

The Great Commission

Matthew 28:16-20 and First Corinthians 15:5-6

DIG: How does Jesus' commission here compare with His earlier one in Matthew 10:5-7, and a much earlier one in **Genesis Dt - I Will Bless Those Who Bless You and Whoever Curses You I Will Curse**. Of the four things commanded of the talmidim in verses 19-20, which one is central? How are they to make disciples? Of Whom? With what resources? Toward what end?

REFLECT: In what ways might you fulfill the Great Commission in the context of your family? Work? Community? What hope does this passage give you as you seek to follow the Messiah? How has the harmony of the Gospels changed your views of Jesus Christ? Or of the kingdom of God? Or of Yeshua's ministry. Of your ministry?

Then the eleven talmidim went from the Sea of Galilee, to a mountain in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go (Matthew 28:16). **This was the eighth appearance of Jesus after His resurrection.** The mountain has not been identified for us in the Gospel accounts. It might have been the remote mountaintop where Peter, James and John saw His Shekinah glory (see **Gb - Jesus went up a High Mountain and was Transfigured**). Or it might have been at the top of Mount Tabor, where you can see a vast expanse of flat land stretching out on all sides. Though less than two thousand feet above sea level at the summit, it feels like you can see the entire world from there.

When they saw Him, they prostrated themselves before Him and worshiped Him; but some doubted (Matthew 28:17). This was not intellectual doubt so much as practical uncertainty. It probably means they didn't know how to respond to Messiah in this new situation in His glorified body. He was familiar and yet now different. The conflicting instincts to worship the risen Lord and to avoid a potentially embarrassing encounter make this a very human scene.¹⁶⁹⁶ The biblical account doesn't whitewash the spiritual doubts of any believer. We know that Thomas doubted that Messiah had risen (see **Mk - Jesus Appears to Thomas**), as well as the disciples on the road to Emmaus who did not recognize Yeshua at first (see **Mh - On the Road to Emmaus**). But with His numerous resurrection appearances, it would not be long before all the talmidim were dedicated believers, and were joined by an ever-increasing number of new messianic Jews who accepted His message and were baptized. At the festival of Shavu'ot about three thousand were added to the number of believers in a single day (Acts 2:41).

The final words of Yeshua to His apostles needed to be of utmost importance. Then Jesus came to them and said **four things**:

First, He assured them that **all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him** as the risen Meshiach (Matthew 28:18). Perhaps He needed to reinforce that important truth after His humiliating death on the cross. Nevertheless, Jesus had fulfilled His calling to suffer and die for the sins of Isra'el and the entire world.

Secondly, they are given the commission of making **disciples**. It involved three things that are all equal in importance in the Greek:

(1) **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations**. As a result, the talmidim had a new mandate. It could be translated, *having gone*, giving the sense of an expectation that they were already on their way! What were they to do while they were going? **Make disciples**. The main focus of commission was for His talmidim (students or learners) to go and make new talmidim (students or learners). **This is consistent with the principle in rabbinic literature "to raise many disciples" (Pirke Avot 1:1)**. How much more so for the talmidim of the Meshiach?¹⁶⁹⁷

The things that His talmidim had seen and experienced were meant to be passed on to others. It is called the **Good News** because the kingdom of God is now very close to those who seek after it. Sins may be forgiven through the finished work of the **Messiah**, and we can be adopted in the family of God when we place our faith/trust/belief in the risen **Savior**. The **Good News** is meant to be shared. And this is exactly what we see happening in the book of Acts, starting first with the Jews in Jerusalem (**Romans 1:16; Acts 1:8**). **Day after day, in the Temple they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 5:42)**.

But Yeshua's Great Commission extends beyond the city of Yerushalayim and the Jewish people. That was God's plan from the very beginning. When ADONAI called Abram, He told him: **I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the Gentile [nations] on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:2-3)**. And later the LORD reminded Isaiah's generation of their calling to be a light to the Gentile nations when He said: **I will make you Jacob a light for the Gentiles, that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6b)**. So the Great Commission is for all peoples, both Jew and Gentile alike. The abundant life in the Messiah is offered to all.

(2) **baptizing them (Matthew 28:19a)**. **Baptism** is an outward expression of an inward conviction. You are not saved because you are **baptized**, you are **baptized** because you are saved. There is nothing we can add to the completed work of **Christ** on the cross (see **Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith/Trust/Belief**). If it is possible (and for the thief on the cross it wasn't), baptism is an act of obedience, but it is not necessary for salvation this is accomplished by **faith** alone. **So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith (Galatians 3:26)**. The formula for being adopted in the family of **God** is: **Salvation = faith + nothing**. For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through **faith** - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of **God** - not by works, so that no one can boast (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). **Baptism** in a kosher pool, or *mikvah*, has long been a common practice in Judaism to symbolize various spiritual truths. In biblical times the *mikvah* was a place of ritual cleansing after healing (**Leviticus 15**), or to prepare for the holy days (**Lev 16**). Similarly, a woman was to go to the *mikvah* after her monthly cleansing (Hebrew *nidah*), and is still practiced today by observant Jewish women (See **Is - Jesus Came to Bethany, Where Lazarus Lived, Whom Jesus Had Raised From the Dead**).

But **baptism** was also a common requirement for **Gentiles** who wanted to convert to Judaism. **A Gentile** in the first-century **was told to bring a Temple sacrifice, be circumcised, and to take a ritual mikvah as a symbol of his sincere desire to follow the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Tractate Yevamot 47a)**. Since there were numerous types of **baptisms**, as stated above, **Jesus'** next phrase qualified exactly what kind of **baptism** was to be used. **His apostles** were to **baptize in the name** (singular) **of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19b)**. Matthew's Jewish audience already believed in **God the Father** as well as **God the Spirit**. What is distinctive about this **baptism** is that it is also in **the name** of **Yeshua** as **the Messiah**. Hence, for those who embrace **Jesus** as their **Savior** and intend to live their life in obedience to **Him**, this specific kind of **baptism** is a symbol of that commitment. And even though Messianic Jews continue to chant: **Sh'ma, Yisra'el! ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad (Deuteronomy 6:4)**, they see a plurality in the *Godhead*.¹⁶⁹⁸

(3) **And** as the **talmidim** then, we are to go and make other **disciples, teaching them to obey everything Yeshua commanded**. In other words, **teaching them to obdy** the Word of **God**. Since **He** put great emphasis on the Torah and the Prophets (see **Dg - The Completion of the Torah**), we must also teach **the whole plan of God (Acts 20:27 CJB)** as an essential part of **Christ's** commission. The Bible is our owner's manual. **ADONAI** created us and included everything we need to know about keeping ourselves in top spiritual shape. So if something breaks down in your life, consult your owner's manual.

Thirdly, those who follow and believe will be saved, and those who do not will be lost.

Fourthly, because it could have sounded rather overwhelming to those early Jewish believers then (and us today), they were given great assurance and hope. **Yeshua** promised: **And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew (28:20))**. The story is told of a man on an African safari deep in the jungle. The guide before him had a machete and was whacking away the tall weeds and thick underbrush. The traveler, tired and hot, asked in frustration, "Where are we? Do you know where you are taking me? Where is the path?" The seasoned guide stopped and looked back at the man and replied, "I am the path."

We ask the same question don't we? We ask **God**, "Where are you taking me? Where is the path?" And **He**, like the guide, doesn't tell us. Oh, **He** may give us a hint or two, but that's all. If **He** did would we understand? Would we comprehend our location? No, like the traveler, we are unacquainted with this jungle called life. So rather than give us an answer, **Jesus** gives us a far greater gift. **He** gives us **Himself**.¹⁶⁹⁹

And He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve because **Matthias** had replaced Judas after the birth of the messianic community (**Acts 1:20-26**). **After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep (First Corinthians 15:5-6)**. Large numbers of people claimed to see **Jesus** alive. Rabbi Sha'ul points out that there were still living witnesses to the resurrection many years after the cross. To be sure, these were first hand accounts.

The changed lives of **the apostles** give evidence to the truth of **the Good News**. There can be no other explanation. It is absolutely certain that **they** did not expect **Christ** to rise. Something happened that transformed **their** lives. They believed in **Him** to the point that **they** were willing to die a martyr's death for **their** faith. There is no other human explanation for their belief (see **Cy - These are the Names of the Twelve Apostles**).

Yeshua's commission applies just as much to us today as it did to **His** first-century **apostles**. It seems as though we are living in the days when the last chapter of Jewish history and world history is about to be written. But we need not be afraid, the best is yet to come (see my commentary on **Isaiah Dd - The Wolf Will Live With the Lamb**).

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series of articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

And Keturah spoke to me, saying, Do you have any Postage Stamps? And I said, I have none here, but I have some in my Study. And she said, I would like you to take some letters for me, and do not forget to mail them. Three weeks is the limit for you to carry my letters in Your Pocket.

And I said, My dear, I am not sure why Delilah delivered Samson over to the Philistines, but I think he forgot to mail her letters. I will be careful and remember. But how is it that you are out of Stamps?

And she said, I was sure I had some; for in my drawer was a Whole Strip of what I thought were Stamps upside down. But when I went to get some Stamps, to my surprise, there was not a Stamp there. There was only a long strip of Perforated paper that had been torn off the margin of a sheet of stamps. And instead of Ten Stamps, there were ten Scraps of paper.

And I said, There are few disappointments so great in this life as that of going to the Stamp Box in confident expectation, and finding the Last Stamp gone, and the Post Office Closed. And she said, It would not be so bad if it had not been that there were in the Box those papers that looked like Stamps.

Now I thought of this, and I considered the disappointment of Keturah, how those Blank Stamps were a Delusion and a Hollow Mockery and a Snare. Whereas, had they not been there, she would have said, cheerfully, Yes, we have not Postage Stamps, and straight away gone and bought some or asked her Husband to bring some Home.

Now this is a Sad Thing in Human Experience, not that there are not men, and not that there are no women, but that when the time comes when there have seemed to be men and women enough for any possible event, whole rows and sheets of them are good for nothing and worse than nothing because they create a false sense of security. For they lack what the Perforated Blanks lacked, the stamp of Personality and Authority and Power upon the one side, and the Glue of Tenacity of Purpose upon the other.

Now I thought of this, and I remembered the bitter words of the Prophet concerning the sorrows of **God**, that He looked for someone to stand in the Gap, and thought there were people enough, there were none that had the Picture and Glue. And I think this must have been the Sorrow of **God** in all ages. For **God** hath sometimes stood with a Handful of Righteous Purposes that He would have sent one great Event to Spokane and another to Santa Fe and another to Skowhegan, but He could not do many mighty works there or in any of those places.

So the cry of **God** rings out, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And if a person responds by saying, Here am I, send me: and that one has both the Imprint of **God** upon their soul, and a thick coating of Glue upon their purpose, then **God** does indeed arrive.

But **God** does often look in **His** Stamp Box and find Whole Strips of Bland Margins.¹⁷⁰⁰