who are old enough to be considered the objects of preaching. He is not here speaking about infants.

To be ready for baptism requires repentance (Acts 2:38, 41). It requires “receiving the word” (Acts 2:41). This also shows that a certain amount of teaching must precede being baptized.

The baptizing must be into the name—note the singular: *one* name; hence *one* God—of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. A *name*, as indicated previously—see on 6:9; 7:22; 10:22, 41, 42; 12:21—represents the one who bears it. “Being baptized into the name of,” therefore means “being brought into vital relationship with” that One, viewed as he has revealed himself.

Should we baptize “in” or “into”? The debate on this has already lasted many years.<sup>907</sup> Now since even in English—at least in conversational style—“in” frequently has the sense of “into”—“Children, come in the house”—a decision on this point may not be quite as important as some try to make it. Nevertheless, all things considered, I believe “into” is defensible. Neither “into” nor “in” is necessarily wrong. A good case can be made for either. But when we say, “I baptize ... in the name of,” this could be understood to mean, “I baptize at the command of,” or “on the authority of,” which certainly is not what is meant. I Cor. 1:13 seems to mean, “Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” Similarly verse 15, “... baptized into my name.” Cf. I Cor. 10:2. And so here in Matt. 28:19, “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” makes good sense.<sup>908</sup>

Not as if the rite of baptism *as such* brings a person into vital union with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But, according to Scripture the following are true: *a.* circumcision was a sign and a seal of the righteousness of Christ accepted by faith (see Rom. 4:11 in its context); *b.* baptism took the place of circumcision (Col. 2:11, 12); *c.* therefore baptism, too, must be regarded as a sign and a seal of the righteousness of Christ accepted by faith.

Accordingly, when through the preaching of the Word a person has been brought from darkness into light, and confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to be the one

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<sup>907</sup> Lenski (*op. cit.*, p. 1155) very definitely rejects “into,” as if it were an absolutely settled matter that this must be rejected. The matter, however, is not nearly as simple as all that. It is a well-known fact that in Koine Greek εἰς often means ἐν, but that does not prove that it *always* must have that meaning. Whether or not it does depends on such matters as whether in any particular passage it is based on Semitic usage, the kind of verbs and nouns with which it is used, etc.

<sup>908</sup> For this argument see H. Bietenhard, art. ὄνομα and related words, Th.D.N.T., Vol. V, p. 275; L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 625. Does not this make Acts 19:3 easier to explain?

Object of his faith, hope, and love, then the sacrament of baptism is the sign and seal that God the Father adopts him as his son and heir; that God the Son washes his sins away by his precious blood; and that God the Holy Spirit dwells in him, and will sanctify him; actually imparting to him that which objectively he already has in Christ, and at last bringing him from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant.

Baptism, therefore, is very important. The one who submits to it, if sincere, is proclaiming that he has broken with the world and has been brought into union with the Triune God, to whom he intends to devote his life.—For “Infant Baptism” see on 19:15.

*“And Teaching Them to Observe All That I Have Commanded You”*

As already remarked, this teaching both precedes and follows baptizing. The early church insisted that before the person to whom the gospel had been proclaimed be admitted to membership he give evidence of genuine repentance and of knowledge of the basics of Christianity. “The early church was interested in edification as well as evangelism, in sanctification as well as conversion, in church government as well as preaching.”<sup>909</sup>

That such teaching should not stop when a person has been baptized is clear from the words, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” Think of:

- a. All of Christ’s marvelous discourses.
- b. All of his parables; both *a.* and *b.* including ever so many “commands,” whether implied or expressed. Among them are:
  - c. Precious “sayings,” such as: “Abide in me ... love each other ... also bear witness” (John 15:4, 12, 27); “Love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44); “Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me” (Luke 9:23).
  - d. Specific predictions and promises or assurances: “He who comes to me will in no way get hungry, and he who believes in me will in no way get thirsty” (John 6:35); “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good courage. I have conquered the world.” Notice the implied directives for Christian conduct.
  - e. Add to this: the lessons on the cross, hypocrisy, proclaiming the gospel; on prayer, humility, trust, the forgiving spirit, the law.
  - f. And is not even the narrative of Christ’s sojourn on earth—the account of his healing, traveling, suffering, death, resurrection, etc.—full of implied “commands”?

“Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,” what an order! First of all for the eleven and for all ordained teachers; but certainly in a sense also for the entire church, the whole membership. Every true member is a witness-bearer.

In view of the fact that after Christ’s ascension there was some hesitancy on the part of Christian leaders to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles (see Acts 10:14, 28; 11:1–3, 19; Gal. 2:11–13), there are those who believe that either the Great Commission is itself a myth, or else the church quickly forgot about it. They contend that in the book of Acts, the epistles, and the book of Revelation no trace of its influence can be detected.

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<sup>909</sup> G. W. Knight, III, *The Faithful Sayings in the Pastoral Epistles*, doctoral dissertation presented to the Free University at Amsterdam, Kampen, 1968, p. 148. Justin Martyr (about A.D. 114–165) states, “As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of their sins.... Then they are brought by us to where there is water ...” *First Apology*, chap. 61. Another very early writing called *The Didache or Teaching of The Twelve Apostles* is generally held to be in part a statement of the rules of Christian conduct that was to be taught to those who were looking forward to being baptized.

How can we be so sure of this? Do not the following passages testify to the possible influence of, among other factors, the Great Commission? See Acts 2:38, 39; 3:25; 4:12; 10:45; 11:1, 18; 13:46–49; 14:27; 15:7–11, 12, 13–19; 17:30; 19:10; 21:19, 20a; 22:15, 21; 26:15–20; 28:28; Rom. 1:5, 14–16; 11:32; Gal. 2:9; 3:28; Eph. 3:8, 9; Col. 3:11; I Tim. 1:15; Rev. 7:9, 10; 22:17.

*The Great Comfort*

**20b. and remember,<sup>910</sup> I am with you day in day out until the close of the age.** Cf. John 14:23; Acts 18:10. There is no vagueness about this assurance. It has been called a promise; it is *a fact*. Note the emphatic introduction: “Remember,” or “Take note,” “Pay close attention,” “Look.” The pronoun “I,” included in the verb, is also written as a separate word and is very emphatic, as if to say, “No one less than I myself am with you.” “With you” not just “forever” but “all the days,” or “day in day out.” Think of these days following each other one by one, each with its own trials, troubles, and difficulties, but each day also accompanied by the assurance, “My grace is sufficient for you. I will never leave you or forsake you.” This continues on and on until the close or consummation of the age. And even then there is nothing to fear; see Matt. 25:31–40.

At the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus Christ assures the church of his constant and comforting presence:

1:23

See p. 133

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel, which, translated, is ‘God with us.’ ”

18:20

See p. 702

“For where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in the midst of them.”

28:20

“And remember, I am with you day in day out until the close of the age.”

*Reflection on Chapter 28*

*Because of Christ’s glorious resurrection we know that our*

- R. ight to heaven has been secured (Rom. 8:1).
- E. arthly house is to be exchanged for the heavenly (II Cor. 5:1).
- S. ins are forgiven (Rom. 4:25).
- U. nion with the church above has begun (Eph. 3:14).
- R. equests are being heard and answered (Eph. 3:20).
- R. edeemer has triumphed; hence, so shall we triumph (John 16:33).
- E. nergies are being constantly replenished (Phil. 4:12, 13).
- C. hrist is living evermore to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25).
- T. rials are understood and attended to (Heb. 4:15).
- I. mmortality (glorious) is guaranteed (John 14:19).
- O. blations are being accepted (Phil. 4:18, 19).
- N. ames are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

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<sup>910</sup> Or: *note well*. For the meaning and translation of ἰδοὺ see footnote 133, on p. 131.

DOUGLAS R. A. HARE

# Matthew



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## Matthew 28:16–20

### *“Enlist All the Gentiles as Disciples”*

The importance of this passage to a proper understanding of the First Gospel can hardly be exaggerated. At one level it is simply another of several appearance narratives that give substance to the witness claims of the earliest kerygma, “he appeared to Cephas, *then to the twelve*” (I Cor. 15:5). As in Luke 24:36–51 and John 20:19–23, this narrative relates an encounter of the Twelve (now eleven) with the risen Messiah, who sends them forth as his heralds. It is possible that a common story of the commissioning of the Twelve underlies these three, very different accounts. In any event, it is clear that each of the Evangelists describes the commissioning from the perspective of his own theology. It is therefore imperative to note the details with which Matthew tells this climactic story.

Although Luke strictly limits the resurrection appearances to the Jerusalem area (Luke 24:49), Matthew follows Mark in locating the commissioning encounter in Galilee (Mark does not include an appearance story, but the Galilean encounter is promised in 14:28; 16:7). The Fourth Gospel accommodates both traditions; it locates the commissioning scene in Jerusalem but supplements it with an appearance to Peter and six other apostles in Galilee (John 21). Whereas John (explicitly, 20:19) and Luke (implicitly, 24:33) locate the primary encounter in a room, Matthew places the appearance on “*the mountain*.” Mountains have played a significant role in the First Gospel. Both the final temptation (4:8) and the transfiguration (17:1) occur on “a (very) high mountain” (no definite article). In certain references to a mountain the accompanying definite article seems to bear no special significance (see 14:23; 15:29). The one instance in which “the mountain” seems to be stressed by the Evangelist is 5:1, the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount (see comments on 5:1). It is possible, therefore, that Matthew wants us to see in 28:16 a reference to the Messiah’s inaugural address.

This possibility is rejected by many commentators for lack of evidence. Certainly the common English rendering of the clause provide little support for the hypothesis. The Greek, however, is not nearly so straightforward as the unanimity among translators would suggest. The adverb translated “to which” in most modern versions normally means “where” (see KJV). The pronoun rendered “them” is not the object of the verb; it is in the dative case, which means that something was done *to* or *for* them. The verb itself is ambiguous. Its basic meaning is “put in order, arrange.” From this origin it develops secondary meanings such as “appoint” (see KJV) and “command.” If we take the verb in verse 16b in this latter sense, we can translate the verse: “And the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus laid down rules for them.” If this interpretation of verse 16 is accepted, the disciples’ return to the site of the Sermon on the Mount reinforces Matthew’s heavy emphasis on *doing* the will of the Father in heaven as interpreted by Jesus the Messiah (see esp. 7:21–27).

The motif of hesitation or doubt of verse 17 may have been traditional in resurrection narratives, a by-product of the motif of uncertainty regarding Jesus’ appearance (the two on the road to Emmaus do not immediately recognize Jesus, and in Luke 24:16 the disciples think it is a spirit; see also John 21:4). The disciples’ doubt is dispelled not by what they *see* but by what they *hear*. As in chapters 5–9, Matthew strongly subordinates seeing to hearing obediently what Jesus says (see comments on 4:23).

The Great Commission is prefaced with one of the most important christological statements in the First Gospel: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” This recalls the similar declaration of 11:27: “All things have been handed over to me by my Father.” In the

comments on that verse it was suggested that the subject there is Jesus' *revealing* authority, while in 28:18 his *ruling* authority is in mind. Some scholars see here an allusion to Dan. 7:13–14. Others point to Ps. 2:8. It is not clear that verse 18 echoes either of these passages. With greater confidence we can assert that the fundamental idea underlying verse 18 is the conviction that Jesus the Messiah has been exalted through death and resurrection to “the right hand of God” as predicted by Ps. 110:1 (see comments on 22:44; 26:64; see also Acts 2:34–35; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3), where he sits and reigns “until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (I Cor. 15:23, also alluding to Ps. 110:1). According to Matthew, Jesus is not waiting passively in heaven for his glorious arrival as judge and king but is already exercising his Lordship as God's plenipotentiary Son. The Great Commission is thus founded on Jesus' *present* Lordship (note the “therefore” of v. 19).

The target of the commission is “all the Gentiles.” In most translations we find instead “all nations.” This does not correspond with the normal function of *ethnē* in the New Testament as a whole or in Matthew (see comments on 25:32). Greek-speaking Jews regularly used *ethnos* in the plural as a way of speaking of non-Jewish individuals (the equivalent of *goyyim* in Hebrew). Clearly it is individuals who are meant in verse 19; it is not possible to baptize a nation but only the individuals who comprise it. This interpretation does not necessarily exclude Jews as prospective disciples. What verse 19 explicitly does is remove the restriction of the earlier Galilean mission (“Go nowhere among the Gentiles,” 10:5). Perhaps Matthew believed that the mission to Israel must continue until Jesus returns in glory (see 10:23), but in view of 21:43 this seems dubious. The mission to Israel, attended by persecution and frustration, has been unsuccessful (see the comments on 10:17–42). While Jewish converts are by no means excluded, the focus of the church's mission, Matthew seems to suggest, must henceforth be the Gentile world.

The most remarkable feature of Matthew's commissioning statement is the absence of any call to preach the gospel! Correspondingly, there is no demand for faith as a precondition for baptism. Matthew apparently can take for granted that the missionaries will proclaim the good news and call for faith (see 24:14; 18:6); what he cannot take for granted is that the converts will treat seriously Jesus' moral demands. He is deeply distressed by the number of so-called converts who think they can attend the Messiah's wedding feast in the shabby rags of their old pagan morality (see 22:11–14). What is stressed, therefore, is that the Gentiles must be *discipled* (the verb *mathēteuō* is used here, as in 13:51; 27:57, not the more common noun *mathētēs*, “disciple”). What this means is explored further in verse 20: “teaching them to observe everything that I commanded you.” As we saw in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's Jesus does not present himself as a legislator laying down a new code of laws to replace the Mosaic corpus but rather as the God-authorized, final interpreter of Torah. To do what Jesus teaches (“my words,” 7:24) is to do the will of the Father in heaven (7:21). The tense of the participles (“baptizing,” “teaching”) does not indicate that the Gentiles must be discipled before they are baptized, or baptized before they are taught. It looks as if Matthew perceives baptism as occurring in the middle of a discipling-and-teaching process that must continue indefinitely.

Nothing is explicitly said in the commission about building the church (see 16:18), but its emphasis on Jesus' teachings clearly points in the direction of nurturing a community. A great many of the individual sayings in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere in the Gospel have particular relevance to the Christian fellowship. The Gentiles are not to be converted to a philosophy but to a unique way of *living together* in the Messiah's community, a way prepared

not by the risen Lord but by the earthly Jesus. The church is not to be cut loose from its historical moorings by an appeal to charismatic revelation (again, see 7:21–28).

The triadic baptismal formula used to be considered a later interpolation but is now generally accepted as authentic. Triadic references to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit occur in other New Testament writings, with variations in the names used (see I Cor. 12:4–6; Eph. 2:18, 4:4–6). It should not be assumed, however, that such formulations reflect the developed Christology of Nicaea. For Matthew, “the Son” is a functional rather than an ontological term; it identifies Jesus as the miraculously born Messiah who was destined from birth to be exalted to God’s right hand.

In Luke’s Gospel the last word about Jesus speaks of separation: “While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:51, NRSV). In Matthew, by contrast, the last word promises Jesus’ continued presence. “I am with you” is a formula ascribed to God in the Old Testament, sometimes with reference to an individual (Gen. 26:24), sometimes addressed to the people as a whole (Hag. 1:13). The attribution of the formula to the risen Jesus reminds us at the conclusion of the Gospel that Jesus is still Emmanuel, “God with us.” To him God has delegated responsibility for leading and protecting the new people of God (see Isa. 41:10).

In its context the promise of verse 20 is addressed to the missionaries of the gospel. This conforms with the portrayal of Jesus as the great missionary in 13:37 (“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of man”). The disciples who go into all the world with the gospel are instruments of *Jesus’* activity (see also 10:40).

It would be a mistake, however, to regard the promise as restricted to the missionaries. The last word is surely for the church as a whole and for all its constituent congregations. In 18:20 Jesus’ presence is promised for times of judgment and discipline in the church. Here the promised presence is for empowerment. As in 8:23–27, the little ship of the church, battered by life’s storms, knows that it is never left to depend on its own resources. The Lord Jesus is with it “all the days, right up to the consummation of the age.” It is not certain why Matthew chooses to write “all the days” rather than the simple adverb “always.” We may guess that the phrase is intended to emphasize the *daily* nature of the supporting presence—“day by day by day.”

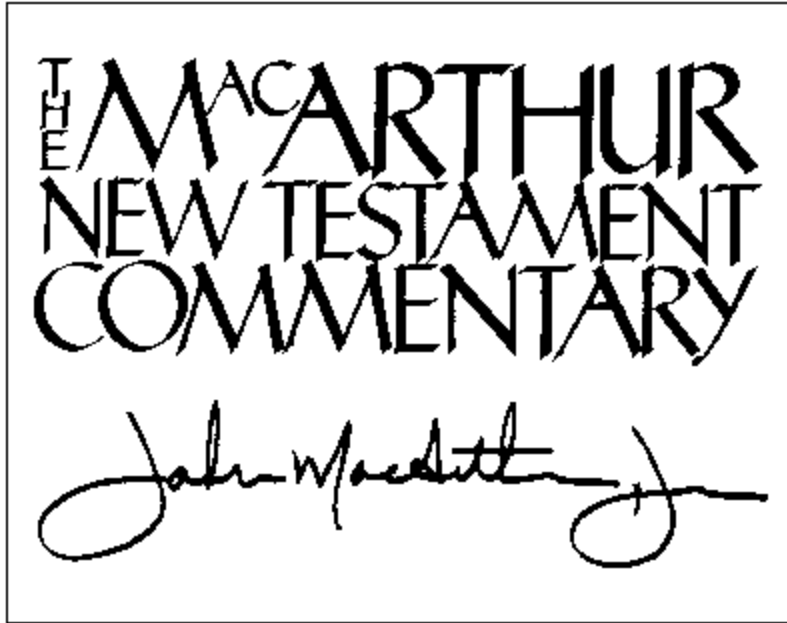
The continued existence of the church despite its myriad sins of commission and omission provides the surest evidence that the promise has been kept.

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<sup>22</sup>Hare, Douglas R. A.: *Matthew*. Louisville : John Knox Press, 1993 (Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching), S. 331



# MATTHEW

MOODY PRESS/CHICAGO

# Making Disciples of All Nations (28:16–20)

# 26

**But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (28:16–20)**

If a Christian understands all the rest of the gospel of Matthew but fails to understand this closing passage, he has missed the point of the entire book. This passage is the climax and major focal point not only of this gospel but of the entire New Testament. It is not an exaggeration to say that, in its broadest sense, it is the focal point of all Scripture, Old Testament as well as New.

This central message of Scripture pertains to the central mission of the people of God, a mission that, tragically, many Christians do not understand or are unwilling to fulfill. It seems obvious that some Christians think little about their mission in this world, except in regard to their own personal needs. They attend services and meetings when it is convenient, take what they feel like taking, and have little concern for anything else. They are involved in the church only to the extent that it serves their own desires. It escapes both their understanding and their concern that the Lord has given His church a supreme mission and that He calls every believer to be an instrument in fulfilling that mission.

If the average evangelical congregation were surveyed concerning the primary purpose of the church, it is likely that many diverse answers would be given. Several purposes, however, would probably be prominent. A large number would rank fellowship first, the opportunity to associate and interact with fellow Christians who share similar beliefs and values. They highly value the fact that the church provides activities and programs for the whole family and is a place where relationships are nurtured and shared and where inspiration is provided through good preaching and beautiful music. A favorite verse for such church members is likely to be, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

At a level perhaps a step higher, some Christians would consider sound biblical teaching to be the church’s principal function, expounding Scripture and strengthening believers in knowledge of and obedience to God’s revealed truth. That emphasis would include helping believers discover and minister their spiritual gifts in various forms of leadership and service. Like fellowship, that too is a basic function of the church, because God “gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–13).

Adding a more elevated level, some members would consider praise of God to be the supreme purpose of the church. They emphasize the church as a praising community that exalts the Lord in adoration, homage, and reverence. Praise is clearly a central purpose of God’s people, just as it has always been and will always be a central activity of heaven, where both saints and angels will eternally sing praises to God. “Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God,”

sing the twenty-four elders lying prostrate before God's throne, "to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created" (Rev. 4:10–11; cf. 5:8–14).

Paul declares that God has "predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace ... to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:5–6, 12; cf. v. 14). Later in that same epistle he exults, "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever" (3:21).

Jesus came into the world to manifest God's glory, the "glory as of the only begotten from the Father" (John 1:14), as "the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (Heb. 1:3). Just as their Lord, Jesus Christ, came into the world with the supreme purpose of glorifying His Father, so those who belong to Christ have that same purpose. We are to praise, honor, and glorify our God in every dimension of life.

All of those emphases are thoroughly biblical and should characterize every body of believers. But neither separately nor together do they represent the central purpose and mission of the church in the world. The supreme purpose and motive of every individual believer and every body of believers is to glorify God.

The mission that flows out of our loving fellowship, our spiritual growth, and our praise is that of being God's faithful and obedient instruments in His divine plan to redeem the world. That plan began in eternity past, before the foundation of the world. But it did not go into effect until Adam chose to sin, fell from fellowship with God, and was spiritually separated from Him. Since that fateful day in the Garden of Eden, fallen, natural man has been trying to hide from God, and God has been redeeming men back to Himself. From that first time of sin, it has always been God who, solely out of His own gracious love, has taken the initiative to restore men to righteousness. God has always taken the initiative for man's salvation and restoration, from His first call to Adam, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9), to His last call in Revelation: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost" (Rev. 22:17).

It was not until sinful mankind persisted in withdrawing further and further from God that He divided them into separate nations. When He needed a witnessing nation to the world, He called out Israel as His chosen people through Abraham. When Israel failed in that calling, God chose a remnant from among them to do what the nation would not. When the nation of Israel rejected her Messiah and King, Jesus Christ, God called out the church, His new chosen instrument to redeem the world.

God has been drawing, is now drawing, and, until the final judgment, will continue to draw sinful men back to Himself and to restore the world that sin has corrupted—all for the purpose of bringing glory to Himself. When sinners are saved, God is glorified, because their salvation cost Him the death of His own Son, the immeasurable price that His magnanimous grace was willing to pay.

The supreme way in which God chose to glorify Himself was through the redemption of sinful men, and it is through participation in that redemptive plan that believers themselves most glorify God. Through Christ, God was "reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their

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cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

v. verse

trespasses against them,” Paul declares, “and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19). That is a work of such magnitude and graciousness that even the heavenly angels long to look into it (1 Pet. 1:12).

Nothing so much glorifies God as His gracious redemption of damned, hell-bound sinners. It was for that ultimate purpose that God called Abraham, that in him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). It was never the Lord’s intention to isolate Israel as His sole focus of concern but rather to use that specially chosen and blessed nation to reach all other nations of the world for Himself. Israel was called to “proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day” and to “tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples” (1 Chron. 16:23–24; cf. Ps. 18:49). Like her Messiah, Israel was to be “a light to the nations so that [the Lord’s] salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6; cf. 42:10–12; 66:19; Jonah 3:1–10).

It has never been God’s will for any person “to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). He “desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). God’s heart has always yearned to bring sinful, rebellious men back to Himself, to give them new, righteous, and eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ. He so greatly “loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Paul rejoiced that God’s “grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:15). The apostle admonished the Corinthian believers and all Christians: “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Every time an unbeliever is saved by God’s grace, God is glorified, and another voice is added to the “Hallelujah Chorus,” as it were.

The great mission of the church is to so love, learn, and live as to call men and women to Jesus Christ. As sinners are forgiven and are transformed from death to life and from darkness to light, God is glorified through that gracious miracle. The glory of God is manifest in His loving provision to redeem lost men. He Himself paid the ultimate price to fulfill His glory.

Therefore the believer who desires to glorify God, who wants to honor God’s supreme will and purpose, must share God’s love for the lost world and share in His mission to redeem the lost to Himself. Christ came into the world that He loved and sought to win sinners to Himself for the Father’s glory. As Christ’s representatives, we are likewise sent into the world that He loves to bring the lost to Him and thereby bring glory and honor to God. Our mission is the same mission as that of the Father and of the Son.

In His great high priestly prayer, Christ prayed, “This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do” (John 17:3–4). In His incarnation, Jesus glorified the Father by accomplishing His mission of providing eternal life to those who trust in Him, by reconciling lost men to the God they had forsaken. Jesus’ supreme purpose on earth was “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

That is therefore also the supreme mission of Christ’s church. The work of the church is an extension of the work of her Lord. “As Thou didst send Me into the world,” Jesus said to His Father, “I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

If God’s primary purpose for the saved were loving fellowship, He would take believers immediately to heaven, where spiritual fellowship is perfect, unhindered by sin, disharmony, or loneliness. If His primary purpose for the saved were the learning of His Word, He would also take believers immediately to heaven, where His Word is perfectly known and understood. And

if God's primary purpose for the saved were to give Him praise, He would, again, take believers immediately to heaven, where praise is perfect and unending.

There is only one reason the Lord allows His church to remain on earth: to seek and to save the lost, just as Christ's only reason for coming to earth was to seek and to save the lost. "As the Father has sent Me," He declared, "I also send you" (John 20:21). Therefore, a believer who is not committed to winning the lost for Jesus Christ should reexamine his relationship to the Lord and certainly his divine reason for existence.

Fellowship, teaching, and praise are not the mission of the church but are rather the preparation of the church to fulfill its mission of winning the lost. And just as in athletics, training should never be confused with or substituted for actually competing in the game, which is the reason for all the training.

How tragic that so much of Christ's church is preoccupied with trivialities. Many Christians are fascinated with the process and have no thought for the goal. They are preoccupied with the spiritually insignificant and show little commitment to reaching the lost.

The resources God has provided most churches are, for the most part, barely tapped in their efforts to call men and women and boys and girls to Jesus Christ. The contemporary church is blessed with previously unheard of means of proclaiming the saving message of Christ to the world. But like the world at large, it is frequently crippled by indulgent, self-centered preoccupations. Instead of asking, for instance, how we might get by with a smaller house or car and use the saved money in the Lord's work, we are inclined to dream about getting bigger and nicer ones.

A counselor of my acquaintance has long had the practice of asking those who come to him for spiritual advice to show him their check stubs for the past year or so. His purpose is to help them recognize their true priorities, which invariably are reflected in the way they spend their money. Another helpful revealer of priorities is one's calendar or appointment book, because where and for what we spend our time is also a reliable barometer of our true interests and concerns.

Christian fellowship, biblical preaching and teaching, and times of praise to God are good and godly, and in many ways carry their own rewards and blessings. But reaching the lost for Christ is much more difficult and demanding, and the results are often slow in coming and the rewards are sometimes long delayed. The gospel is frequently resented by those to whom we witness, and sometimes faithful witnessing is ridiculed even by fellow believers. Yet above all others, that ministry can only be accomplished while we are on earth. We will have no opportunity in heaven to call the lost to the Savior.

In his devotional book *Quiet Talks with World Winners*, S. D. Gordon recounted the story of a group of amateur climbers who planned to ascend Mont Blanc in the French Alps. On the evening before the climb, the guides stated the basic requirement for success. Because it was an exceedingly difficult climb, one could reach the top by taking only the necessary equipment for climbing, leaving all unnecessary accessories behind.

One athletic young man discounted the guides' advice, thinking it could not possibly apply to him. He showed up for the climb with a blanket, a small case of wine, a camera, a set of notebooks, and a pocketful of snacks. Although warned again by the guides, the strong-willed young man nevertheless started out ahead of the rest to prove his superior skill and endurance.

But as the other climbers proceeded up the mountainside, they began to notice various articles left by the path. First, they noticed the young man's food and wine, a short while later the notebooks and camera, and finally the blanket. The young man managed to reach the peak,



but, just as the guides had predicted, he did so only after discarding all his unnecessary paraphernalia.

Applying that illustration to the church, Mr. Gordon comments that, unlike that young climber, who eventually paid the price for success, many Christians, when they discover they cannot reach the top with their loads, simply stop climbing and settle down on the mountainside.

In the final message of Christ reported by Matthew, Jesus gives five explicit or implicit elements that are necessary for His followers to fulfill their supreme mission on earth—to reach the mountain peak of their calling, as it were. These essential elements may be summarized as availability, worship, submission, obedience, and power.

## AVAILABILITY

**But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. (28:16)**

The first three elements for effectively fulfilling the church's mission are attitudes, the first of which is implied in the fact that **the eleven disciples** were where the Lord had told them to be.

As someone astutely observed many years ago, as far as a believer's service to God is concerned, the greatest ability is availability. The most talented and gifted Christian is useless to God if he is not available to be used, just as God's greatest blessings are not available to those who are not present to receive them.

Faithful discipleship does not begin with knowing where you will be serving the Lord or in what capacity. It does not start with having a clear call to a certain ministry, or occupation, or place of service. It always begins with simply being available to God, putting all reservations and preconceptions aside.

**The eleven disciples** had not received the blessing of seeing the resurrected Jesus in the garden because, unlike the faithful women, they were not there. Now, however, **the eleven** were where Jesus wanted them to be, and consequently they received His Great Commission and His great promise.

Both before and after the resurrection Jesus said He would meet His disciples in Galilee (see Matt. 26:32; 28:7, 10). He had called a great conclave of His followers for the purpose of commissioning them to reach the world in His name, and now they were gathered at the appointed place.

We are not told when or how the Lord specified the exact time and place in Galilee where they were to gather, but they were now at **the particular mountain which Jesus had designated** on some previous occasion.

The last recorded appearance of Jesus in Jerusalem was eight days after the resurrection, when Thomas saw the resurrected Lord for the first time (John 20:26). The journey from Jerusalem to Galilee would have taken about a week, and after they arrived there some of the disciples went fishing, during which time the Lord appeared to them again, providing a catch too heavy to haul into the boat. Then, after having breakfast with them, Jesus asked Peter three times about his love for Him and gave the commission to feed His sheep (John 21:1–17). That event would have occurred at least fifteen days after the resurrection and probably closer to twenty. Because Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives in the presence of the disciples, they had to take another week to travel back to Jerusalem. And because Jesus' postresurrection appearances covered a total of forty days (Acts 1:3), His giving of the Great Commission on the Galilean mountainside would have had to occur some time between twenty and thirty-five days after His resurrection.

We are not told who was present when Jesus gave the Great Commission, but it seems probable that it was the group of more than five hundred that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:6. That has been the view of many biblical scholars throughout church history.

The fact that Matthew specifically mentions only **the eleven disciples** does not limit the gathering to them. The angel's message for the women to give to the disciples seems to imply that the women would also see Jesus in Galilee (see Matt. 28:7). There would have been no reason for Jesus to send the eleven to Galilee, only to have them return a few days later to the Mount of Olives for His ascension. It seems more reasonable that the Lord assembled a large group of believers and that He chose Galilee for the meeting place because most of His followers were from that region.

Because the Great Commission applies to all of His church, Jesus would surely have wanted to deliver it to the largest possible group of His faithful followers. Not only were most of Jesus' followers from Galilee, but that region was secluded and was a safe distance from Jerusalem, where most of Jesus' enemies were. And because the commission extends to all the world, Galilee, often referred to as Galilee of the Gentiles, also was appropriate for that reason.

Wherever the mountain was, it became a place of great sacredness, where more than five hundred of Jesus' disciples came with their weaknesses, confusion, doubts, misgivings, and fears. They were not the most humanly capable people in the world, nor the most intelligent or powerful or influential. But they were where the Lord wanted them to be, and that obedience gave evidence of their willingness to be used in His service. Like Isaiah after his vision in the Temple, they said, in effect, "Here am I. Send me" (Isa. 6:8).

Because they were there, they met Christ, Because they were there, they were commissioned. Because they were there, they received the Lord's promise of His continual presence and power as they ministered to the world in His name. It all started with being available.

## WORSHIP

**And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, (28:17–18a)**

The second element implied here for effective fulfillment of the church's mission is the attitude of genuine worship. When God is not truly worshiped, He cannot be truly served, no matter how talented, gifted, or well-intentioned His servants may be.

The moment Jesus appeared and the disciples **saw Him, they worshiped Him**, prostrating themselves in humble adoration before their divine Lord and Savior. When they saw the risen Jesus on the hillside, their confusion disappeared and their shattered dreams were restored. Their sorrow turned into unbelievable joy and their disillusionment into unwavering hope.

The believers gathered there were not giving homage to a human dignitary or mere earthly ruler but were worshiping God's own Son, the Lord of heaven and earth. Though no spoken words are recorded, in their hearts they must have been saying with Thomas after his last doubts were assuaged, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

On but one previous occasion does Scripture say that the eleven disciples actually worshiped Jesus. After He walked to them on the water, they "worshiped Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'" (Matt. 14:33). Now their awe and their certainty of His divinity were immeasurably greater, because He was risen from the dead. It is probable that the worship of Christ on that day in Galilee has been equaled few other times in all of human history.

Yet, amazingly, **some were still doubtful**. That simple phrase inserted by Matthew is but one of countless small and indirect testimonies to the integrity of Scripture. In transparent honesty,

the gospel writer sets forth the incident as it actually happened, with no attempt to make it more dramatic or convincing than it was. As he portrayed Jesus in His divine perfection, he also portrayed Jesus' followers, including himself, in their human imperfection.

Those who attempt to write history to their own liking are inclined to magnify that which is favorable and omit that which is not. Had Matthew and the other gospel writers contrived Jesus' resurrection, they would have had made every effort to exclude any fact or incident that would have tarnished their case. Nor would they have hesitated to falsify evidence and distort the truth. A person who lies about something of major importance has no scruples about telling lesser lies to support his primary deceit. Matthew's simple honesty testifies both to his own honesty and to the integrity of God's Word.

The identity of the doubters is not given. Because the eleven disciples are the only ones specifically mentioned in this passage, some interpreters insist that those who **were doubtful** were of that group. But as already noted, it is probable that hundreds of other believers were also present.

Exactly what was doubted is also not specified. If the fact of Jesus' resurrection was in question, then the doubters could not have included any of the eleven, because all of them had already witnessed the risen Christ, some on several occasions. It seems most likely that the doubt concerned whether or not the person who appeared to them was actually the physically risen Christ or some form of imposter. Out of that large group, only the eleven disciples and some of the women who had come to the tomb had seen the risen Christ. Perhaps some of those in the back of the crowd could not see Jesus clearly and, like Thomas, were reluctant to believe such an amazing truth without firm evidence.

As if to alleviate that doubt, **Jesus** graciously **came up and spoke to them**. Whatever the doubt was and whoever the doubters were, as the Lord came nearer and as His familiar voice sounded in their ears once again, all uncertainty was erased. Now those who had doubted fell down and joined the others in worship.

Nothing else now mattered. It made no difference where they lived, what their heritage was, what their economic or social position was, or what their nationality was. They were now in the presence of the living God.

The complete focus was on Christ. That is the essence of true worship-single-minded, unhindered, and unqualified concentration on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Not simply to the Corinthians, but to every person to whom he spoke and in every place he ministered, Paul "determined to know nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). In his own life the apostle was determined to "know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil. 3:10). Paul's life was so totally Christ-centered that he could say with perfect sincerity, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

## SUBMISSION

**"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (28:18b)**

The third element for effective fulfillment of the church's mission is another attitude, the implied attitude of submission. The focus of Jesus' declaration here is on His sovereign lordship, but in context it also clearly relates to the believers response to His rule.

Before the Lord states the Great Commission, He establishes His divine authority to command it. It is because of His sovereign power that His followers are to have the attitude of complete, humble submission to His will.

**Exousia (authority)** refers to the freedom and right to speak and act as one pleases. In relation to God, that freedom and right are absolute and unlimited. The **all** is both reinforced and delineated by the phrase **in heaven and earth**. The sovereign authority **given to** Jesus by His heavenly Father (see Matt. 11:27; John 3:35) is absolute and universal.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated His authority over disease and sickness (Matt. 4:23; 9:35), over demons (4:24; 8:32; 12:22), over sin (9:6), and over death (Mark 5:41–42; John 11:43–44). Except for the forgiveness of sins, Jesus even exhibited the authority to delegate such powers to certain of His followers (Matt. 10:1; Luke 10:9, 17). He has authority to bring all men before the tribunal of God and to condemn them to eternal death or bring them to eternal life (John 5:27–29; 17:2). He had the authority to lay down His own life and to take it up again (John 10:18). He has the sovereign authority to rule both heaven and earth and to subjugate Satan and his demons to eternal torment in the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; 20:10). Satan’s tempting Jesus by offering Him rulership over the world (Matt. 4:8–9) not only was wicked but foolish, because lordship of both heaven and earth was already Christ’s inheritance by divine fiat.

Even the prophet Daniel foresaw sovereign authority being given to Christ. In his night vision he beheld “One like a Son of Man . . . coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13–14; cf. Isa. 9:6–7).

Jesus Himself described His coming dominion. “The sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky,” He said, “and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30; cf. 26:64).

Jesus’ sovereign authority was **given to** Him by His Father, who “has given all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22), “made Him both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), and has “highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:9–11). Then, finally, in an act of adoring love and submission, “when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

Before giving the commission, Jesus first established His absolute, pervasive authority, because otherwise the command would have seemed hopelessly impossible for the disciples to fulfill, and they might have ignored it. Were it not for knowing they had the Lord’s sovereign demand as well as His resources to guide and empower them, those five hundred nondescript, powerless disciples would have been totally overwhelmed by the inconceivable task of making disciples for their Lord from among every nation on earth.

Submission to the absolute sovereignty of Jesus Christ is not a believer’s option but is his supreme obligation. It is not negotiable or adjustable to one’s own particular inclinations and plans. It is rather the attitude that says with absolute sincerity, “Whatever the Lord commands, I will do.”

## OBEDIENCE

**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; (28:19–20a)**

The fourth element for effective fulfillment of the church's mission is obedience to the Lord's command, made possible only when the attitudes of availability, worship, and submission characterize the believer's life.

It was in light of His absolute, sovereign authority that Jesus commanded, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.”** The transitional word is **therefore**. “Because I am sovereign Lord of the universe,” Jesus was saying, “I have both the authority to command you to be My witnesses and the power to enable you to obey that command.”

In light of the Old Testament teaching about Israel's mission to be God's light to the Gentiles and in light of Jesus' earthly ministry, it should not be surprising that His commission was to **make disciples of all the nations**.

*Mathēteuō* (**make disciples**) is the main verb and the central command of verses 19–20, which form the closing sentence of Matthew's gospel. The root meaning of the term refers to believing and learning. Jesus was not referring simply to believers or simply to learners, or He would have used other words. *Mathēteuō* carries a beautiful combination of meanings. In this context it relates to those who place their trust in Jesus Christ and follow Him in lives of continual learning and obedience. “If you abide in My word,” Jesus said, “then you are truly disciples of Mine” (John 8:31). It should be noted that some disciples were not true (see John 6:66).

A person who is not Christ's true disciple does not belong to Him and is not saved. When a person genuinely confesses Christ as Lord and Savior, he is immediately saved, immediately made a disciple, and immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. Not to be Christ's disciple is therefore not to be Christ's at all.

Scripture knows nothing of receiving Christ as Savior but not as Lord, as if a person could take God piecemeal as it suits him. Every convert to Christ is a disciple of Christ, and no one who is not a disciple of Christ, no matter what his profession of faith might be, is a convert of Christ.

The very point of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler was that this man—although highly moral, religious, generous, and admiring of Jesus—refused to give up everything for Christ and submit to Him as Lord. He sincerely wanted eternal life and had the wisdom to come to the source of that life. But he was unwilling to give up his own life and possessions and obey Jesus' command to “come, follow Me” (Luke 18:18–23). He was willing to have Jesus as Savior but not as Lord, and Christ would not receive him on those terms. Because he refused to be Christ's disciple when the cost was made clear (like those in John 6:66), he could have no part of Christ or of the eternal life that He gives.

Some popular theologies today teach that Jesus was referring to those who are already believers when He taught such things as, “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27; cf. v. 33). Such forms of easy believism maintain that the only requirement for salvation is to “accept Jesus as Savior.” Then, at some later date, a saved person may or may not become a disciple by accepting Christ as Lord of his life. Taking up one's cross and following Christ (Matt. 10:38) is looked on as a secondary, ideal level of relationship to Christ that is commendable but not mandatory.

The Great Commission is a command to bring unbelievers throughout the world to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and the term the Lord uses in this commissioning is **make disciples**. The true convert is a disciple, a person who has accepted and submitted himself to Jesus Christ, whatever that may mean or demand. The truly converted person is filled with the Holy Spirit and given a new nature that yearns to obey and worship the Lord who has saved him. Even when he

is disobedient, he knows he is living against the grain of his new nature, which is to honor and please the Lord. He loves righteousness and hates sin, including his own.

Jesus' supreme command, therefore, is for those who are His disciples to become His instruments for making disciples of all nations. Jesus' own earthly ministry was to make disciples for Himself, and that is the ministry of His people. Those who truly follow Jesus Christ become "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). Those who become His disciples are themselves to become disciple makers. The mission of the early church was to make disciples (see Acts 2:47; 14:21), and that is still Christ's mission for His church.

Jesus' command for His followers to **make disciples** was given only once, climactically, at the very end of His earthly ministry. Some might ask, "If it was so crucial, why did Jesus mention it only once?" The reason, no doubt, is that the motivation for reaching others for Christ is innate to the redeemed life. One might as well ask why God's command for man to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) was given only once. In each case, reproduction in kind is natural to life. The call to make disciples is stated only once because it is natural for the new creation to be reproductive. It would beg the issue to repeat what is so basic.

The specific requirements Jesus gives for making disciples involve three participles: going (rendered here as **go**), **baptizing**, and **teaching**.

The first requirement makes clear that the church is not to wait for the world to come to its doors but that it is to **go** to the world. The Greek participle is best translated "having gone," suggesting that this requirement is not so much a command as an assumption.

Jesus' initial instruction to the disciples was for them to go only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6; cf. 15:24). God's design was to offer salvation first to the Jews and then to use them as His missionaries to the rest of the world. The gospel is the "power of salvation to everyone who believes," but "to the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16; cf. John 4:22). But when Israel as a nation rejected the Messiah-King who was sent to her in Jesus, the invitation for salvation went directly to the entire world.

Jesus compared Israel's response to God's call to a wedding feast given by a king for his son. When the favored guests refused to accept the king's invitation and maligned and even killed some of the messengers, the king had his army destroy the ungrateful and wicked guests. He then sent his servants out to the streets and highways to invite to the feast anyone who would come (Matt. 22:1–10). The picture was of an apostate Israel who refused her Messiah and thereby forfeited the kingdom that He offered to them.

At the end of His earthly ministry, Christ had only a small remnant of believers, and it was to part of that remnant that He gave His commission to evangelize the world. The first sermon of the Spirit-filled church was preached by Peter and directed to Jews and Jewish proselytes who had come to worship in Jerusalem (Acts 2:22). But God later had to dramatically convince Peter that the gospel was also for Gentiles (10:1–48).

As he traveled throughout Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece, even the apostle Paul, "the apostle to the Gentiles," normally began his ministry in a given city at the Jewish synagogue (see Acts 9:20; 13:5; 18:4). But his message was always for Gentiles as well as Jews. At his conversion on the Damascus Road, the Lord said to him,

Arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness, ... delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to life and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me. (Acts 26:16–18)

The second requirement for making disciples is that of **baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**. To baptize literally means to immerse in water, and certain forms of baptism had long been practiced by various Jewish groups as a symbol of spiritual cleansing. The baptism of John the Baptist symbolized repentance of sin and turning to God (Matt. 3:6). As instituted by Christ, however, baptism became an outward act of identification with Him through faith, a visible, public testimony that henceforth one belonged to Him.

The initial act of obedience to Christ after salvation is to submit to baptism as a testimony to union with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. “Do you not know,” Paul asked the Roman believers, “that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3–4).

Immersion is the most appropriate mode of baptism, not only because the Greek word behind it connotes immersion but even more importantly because that is the only mode that symbolizes burial and resurrection.

Although the act of baptism has absolutely no saving or sacramental benefit or power, it is commanded by Christ of His followers. The only exception might be physical inability, as in the case of the repentant thief on the cross, a prisoner who is forbidden the ordinance, or a similar circumstance beyond the believer’s control. The person who is unwilling to be baptized is at best a disobedient believer, and if he persists in his unwillingness there is reason to doubt the genuineness of his faith (see Matt. 10:32–33). If he is unwilling to comply with that simple act of obedience in the presence of fellow believers, he will hardly be willing to stand for Christ before the unbelieving world.

Baptism has no part in the work of salvation, but it is a God-ordained and God-commanded accompaniment of salvation. Jesus said, “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Jesus made clear that it is disbelief, not failure to be baptized, that precludes salvation; but He could not possibly have made the divine association of salvation and baptism more obvious than He does in that statement.

The association was indisputably clear in Peter’s mind as he exhorted his unbelieving hearers at Pentecost: “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38). The association was just as close in Paul’s mind, as witnessed in his great manifesto of Christian unity: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4–6).

A person is saved by God’s grace alone working through his faith as a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). But by God’s own declaration, the act of baptism is His divinely designated sign of the believer’s identification with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is a divinely commanded act of faith and obedience.

New converts need to be taught that they should be baptized as soon as possible, not to seal or confirm their salvation but to make public testimony to it in obedience to their newfound Lord. The call to Christ not only is the call to salvation but also the call to obedience, the first public act of which should be baptism in His name.

Throughout the book of Acts, baptism is shown in the closest possible association with conversion. The three thousand souls converted at Pentecost were immediately baptized (Acts

2:41). As soon as the Ethiopian believed in Christ, he stopped his chariot so that he could be baptized (8:38). As soon as Paul received back his sight after his conversion, he was baptized (9:18). When Cornelius and his household were saved, Peter “ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (10:48). As unbelievers in Corinth were being won to Jesus Christ, they were also being baptized (18:8). When Paul found some disciples of John in Ephesus who had only been baptized for repentance, he told them about Jesus, the one for whom John was merely preparing the way, and when they believed “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (19:1–5).

In the context of the Great Commission, baptism is synonymous with salvation, which is synonymous with becoming a disciple. As already emphasized, discipleship *is* Christian life, not an optional, second level of it.

Baptism is to be made **in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**. Jesus was not giving a ritual formula, although that beautiful phrase from the lips of our Lord has been commonly and appropriately used in baptismal services throughout the history of the church. **In the name of** is not a sacramental formula, as seen in the fact that the book of Acts reports no converts being baptized with those precise words. Those words are rather a rich and comprehensive statement of the wonderful union that believers have with the whole Godhead.

In His statement here about baptism, Jesus again clearly placed Himself on an equal level with God **the Father** and with **the Holy Spirit**. He also emphasizes the unity of the Trinity by declaring that baptism should be done in Their one **name** (singular), not in Their separate names. As it does in many parts of Scripture, the phrase **the name** here embodies the fullness of a person, encompassing all that he is, has, and represents. When he is baptized, the believer is identified with everything that God is, has, and represents.

The pronoun Jesus uses here (*eis, in*) can also be rendered “into” or “unto.” Those who teach baptismal regeneration—the belief that water baptism is essential for salvation—insist that it must here be translated “into.” But that is a completely arbitrary translation and, in any case, cannot stand up against the many other passages that prove baptism has no part in regeneration but is rather an outward act, subsequent to regeneration, that testifies to its having taken place.

Baptism does not place a believer into oneness with the Trinity but signifies that, by God’s grace working through his faith in Jesus Christ, the believer already has been made one with **the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**.

The third requirement for making disciples of all nations is that of **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**. The church’s mission is not simply to convert but to teach. The convert is called to a life of obedience to the Lord, and in order to obey Him it is obviously necessary to know what He requires. As already noted, a disciple is by definition a learner and follower. Therefore, studying, understanding, and obeying “the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27) is the lifelong task of every true disciple.

In Jesus’ parting discourse to the disciples in the upper room, He said,

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. ([John 14:23–26](#))

Jesus did not spend time teaching in order to entertain the crowds or to reveal interesting but inconsequential truths about God or to set forth ideal but optional standards that God requires. His first mission was to provide salvation for those who would come to Him in faith, that is, to



make disciples. His second mission was to teach God's truth to those disciples. That is the same twofold mission He gives the church.

No one is a true disciple apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ, and there is no true disciple apart from an obedient heart that desires to please the Lord in all things. The writer of Hebrews makes that attitude of obedience synonymous with saving faith, declaring that Christ "became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9). Thanking God for the salvation of believers in Rome, Paul said to them, "Through you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed" (Rom. 6:17).

Every Christian is not gifted as a teacher, but every faithful Christian is committed to promoting the ministry of teaching God's Word both to make and to edify disciples of Christ.

## POWER

**"and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** (28:20b)

As crucial as are the first four elements for effective fulfillment of the church's mission, they would be useless without the last, namely, the power that the Lord Jesus Christ offers through His continuing presence with those who belong to Him. Neither the attitudes of availability, worship, and submission, nor faithful obedience to God's Word would be possible apart from Christ's own power working in and through us.

*Idou (lo)* is an interjection frequently used in the New Testament to call attention to something of special importance. *Egō eimi (I am)* is an emphatic form that might be rendered, "I Myself am," calling special attention to the fact of Christ's own presence. Jesus was saying, in effect, "Now pay special attention to what I am about to say, because it is the most important of all. I Myself, your divine, resurrected, living, eternal Lord, **am with you always, even to the end of the age.**"

A helpful way to keep one's spiritual life and work in the right perspective and to continually rely on the Lord's power rather than one's own is to pray in ways such as these: "Lord, You care more about this matter I am facing than I do, so do what You know is best. Lord, You love this person more than I do and only You can reach into his heart and save him, so help me to witness only as You lead and empower. Lord, You are more concerned about the truth and integrity of Your holy Word than I am, so please energize my heart and mind to be true to the text I am teaching."

**Always** literally means "all the days." For the individual believer that means all the days of his life. But in its fullest meaning for the church at large it means **even to the end of the age**, that is, until the Lord returns bodily to judge the world and to rule His earthly kingdom. (See Matt. 13:37–50, where Christ uses the phrase "end of the age" three times to designate His second coming.)

Jesus will not visibly return to earth and display Himself before the whole world in His majestic glory and power until **the end of the age**. But until that time, throughout this present age, He will **always** be with those who belong to Him, leading them and empowering them to fulfill His Great Commission.

Some years ago, a missionary went to a primitive, pagan society. She became especially burdened for a young wife and eventually was used to win the woman to Christ. Almost as soon as she was saved the woman told the missionary with great sorrow, "I wish you could have come sooner, so my little boy could have been saved."ll When the missionary asked why it was too

late, the mother replied, “Because just a few weeks before you came to us, I offered him as a sacrifice to the gods of our tribe.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>MacArthur, John: *Matthew*. Chicago : Moody Press, 1989, S. 335

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# BIBLICAL

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# COMMENTARY

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VOLUME 33B

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## Matthew 14–28

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## *The Appearance of Jesus to the Eleven in Galilee and the Great Commission (28:16–20)*

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*Neot* Neotestamentica

*ZTK* Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

ed. edited, edition(s), editor

*BZ* Biblische Zeitschrift

*RTP* Revue de théologie et de philosophie

*TLZ* Theologische Literaturzeitung

Tr. translation, translator(s), translated by, transpose(s)

FS Festschrift, volume written in honor of

*NovT* Novum Testamentum

*EvQ* The Evangelical Quarterly

*Th* Theology

*ZNW* Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft

*RHPR* Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses

*Scr* Scripture

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*ASTI* Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute

*CBQ* Catholic Biblical Quarterly

*SE* *Studia Evangelica* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (= *TU* 73 [1959], 87 [1964], 88 [1964], 102 [1968], 103 [1968], 112 [1973])

*TU* *TU* Texte und Untersuchungen

*SBT* *Studies in Biblical Theology* (London/Naperville, IL: SCM/Allenson) or *Studia biblica et theologica*

*Rev.* revised, reviser, revision, or reverse

*BSac* *Bibliotheca Sacra*

*IBS* *Irish Biblical Studies*

*HTR* *Harvard Theological Review*

*JETS* *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

*BT* *The Bible Translator*

*SBLDS* Society of Biblical Literature [SBL] Dissertation Series

*MT* The Masoretic Text [of the Old Testament] (as published in BHS)

*JBL* *Journal of Biblical Literature*

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*ExpTim* The Expository Times

*Diss.* Dissertation

*LD* Lectio divina (Paris: Cerf)

*EvT* Evangelische Theologie

*ETL* Ephemerides theologiae lovanienses

*Int* Interpretation

*BK* Bibel und Kirche

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### Translation

<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went into Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him, they worshiped him,<sup>a</sup> but they<sup>b</sup> doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying: “All authority in heaven and upon [the]<sup>c</sup> earth has been given to me.<sup>d</sup> <sup>19</sup> Go, therefore,<sup>e</sup> and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> and teach them to keep everything—as much as I have commanded you. And, look, I am with you all the days until the consummation of the age!”

### Notes

*CTQ* Concordia Theological Quarterly

*TD* Theology Digest

*CHR* Catholic Historical Review

*AsSeign* Assemblées du Seigneur

<sup>a</sup> a. “Him” added, supplying the direct object. Many MSS (A W Θ f<sup>1,13</sup> TR) add the dat. pronoun αὐτῷ, “him.” Γ 28 700\* 1241 add the accusative pronoun αὐτόν, “him.” The text (without pronoun) is supported by X B D 33 lat, judged by the UBSGNT committee to be superior. *TCGNT*, 72.

<sup>b</sup> b. οἱ, the pl. of the definite article, may also be translated “some.” See *Comment*.

<sup>d</sup> d. Θ sy<sup>p</sup> add καθὼς ἀπέστειλén με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ ἀποστελῶ ὑμᾶς, “just as the Father sent me, I also will send you,” an apposite importation from John 20:21.

<sup>e</sup> e. οὐν, “therefore.” D it have νῦν, “now.” Many MSS (X A f<sup>13</sup> TR bo<sup>pt</sup>) omit οὐν. Favoring οὐν are B W Δ Θ f<sup>1</sup> lat sy sa mae bo<sup>pt</sup>.



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b. οἱ, the pl. of the definite article, may also be translated “some.” See *Comment*.

c. The definite article τῆς is omitted by many MSS (**℣** A W Θ *f*<sup>1,13</sup> TR). Favoring its inclusion are B D 892.

d. Θ sy<sup>p</sup> add καθὼς ἀπέστειλén με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ ἀποστελῶ ὑμᾶς, “just as the Father sent me, I also will send you,” an apposite importation from John 20:21.

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f. Many MSS (A<sup>c</sup> Θ *f*<sup>13</sup> TR it vg<sup>mss</sup> sy bo<sup>pt</sup>) add ἀμήν, “amen,” probably “reflecting the liturgical usage of the text” (*TCGNT*, 72). No reason exists for the deliberate omission of the word if it had been part of the original text.

### ***Form/Structure/Setting***

A. The resurrection narrative comes to its climax, as does the entire Gospel, in this its final majestic pericope. The women have seen the empty tomb and have met the resurrected Jesus. It is assumed in the present passage that they relayed Jesus’ message to the disciples, for now the latter are found in Galilee. Here, as promised, the risen Jesus appears to them. And here they receive their commission in the famous words that have become the hallmark of the Gospel of Matthew. For these words, perhaps more than any others, distill the outlook and various

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MSS manuscript(s)

A Codex Alexandrinus

Θ Theodotion

TR Textus Receptus

dat. dative

**℣℥** Codex Sinaiticus

B Codex Vaticanus or MT MS, edited by Jacob ben Chayim, Venice (1524/25)

D Codex Bezae or Deuteronom(ist)ic

lat Latin

UBSGNT United Bible Societies *Greek New Testament*

*TCGNT* B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*

pl. plate or plural

sy Syriac

vg Latin Vulgate (as published in Weber’s edition)



emphases of the Gospel (see Vögtle, SE 2 [1964] 266–94). O. Michel goes so far as to say, in italics, that “Matt. 28:18–20 is the key to the understanding of the whole book” (35; cf. P. F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and His Message*, 22–25). Here we find especially Christology and discipleship but also ecclesiology (see Trilling, “Das Kirchenverständnis”) and righteousness—emphases familiar from the earlier parts of the Gospel (see Lange’s thorough study). These final five verses not only conclude the passion-resurrection narrative of chaps. 26–28 but also serve as the conclusion to the entire Gospel. According to Brooks this pericope is basic to the narrative framework of the entire Gospel since it stresses authority and teaching—emphases found in every section of the Gospel.

B. The passage as it stands is unique to Matthew. That traditional elements underlie at least some of the material seems indicated by a few parallels that do exist, especially in Luke, John, and the longer ending of Mark. Thus Luke 24:47 refers to the necessity that κηρυχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ μετάνοιαν εἰς ἅφεςιν ἁμαρτιῶν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, “repentance for the forgiveness of sins be proclaimed in his name to all the nations” (cf. v. 19). Parallel to Matthew’s reference to the disciples’ doubting (v. 17) is Luke’s account of the risen Jesus asking διὰ τί διαλογισμοὶ ἀναβαίνουσιν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν, “Why do doubts arise in your heart?” (Luke 24:38), and the reference to the disciples ἔτι δὲ ἀπιστοῦντων αὐτῶν, “and they yet disbelieving” (Luke 24:41). With Matthew’s reference to the disciples’ worshiping the risen Jesus, cf. καὶ αὐτοὶ προσκυνήσαντες αὐτόν, “and they were worshiping him” (Luke 24:52). And with Matthew’s reference to the authority of Jesus and his ongoing presence with them, cf. καὶ [ἰδοὺ] ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πατρός μου ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς, “and [behold] I send the promise of my Father upon you,” and ἐνδύσησθε ἐξ ὕψους δύναμιν, “you will be clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). There is also some similarity with the Gospel of John, which preserves tradition independent of the Synoptics. Thus Matthew’s commission is similar to John’s εἰρήνη ὑμῖν· καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ ἐγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς, “peace be with you; as the Father sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21; cf. 20:23: “if you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven”). With Matthew’s emphasis on keeping Jesus’ commandments, cf. ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει, “if anyone loves me that person will keep my word,” and with the promise of Jesus’ presence, cf. καὶ πρὸς αὐτόν ἐλευσόμεθα καὶ μονὴν παρ’ αὐτῷ ποιησόμεθα, “and we [i.e., Jesus and the Father] will come to him and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). The parallel with Mark 16:14–18, verses not found in the earliest MSS, almost certainly reflects dependence on Matthew and therefore cannot be used as independent confirmation of Matthew’s material. (Thus Mark 16:14 mentions the ἑνδεκά, “eleven,” and refers to Jesus rebuking the disciples for their unbelief; Mark 16:15 records the commission πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει, “Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature”; Mark 16:16 refers to baptizing converts, βαπτισθεῖς, “having been baptized”; and Mark 16:17 has the phrase ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου, “in my name,” where, however, it refers to demon exorcism.) The parallel in *Did.* 7.1, where the commission to baptize using the triadic formula is presented, also probably depends on Matthew.

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cf. *confer*, compare

chaps. chapter(s)

i.e. *id est*, that is

*Did.* Didache

And the same must be said of *Herm. Sim.* 5.7.3; 6.4, where reference is made to the authority Jesus received from the Father.

C. The pericope of course finds its *raison d'être* not only in the appearance of Jesus to the disciples but especially in the words of Jesus with which the Gospel concludes. The following is a suggested outline: (1) the disciples return to Galilee (v. 16); (2) they see the risen Jesus (v. 17); and (3) Jesus commissions them (vv 18–19), subdivided into (a) the statement of the authority of Jesus (vv 18b), (b) the command to make disciples of the nations (19a), baptize them (19b), and teach them (v. 20a); and (c) the promise of Jesus' presence (v. 20b). Thus Jesus declares his authority, commissions his disciples, and assures them of his presence in the future. In the narrative material (vv 16–17) there is little to comment on structurally except for the opposition *προσεκύνησαν*, “they worshiped,” and *ἐδίστασαν*, “they doubted,” in v. 17. In the commission section, several structural features may be pointed out. After the initial statement concerning Jesus' authority, which has the parallelism *ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς*, “in heaven and on [the] earth” (v. 18b), the commission proper consists syntactically of the main verb *μαθητεύσατε*, “make disciples,” with three parallel subordinate participles: *πορευθέντες*, “going,” *βαπτίζοντες*, “baptizing,” and *διδάσκοντες*, “teaching” (vv 19–20a). The participles when linked with the imperative verb themselves take on imperatival force and function as imperatives. Under the second of these participles is the parallel triadic formula *εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος*, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (v. 19b). The final sentence (v. 20b), with the forceful introductory *ἰδοὺ*, “look,” the *ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι*, “I am with you,” and the final phrase *ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος*, “until the consummation of the age,” functions as a grand concluding cadence to the pericope and the entire Gospel. The commission proper (vv 19–20a) is thus preceded by the assertion of Jesus' authority (v. 18) and followed by the promise of Jesus' presence (v. 20b). Indeed, it is possible to see, with Schieber, a concentric structure: A, authority (v. 18b); B, making disciples (v. 19a); C, the central element, baptizing (v. 19b); B', teaching (v. 20a); and A', presence (v. 20b). Also note the occurrence of the word “all” no less than four times, pointing again to the scope of the passage (v. 18 [authority], v. 19 [nations], and twice in v. 20 [Jesus' commands; days]).

D. Several attempts have been made to classify this pericope in terms of genre. A common explanation is that 28:18–20 is an “enthronement hymn” with an eye on parallel texts in Dan 7:13–14; Phil 2:9–11 (Michel, 36; Jeremias, 38–39; Hahn, *Mission*, 66–67). B. J. Hubbard provides a brief survey of scholarship, including other theories (e.g., cult legend [Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 306], word of revelation, theophany, farewell speech, priestly blessing, covenant renewal [Frankemölle, *Jahwebund*, 53–67; cf. K. Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular*, WMANT 4 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1964)], official decree [e.g., 2 Chr 36:23; thus Malina; cf. Lange]). Hubbard himself looks to the commissioning narratives (concerning patriarchs and prophets) of the Hebrew Bible for a parallel form to the present pericope. The fullest pattern contains the elements of introduction, confrontation, reaction,

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*Herm. Sim. Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes*

vv verse(s)

e.g. *exempli gratia*, for example

WMANT Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament (Neukirchen: Neukirchener)

commission, protest, reassurance, and conclusion. Of these the present pericope lacks protest and conclusion (which records obedience). Clearly our passage resembles both enthronement (presentation, proclamation, acclamation) and commissioning narratives. Yet it fits no specific literary genre *exactly* (see Meier, *JBL* 96 [1977] 407–24; O’Brien; Friedrich; Schieber, *Kairos* 19 [1977] 286–307; and Hill, *IBS* 8 [1968] 54–63). Although the present pericope has some relationship to Dan 7, the contents are not extensive enough to warrant Schaberg’s characterization of it as a midrash on that passage. The text is *sui generis* in the same way that the event is *sui generis*.

E. The question of the authenticity of the words of Jesus in vv 18–20 is rather easier than for earlier passages of the Gospel, assuming one accepts the reality of the risen Jesus. For it is that glorious figure who speaks here and who may readily be thought of as capable of such words. The limitations of the earthly Jesus have been left behind. Here from the mouth of Jesus is the vindication of the legitimacy of the gentile mission (pace Hill). At the same time, it is very clear that the words are recast in Matthew’s style and vocabulary (see Kingsbury, *JBL* 93 [1974] 573–84). This fact, however, does not amount to a demonstration that Matthew composed the passage *ex nihilo* (pace S. Brown, Lange, Kingsbury). He may simply have worked over and re-presented a tradition available to him (thus Gnilka, 505; Meier, *JBL* 96 [1977] 407–24; cf. Osborne). Davies and Allison (*RHPR* 72 [1992] 89–98) argue for an original commissioning logion from Jesus reinterpreted by means of Dan 7:13–14 and finally glossed with Moses-Joshua traditions (Deut 31:14–15, 23; Joshua 1:1–9). For a denial of the influence of Dan 7, however, see Vögtle (SE 2 [1964] 266–94).

### **Comment**

**16** For the first time the disciples are referred to using the poignant term οἱ ἑνδεκά, “the eleven,” rather than οἱ δώδεκα, “the twelve” (cf. 10:1–2, 5; 11:1; 20:17; 26:14, 20, 47). For “the eleven” in this sense, i.e., the twelve minus Judas, cf. Mark 16:14; Luke 24:9, 33; Acts 1:26. Note, however, that “the eleven” *includes* Peter. The eleven disciples travel up to Galilee as they had been commanded to do both by Jesus and by the angel at the tomb (cf. vv 7, 10; and Jesus’ statement in 26:32). The consummation of the story will thus take place where the ministry began: in “Galilee of the Gentiles” the light dawns that overcomes the shadow of death (4:15–16) and makes possible the mission to the Gentiles (v. 19). No reference has been made earlier in Matthew to a specific mountain in Galilee where the disciples were to meet Jesus (τὸ ὄρος οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, “the mountain to which Jesus had summoned them”), and here it may simply reflect Matthew’s concern to set this revelatory expression of Jesus at an appropriately holy mountain, as elsewhere in the Gospels, i.e., a place of revelation. Traditionally the mountain has been identified with Tabor, the mount of the transfiguration. (On this, the seventh of Matthew’s mountains [including 14:23], see Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain*, 170–90; Strobel argues for an actual, rather than symbolic, place.)

**17** When the disciples saw Jesus they, like the women earlier (v. 9), προσεκύνησαν, “worshiped,” him. This would seem to indicate not only that they recognized Jesus but that they thus believed that he had risen from the dead. The reader is accordingly unprepared for the last three words of the verse: οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν, “but they doubted.” Two major problems here must be addressed. First, to what exactly does the definite article οἱ refer? Second, what is the nuance of ἐδίστασαν, “they doubted?”

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pace with due respect to, but differing from or despite the interpretation of

Grammatical considerations alone cannot answer the first question. Even without the corresponding οἱ μὲν to go with οἱ δέ (i.e., “some, on the one hand, ... but others”), the latter words can have a partitive sense meaning “some of the eleven.” On the other hand, οἱ δέ can simply be taken as a pronoun meaning “they,” i.e., all of the eleven (for evidence of both possibilities, see BAGD, 549b–550a). An examination of the οἱ δέ construction in Matthew seems mainly to support the latter usage (see 2:5; 4:20, 22; 14:17, 33; 15:34; 16:7, 14; 20:5, 31; 21:25; 22:19; 26:15; 26:67; 27:4, 21, 23; 28:15). Granted that some of these occurrences may be ambiguous, none of them demands a division. All of them could be, and several must be, taken as inclusive (if “some” is occasionally meant, they represent the whole group) rather than partitive (26:67, listed by BAGD as partitive, is hardly necessarily so). Grayston has this right, McKay notwithstanding. Van der Horst’s overstated case to the contrary (οἱ δέ “*must* be part of the disciples” [29]) is based solely upon Hellenistic usage and ignores Matthean usage. Furthermore, if the evangelist had wanted to say “some,” he had available to him the unmistakable τινές or τινὲς αὐτῶν to make his point. For strong support for taking οἱ δέ as referring to all the eleven, see Gibling; Neirynck; Reeves; Kwik; and Hahn, “Der Sendungsauftrag” (among the commentators, cf. Grundmann, Bonnard, Viviano, Bruner, Garland). In fact, however, the decision about the sense of the construction in 28:17 is usually influenced by the problem posed by the idea of all eleven “doubting.” And thus a considerable number of commentators continue to opt for translating οἱ δέ with “some,” i.e., some of the eleven worshiped, some doubted (e.g., Hill; Gundry; Fenton; Hubbard, *The Matthean Redaction*; France; Gnillka; Harrington; Blomberg). Some indeed cannot tolerate the idea of *any* of the eleven doubting and thus argue, with no actual evidence, that οἱ δέ means “some” *others* who were on the mountain and not the eleven (Allen; McNeile; Plummer; Lohmeyer; Klostermann; and more recently, Carson; L. Morris [if tentatively]; Hiebert, *BSac* 149 [1992] 338–54).

At the root of the problem for those who have trouble accepting that all eleven disciples were involved is the meaning of the word ἐδίστασαν, usually translated “they doubted.” The question is whether doubt, in the sense of unbelief, is compatible with the worship referred to in the first clause. Some would avoid the problem by understanding ἐδίστασαν as a pluperfect, i.e., they “had doubted” but no longer did (thus Jerome, Lagrange). This view is disallowed, however, by the clearly aorist verb of the first clause. Others argue for a weakened sense of προσεκύνησαν, taking it not as worship but as a posture from which to beseech Jesus for mercy (Grayston). Another way of dealing with the difficulty is by specifying the object of the doubt. For Grayston the doubt concerns whether Jesus will forgive them for their recent disloyalty. Others assert that the doubt concerned the identity of Jesus (thus Hendricksen; Filson; Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* [Chicago: Moody, 1974]). Some suggest that they were uncertain about the propriety of worshiping Jesus (Parkhurst, Harrington; cf. Lange). In both cases one may ask why then the disciples worshiped Jesus. As to the latter, clearly the worship of Jesus is no problem for the evangelist, and he would hardly make it one for the disciples (Blomberg suggests the reverse problem, i.e., “confusion about how to behave in the presence of a supernaturally manifested, exalted, and holy being” [430]). As a final example of the lengths to which some have been driven to solve this puzzle, note W. D. Morris’ emendation of the text to οἱ δὲ διέστησαν, i.e., “but they stood apart,” i.e., not approaching the risen Jesus.

The key to a proper understanding of the statement is the definition of the verb διστάζειν. To begin with, it must be stressed that the verb does not refer to unbelief, nor even perplexity. As I. P. Ellis has pointed out, the evangelist had available ἀπιστεῖν for “disbelieve” and ἀπορεῖν for “be perplexed.” The word occurs in the NT only here and in 14:31. In the latter passage, Peter walks on the water until he sees the wind and becomes afraid. Then Jesus addresses him as ὀλιγόπιστε, “O little faith,” and asks εἰς τί ἐδίστασας, “Why did you doubt?” The doubt here amounts to hesitation, indecision (Ellis documents this meaning of the word in Plato and Aristotle), and perhaps uncertainty. In Peter’s case the doubt indicates a divided mind brought about by a lack of an adequate measure of faith, not a lack of faith altogether. This appears to be somewhat, but not altogether, different from the reference to διαλογισμοί, “doubts,” that

were arising in the hearts of the disciples as they confronted the risen Jesus according to [Luke 24:38](#). To be noted, incidentally, is the fact that a few lines later Luke can refer to a combination of ἀπιστούντων, “disbelieving,” and χαρᾶς, “joy,” in the minds of (all, not some) of the disciples ([Luke 24:41](#)).

It is natural to believe that the eleven disciples would have been in a state of hesitation and indecision. Too much had happened too fast for them to be able to assimilate it. They did not doubt that it was Jesus whom they saw and whom they gladly worshiped. If their faith was too small in measure, that was because they were in a state of uncertainty about what the recent events meant and what might happen next. They found themselves in “a situation of cognitive dissonance *par excellence*”; (Walsh and Keesmaat, 195). It is precisely this state of mind that is addressed in the words that Jesus speaks to the disciples in the following verses (vv 18–20; see Giblin, who refers to “reassurance”). Jesus’ words will accomplish what the sight of the risen Jesus alone could not. Two things remain intriguing, however: first, that Matthew bothers at all to insert the reference to their doubting, and second, that Matthew records no resolution of their uncertain state of mind (cf. Leon-Dufour, “Origin”). It seems clear that Matthew wanted members of his community to apply the truth to themselves. This can be put in a variety of ways. Garland writes: “Matthew understands that the fluctuation between worship and indecision is every disciple’s struggle. What is needed is confidence that Jesus is Lord of all and present with them at all times” (266). Other writers have appropriately made room for doubt alongside faith in the believer (see Grundmann, Bruner, Reeves, Walsh and Keesmaat, and Viviano, who concludes that the passage refers to “a common psychological experience which gives hope to moderns” [674]). To such people, who are far from being perfect, Jesus gives the commission to make disciples of the nations (Bruner, Stendahl)—a commission, as we have already noted, that is framed with a comforting statement and promise.

**18** Jesus now “comes to them” (προσελθών), a comforting approach that takes the initiative to reestablish an intimate relationship with them, and speaks the wonderful concluding words of the Gospel. He does not rebuke them for their disloyalty or their doubt. He begins with a vitally important prelude to the formal commissioning of the disciples, namely, the assertion of his authority: ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς, “all authority has been given to me in heaven and upon [the] earth.” The passive verb assumes God as the acting subject: God has given Jesus this comprehensive sovereignty over the whole of the created order. Already during his ministry he had made statements about his authority. In 9:6 (cf. 9:8) he referred to the ἐξουσίαν, “authority,” given to the Son of Man ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, “upon the earth,” in this case to forgive sins (cf. Dan 7:14 with respect to the Son of Man). In 11:27 he made the astonishing claim that πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου, “all things have been given to me by my Father” (see *Comment* on this verse and Lange’s discussion, 25–96; cf. John 3:35). From the risen Jesus, however, such a claim has all the more convincing power (cf. the exalted passage concerning the authority specifically of the risen Jesus in Eph 1:20–23). The resurrection serves as a vindication of the words and deeds of Jesus during his ministry. Now the resurrected (not resuscitated!) Jesus who appears before the disciples is one who partakes of a new order of existence and who here anticipates his glorious exaltation (enthronement; cf. 2 Sam 7:13) at God’s right hand (cf. Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9; Phil 2:9–11) and indeed the parousia itself. As on the mount of the transfiguration (17:1–8), the veil is taken away—but now permanently—so that the glorious identity of Jesus becomes plain (cf. 26:64). It is accordingly the one who has “all authority in heaven and on earth,” i.e., the sovereign authority of God, who now sends out his disciples on the mission to evangelize the world. This is to provide them in turn with authority and supply them with confidence as they go. The authority of the risen one is not categorically

new but now depends upon a new basis—the arrival at a new stage of salvation history. Dan 7:13–14 provides important background material to vv 18–20, referring to one like a Son of Man who receives “dominion and glory and kingship,” an everlasting dominion, “that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him” (for the Dan 7 background to this pericope, see Schaberg’s discussion, 111–221).

**19** This connection between the authority of Jesus and the fulfilling of the tasks now assigned to the disciples and those who come after them in Matthew’s and every church is made plain in the connective οὖν, “therefore.” Jesus’ authority (v. 18) and his presence (v. 20) will empower his disciples to fulfill the commission he now gives them. The commission itself is given by means of one main imperative verb, μαθητεύσατε, “make disciples,” together with three syntactically subordinate participles that take on an imperatival force (thus rightly Friedrich, 154) because of the main verb. The first of these, πορεύθεντες, precedes the main verb. The disciples are to “go” and “make disciples.” Since the main verb has for its object πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, “all the nations,” it is implied that the disciples are to go into all the world. The universal authority of Jesus is the basis of the universal mission of the church. The verb μαθητεύσατε, “make disciples,” is characteristically Matthean (cf. 13:52; 27:57; the only other NT occurrence is in Acts 14:21 where it is linked with εὐαγγελισάμενοι, “having evangelized”). The word “disciple” means above all “learner” or “pupil.” The emphasis in the commission thus falls not on the initial proclamation of the gospel but more on the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship, an emphasis that is strengthened and explained by the instruction “teaching them to keep all that I have commanded” in v. 20a. To be made a disciple in Matthew means above all to follow after righteousness as articulated in the teaching of Jesus (see Kvalbein, *Themelios* 13 [1988] 48–53).

Now, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, for the first time the limitation of the gospel to Israel (cf. 10:5; 15:24) is removed. The direct commission is given to take the message of Jesus to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, “all the nations” (a development anticipated in 24:14; 26:13), a task acknowledged and fulfilled by the early church (cf. Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; Col. 1:23). Now we finally arrive at the full inclusion of the Gentiles (on this, see Hre Kio) in the history of salvation (cf. Dan 7:14), something hinted at in the Gospel from the very beginning and throughout (cf. the allusion to Abraham in 1:1 but also the magi in 2:1–12, the centurion in 8:5–13, and the Canaanite woman’s daughter in 15:21–28). The problem of the slowness of the early church to engage in the evangelization of the Gentiles is no necessary obstacle to the historicity of these words of commission. In all probability the earliest church believed that Israel was to be won first before the “time of the Gentiles” would begin (Gerhardsson). The commission as it stands in Matthew does not exclude the Jews, nor (pace Hare and Harrington; see esp. Meier, *CBQ* 39 [1977] 94–104), of course, did the early church understand its task in such a way as to exclude further evangelization of the Jews (cf. Rom 1:16; 10:18; 1 Cor 9:20). Probably already in 24:9; 25:32 the Jews are included under the rubric τὰ ἔθνη, “the nations.” It is shocking now to find Israel thus subordinated and absorbed into the comprehensive reference to the nations. In the now completed salvific work of the Messiah, Israel has accomplished her special role in salvation history. She now too is to enjoy the fruit of that accomplishment as *primus inter pares* (cf. Rom 1:16). The reference to “all nations” here, of course, cannot be understood as the collective conversion of national groups (in which case αὐτά, the neuter plural pronoun, would be expected rather than αὐτούς, “them” [masculine], as in our text).

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esp. especially

The disciples are further told to “baptize” (βαπτίζοντες; the second of the participles functioning as supplementary imperatives) new disciples. The command to baptize comes as somewhat of a surprise since baptism is referred to earlier only in chap. 3 (and 21:25) where only John’s baptism is described (among the Gospels only in John 3:22; 4:1–2 do we read of Jesus’ or his disciples’ baptizing others). Matthew tells us nothing concerning his view of Christian baptism. Only Matthew records this command of Jesus, but the practice of the early church suggests its historicity (cf. Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 38; 9:18; etc.). The threefold name (at most only an incipient trinitarianism) in which the baptism was to be performed, on the other hand, seems clearly to be a liturgical expansion of the evangelist consonant with the practice of his day (thus Hubbard; cf. *Did.* 7.1). There is a good possibility that in its original form, as witnessed by the ante-Nicene Eusebian form, the text read “make disciples *in my name*” (see Conybeare). This shorter reading preserves the symmetrical rhythm of the passage, whereas the triadic formula fits awkwardly into the structure as one might expect if it were an interpolation (see H. B. Green; cf. Howard; Hill [*IBS* 8 (1986) 54–63], on the other hand, argues for a concentric design with the triadic formula at its center). It is Kosmala, however, who has argued most effectively for the shorter reading, pointing to the central importance of the “name of Jesus” in early Christian preaching, the early practice of baptism in the name of Jesus, and the singular “in his name” with reference to the hope of the Gentiles in Isa 42:4b, quoted by Matthew in 12:18–21. As Carson rightly notes of our passage: “There is no evidence we have Jesus’ *ipsissima verba* here” (598). The narrative of Acts notes the use of the name only of “Jesus Christ” in baptism (Acts 2:38; 8:16 10:48; 19:5; cf. Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27) or simply “the Lord Jesus” (τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ; Acts 8:16; 19:5). Baptism εἰς, lit. “into,” the “name” (the singular ὄνομα, “name,” points to the unity of the three) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit reflects the Hebrew/Aramaic expression **𐤏𐤕𐤔𐤌**, *lēšēm*, which has a cultic sense and means “fundamentally determined by” (Hartman). In contrast to John’s baptism, this baptism brings a person into an existence that is fundamentally determined by, i.e., ruled by, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (cf. εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα, “in my name,” in 18:20). Schaberg’s theory that the triadic formula goes back to the triad in Dan 7 (Ancient of Days, one like a son of man, and angels) remains an improbable speculation.

**20** The final element of the commission is found in διδάσκοντες, “teach” (the third participle functioning as an imperative). They are thus told to do what Jesus himself did (Jesus is referred to as teaching in 4:23; 5:2; 7:29; 9:35; 11:1; 13:34; 21:23; 26:55). This command recalls the explicit teaching of 5:19. The exalted Jesus stands in continuity with the historical Jesus (thus Luck). The object of the participle is the clause τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν, lit. “to keep everything whatsoever I have commanded you.” This is obviously a concern that has often been close to the heart of the evangelist earlier in the Gospel, especially in the first discourse of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount, namely, *obedience* to the teaching of Jesus (cf. esp. 5:17–20; 7:21–27). “Righteousness” for Matthew finds its final and authoritative definition in the teaching of Jesus, who is the *one* teacher (23:8, 10). And indeed, the Gospel of Matthew provided the church with an excellent handbook containing that teaching. And it is thus the particular responsibility of the church to hand on that teaching and to see to it that new disciples make it their way of life (cf. the similar Johannine emphasis [John 14:23]). The commission of the disciples is followed by a promise that must have cheered the hearts of those to whom so much responsibility was being given. Matthew calls attention to its special character with his ἰδοὺ,

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lit. literally

“look.” The promise is that ἐγὼ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰμι, “I am with you,” words that recall the promise of 18:20 as well as echo especially the identification of Jesus as Emmanuel, “God with us” (1:23; cf. Hag 1:13 where the words are found verbatim in slightly different order; in fact, the promise echoes numerous OT passages that promise the presence of Yahweh with his people, e.g., Gen 28:15; Exod 3:12; Josh 1:5, 9; Isa 41:10). Where Yahweh was formerly with his people, Jesus is now with his people, the church. Jesus, though not physically present among them, will not have abandoned them. He will be in their midst, though unseen, and will empower them to fulfill the commission he has given them. Those who receive the messengers of the good news will receive Jesus himself (10:40). And the promise of Jesus’ continuing presence with them is not restricted to any special circumstances (but includes persecution as well as ministry), nor is it made simply for the immediate future. He will be with them πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, “all the days until the consummation of the age.” The last phrase, “the consummation of the age,” is also found in 13:39–40, 49; 24:3 and for Matthew (contrast Heb 9:26) refers to end of the present age through the parousia of the Son of Man and the experience of the final judgment of the wicked and reward of the righteous. Jesus promises his disciples that he will be with them until the end of time as presently known. The promise thus applies not only to the future of the disciples themselves but to their successors and their successors’ successors in the church. The evangelist here not only writes history but provides a promise having relevance to his own contemporaries and indeed to the disciples composing the church down to the end of the eon.

### ***Explanation***

The risen Jesus is central to the existence and proclamation of the church. There would be no gospel if there had been no resurrection. The resurrection, however, is not simply a datum of history, words about a past event. The resurrection has enormous consequence for present Christian existence (which, however, it is left to certain NT epistles to expound). It is the risen Jesus, to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given, who here commissions his disciples and in effect the church of every period of history. They are to go everywhere with the message of good news in the name and authority of Jesus. Theirs is indeed an awesome responsibility: to go, make disciples of all nations, baptize, and teach. If left to their own devices and strength, the task would be overwhelming. Yet they are not left alone in this assignment. The risen, enthroned Jesus promises to be with them in their fulfillment of it, not intermittently but always. Evidence of the truth of that promise is readily available in the narrative of the book of Acts as well as in the history of the church (cf. 16:18), which has seen a network of believers around the world in every land, of every race, come into existence from what began just after the death of Jesus with but a handful of doubting, confused, and powerless disciples. The statements that frame the commission on either side concerning the authority and the presence of Jesus alone allow the church to continue in the world. Only the ongoing reality of these facts can continue to equip the church for its mission—a mission that will continue until the consummation of the age. The great commission and its frame with which Matthew ends remain, like the whole Gospel itself, one of the priceless treasures of the Christian church, providing comfort, strength, and hope until the final dawning of the eschaton. “And this good news of the



kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (24:14).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Hagner, Donald A.: *Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 14-28*. Dallas : Word, Incorporated, 2002 (Word Biblical Commentary 33B), S. 878