

The Apostolic Commissions

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FORWARD

In most of the "Christian world", the mission of "the Church" is to fulfill the "Great Commission". Sometimes, in fact, most of the time, it is taken for granted that everyone knows what is meant by "the Great Commission", and that it must be in the Bible. Now what most mean by the Great Commission is the ending to the *Gospel According to Matthew*, but even that is never expressly addressed as such.

This is not to say that it is not a great commission, or that it is wrong to call it this. But if we called it something else would that be an issue? If we attempt to clearly define the scope and purpose, are we trying to unbind ourselves from what God has bound? Should it be taught as a "do this and stop discussing it", or should we try and clearly understand our Lord's words before we attempt to fulfill them?

This is a compilation of studies of the subject and an attempt to understand our Lord's message. The title of it is *The Apostolic Commissions* because that is who this command in Matthew and other commands throughout the Scriptural record were given to first. Whether some or all of it can be applied to us is secondary, because in studying the Word of God we should first listen and get a firm grip on what the Bible says before we can in any way determine what the Bible means. We should get a firm grip on the interpretation before we can apply anything, either directly or indirectly.

The one request that I would make of the reader is that you would look to the Scriptures to see if these things are so as Luke commended the Jews at Berea for so doing in Acts 17. Do not react emotionally, but ponder this *Scripturally*.

THE COMMISSION IN MATTHEW: MATTHEW 28:16–20

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

This is the end of the Gospel According to Matthew. Before continuing, I would like the reader to notice that there is no reference to the ascension of our Lord in Matthew. He is seen on this mountain in Galilee speaking to His disciples, and that is where the account ends. It is quite possible that this is the same mountain where He was transfigured before them and they saw His kingdom glory. That is why He stated to them in Matthew 16:28 that **some standing here... shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom**. In the very next 2 verses, chapter 17 verses 1&2, He was transfigured before them and **His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light** (Matthew 17:2). Why then is His ascension not recorded nor even referred to? The other accounts of our Lord's earthly ministry all record His ascension. It is recorded in Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51, Acts 1:9–10, and John speaks of His ascension in John 3:13. Matthew, however, does not, even though he was certainly a witness to this miraculous event. Why does he not mention it? Accepting with no hesitation the Holy Spirit's intentional omission in this inspired account of our Lord's ministry, we would have to conclude that the ascension of our Lord is outside of the purpose of His call on Matthew to write. From the book of Matthew, I offer the following as to why this may be:

1. **Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the *earth*.** (Matthew 5:5)
2. **Ye are the salt of the *earth*...** (Matthew 5:13)
3. **Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in *earth*, as it is in heaven.** (Matthew 6:10)
4. **But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power *on earth* to forgive sins...** (Matthew 9:6)
5. **At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and *earth*...** (Matthew 11:25)
6. **And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind *on earth* shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose *on earth* shall be loosed in heaven.** (Matthew 16:19)
7. **Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind *on earth* shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose *on earth* shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree *on earth* as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.** (Matthew 18:18–19)

THE PURPOSE OF GOD CONCERNING THE EARTH

The very first verse of the Bible says plainly:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the *earth*. (Genesis 1:1)

God created the universe, but chose to tell us that He created the heaven and the earth. Indeed, He has a plan for the earth:

For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the *earth* and made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else. (Isaiah 45:18)

The Gospel of Matthew has everything to do with God's plans for earth and His Anointed King. It will be His Christ, who will rule and reign over it. I would offer the hypothesis that Christ ascending to Heaven is outside of that scope, and it is very reasonable to consider the possibility that this is a reason for this *intentional* omission.

DETAILS OF THE COMMISSION IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Before going forward in this study, let us look closely at the details of His commissioning words as recorded in Matthew 28:

- **All power is given unto Me in heaven and earth**
 - All power: ἐξουσία—"exousia"—this is authority, privilege, right to rule, or in a word, sovereignty.
 - The Lord Jesus Christ is given that sovereignty
 - He has that sovereignty in heaven and earth
- **Go ye therefore**
 - Because of this sovereignty, here is the command. It is stamped with His authority and approval.
- **teach all nations**
 - The place of all nations. They are the objects of the teaching of the eleven disciples. The nations, i.e., Gentile nations, are to be made disciples.
 - An interesting observation: These are not specified as individuals but as nations. The nations as a whole are to be taught.
- **baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost**
 - baptizing them *in* (Greek εἰς—"eis") the Name. The nations are to be baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. They are to be identified as under His sovereignty. We should do away with the thought of this as a "baptism formula" and begin thinking about what it actually is. The nations are to be followers of God's Christ, under the rule and reign of

the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Believers today under the present dispensation of grace, however, are baptized by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13) into Jesus Christ and baptized into His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3–4). This does not diminish His rightful sovereignty over heaven and earth even now, but the sovereignty over the nations of the earth in prophecy is not the grace reign that true Christians enjoy now, but is a time of reign when He will rule the nations with a rod of iron.

- **teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you**
 - This is the content of their training, i.e., discipleship
 - These commands are the “ruling charter” of the King. Matthew chapters 5–7 gives a summary of the commandments in force under the King’s reign.
- **And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world**
 - This is the duration of the Lord’s stamp of approval by His sovereignty on this teaching (discipleship) ministry.
 - It is unto the end of the world (*age*: Greek αἰών — “*aiōn*”)

WHY THE DELAY?

This passage is often referred to as our Lord’s last words and last commands. But is this the case? Is this the last word that He has spoken? And what is the purpose of this command? Above we have broken down succinctly using the words of scripture as they are translated in the King James Version of the Bible, because for many years this version has been the Bible in English. I have not sought to find any special version or translation to make these words say what I think they should say. That should be our attitude in Bible study always—that the Word of God speaks, and we listen. In simply reading the New Testament, there are 26 distinct books following. This is *not* His last word. There was very much left for Him to speak.

This ending to Matthew is looking ahead to the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven brought down to Earth. While He has here established His right to reign, this Kingdom will not be an accomplished fact until

The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 11:15)

Now all of us can see looking at this world around us that this is not the rule and reign of our Lord in the world today. This world is in constant chaos, injustice, and war; the Kingdom of heaven that the Scriptures reveal is one of righteousness and peace. So what is the answer to this dilemma? The Apostle Peter gives us insight on where to find the answer to this dilemma:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. ... But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack

concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. ... *And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.* (2 Peter 3:3–4, 8–9, 15–16)

So the Apostle Peter's statement that the Apostle Paul has written regarding these things, let us look to the Apostle Paul for the answer as to why the sovereignty of this world has not yet become the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, although He is by divine right Lord of all.

And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. (Ephesians 1:19–23)

Paul states here in exalting fashion the place where our Lord Jesus is now: He is at the right hand of God, in the heavenlies. But what about God's plan for the earth? Has He abandoned that plan now that His people rejected His Son? God forbid! He is at the right hand of the Father graciously and patiently waiting.

The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. (Psalm 110:1)

So now we ask the question again, what about God's plan for the earth? If we have any trust in God's Word, we should know that He will accomplish His purposes. While the elect nation Israel and the rest of this world's nations have been ripe for judgment, He is patiently and mercifully waiting. ***The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.***

...receive not the grace of God in vain. (For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.) (2 Corinthians 6:1–2)

He is now in grace offering salvation to Jew and Gentile alike, not on the basis of covenants but on the basis of mercy. He is offering salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of redemption by Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross (Ephesians 2:8–9, 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, etc.). He is reigning in grace today until this offer is no longer available and is taken off the table:

...when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory

of His power; When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10)

This time of the longsuffering of our Lord could be understood as a period of amnesty. It is truly a reign of grace. It is NOT the time when He is ruling the nations with a rod of iron. While our gracious God is speaking in grace and peace to the earth, the nations are speaking back in rebellion — war and bloodshed — shaking their collective fist in His face! He will, however, judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). He will return in righteousness to judge and make war (Revelation 19:11). He will smite the nations, and will rule them with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:15). Then His Apostles who were promised twelve thrones in which they would sit in the regeneration and judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28), will lead a discipleship mission, where they will teach all nations, and baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

THE THEOCRACY—THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4)

From the above evidence, the commission here in Matthew from the mountain in Galilee seems in every way to be looking forward to the coming Kingdom age. It is after the seventh angel sounded in the book of Revelation that the elders in heaven are recorded to say: **We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast *taken to thee thy great power*, and hast reigned,** (Revelation 11:17). The Lord will begin to take His great power when He makes the counter-declaration of war upon the nations.

Now, many might say that the Lord Jesus Christ is reigning now in the hearts of believers, and this is true to some extent. The extent of His reign in the believer's heart is to the extent that we yield ourselves as His servants (Romans 6:16–23), and we let the word of Christ dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16). However, this is not the kingdom that the prophets of both testaments, and of which He Himself spoke. His kingdom appears in prophecy to be a real, literal, physical, governmental, and geographic reign. It appears to be this because it will be a real, literal, physical, governmental, and geographic kingdom of heaven on earth. To this end He was born of the virgin:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the *government* shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His *government* and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6–7)

That is why the angel Gabriel said to Mary:

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke 1:31–33)

In connection with this reign and the commission that we are discussing, read about the 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel in Revelation chapters 7 and 14. These are Jehovah's *true* witnesses. When His time to reign comes, it will not be a silent reign, and all Heaven and Earth will know that His time has come!

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. (Revelation 19:6)

Notice that He secures this reign when He comes in righteousness to judge and make war (Revelation 19:11). It is then when He will make His right to sovereignty a reality, and He will be declared absolutely and finally without question or any more opposition: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Which in His times He shall shew, Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; Whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to Whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:15–16)

Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:24–28)

Before continuing our study of this command to bring the nations under the subjection of the ruling King of kings and to disciple them to be proper subjects, let me interrupt with a few questions for you to ponder: Have **you** received the grace of God and believed on the only Name by which **you** are saved and believed the gospel that He has given to **you**, that Christ died for **your** sins and was buried and rose from the dead according to the scriptures? The Lord is longsuffering, and the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation, but the day of salvation will not last forever. Which side are **you** on? Will **you** accept His offer of salvation by grace through faith in His finished work of redemption?

The *Gospel According to Matthew* is the continuation of the prophecy of the Old Testament. This can be seen and should be recognized from the very first verse:

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1)

As the Son of both Abraham and David, our Lord Jesus *as Man* is the only rightful heir to the covenants that were made to these patriarchs. *As God*, He could rightly say that He is Lord of heaven and earth, but the promises made to the Patriarchs would need to be fulfilled because the character of God Himself is to keep His promises (Titus 1:2). But neither Abraham, David, nor any of their sons were worthy to be the heirs of these great promises. None that is, but the Man Christ Jesus. This is where Matthew's gospel begins, with our Lord Jesus Christ and His legitimate claim *as Man* to these promises. It ends with all power and authority given to Him in heaven and in earth. This is to state an important fact about the commission in question: This is a commission about authority, discipleship, and obedience. In that order. It is about setting the world that is rightfully His back to His rightful authority. As stated earlier, it is about sovereignty. At this point, two key phrases in Matthew's gospel need to be addressed.

THE SON OF MAN

The phrase "Son of Man" occurs 32 times in Matthew's gospel, and it is the way that the Lord most often refers to Himself. This term can be best understood from this prophecy in Daniel:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13–14)

That the Son of Man is given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him sounds a lot like all power in heaven and earth is given unto Jesus Christ. Scripture gives witness to the fact that He has not yet taken to Himself that great authority, and if we compare that with the experience of human history since this commission was given there is no argument. The "theological" argument through much of history is that it is a "spiritual" kingdom, so that it cannot be seen in this realm. But the book of the Revelation describes the King of kings and Lord of lords conquering and reigning on this earth. That argument of a "spiritual" kingdom falls flat. That argument seems to be of faith, but it is really making God's Word to say something different than what it very actually does say. It seems to me like that which Abraham and Sarah attempted by bringing Hagar in to "help" God to fulfill His promises. God does not need our help to fulfill His promises. He will fulfill them AS THEY ARE WRITTEN.

In Matthew 24:30, the Lord spoke of the *the sign of the Son of man in heaven* and gave what that sign was in the very same verse: *the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*. This may add some insight into just what Stephen saw when, full of the Holy Ghost, he looked up and saw *the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God*, and said **Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.** (Acts 7:55–56)

That the Lord Jesus Christ, the *Son of Man*, did not come at that time to judge and to make war can only be due to His GRACE. All was ready for Him to do so. The rebellion of the covenant people had reached its height. They sent a message back to the King with this act saying “We will not have this Man Jesus to reign over us!” (Luke 19:14)

While the Lord Jesus is graciously waiting at the Father’s right hand to make His enemies His footstool, He is proclaiming through the epistles of Paul the day of salvation, and the word of reconciliation. He is declaring grace and peace today, not because of His “crown rights”, but because of His finished redemption on the cross. Note that He does have the authority to do so because He is Lord of heaven and earth. Paul’s gospel is *“the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but is NOW made manifest”* (Romans 16:25–26). It is now being made known that in spite of the world’s rejection (Jew and Gentile alike have rejected Him), God is now saving all who come (whether Jew or Gentile) by Him, by His finished redemption at the cross. It is the preaching of the cross that saves souls today (1 Corinthians 1:18). But the day will come when the day of salvation will come to a close, and the Lord will take what is rightfully His. He will take His great power and reign *on the earth*. It will be the reign of heaven on earth. It will be:

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” occurs 32 times and is exclusive to the book of Matthew. The Prophets of the Old Testament spoke of this Kingdom. One of the most explicit references to this kingdom is in Daniel’s prophecy, interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great image.

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. (Daniel 2:44)

In Daniel 2:36–43, the prophet describes real, literal, physical, governmental, and geographic kingdoms that reign in the earth. The God of heaven will also set up a kingdom to consume and break in pieces *all these kingdoms*. With man’s quest for empire still today not satisfied, it is hard to believe anyone with a straight face can say that the kingdom of the God of heaven is in any way operating on earth. Some will say that it is God operating in “the Church”, but again, this hardly passes the straight face test. “The Church” is being absorbed into the kingdoms of this world, and not consuming them. “The Church” is more broken in pieces than any other institution thinkable. As an aside, the Body of Christ, the Church that Paul writes of, is not an institution, but is the assembly of all believers in Jesus Christ’s finished work of redemption at the cross who are baptized by the Holy Spirit into that Body.

This kingdom of heaven, however, in which the God of heaven reigns over the earth, while spiritual (that is empowered by the Spirit of God) in character, is also a literal, physical, geographic, and governmental kingdom with God's Christ (Messiah) reigning over the earth. Read in the following Messianic Psalm:

Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion.

I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten thee.

Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.

Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him. (Psalm 2:6–12)

Notice that it is on the *"holy hill of Zion"* —in Jerusalem—where the King sits upon His throne. Notice that the heathen, i.e., Gentile nations, are the King's inheritance. Notice the uttermost parts *of the earth* are the King's possession. Notice that the kings *of the earth* are to be subjected to the King of kings. Notice they are to be in fear of His wrath. Notice that He will truly be King *over kings*. The kings will call Him King. He will be the King of kings.

Notice further the character of this King's reign:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2:2–4)

In discussing the previous Psalm, we addressed many of the themes in this prophecy. But notice in the end of this passage: weapons of war will become tools of agriculture. And how greatly will tools of agriculture be needed in the Kingdom of God's Christ! There will be no war to destroy the land, and nations will not even have trained armies! They will NO MORE LEARN WAR! The ageless dream of world peace will finally be realized as the Prince of Peace is enthroned ON THE EARTH!

Most evangelical and fundamentalist Christians take this commission as a general call for all Christians to evangelize, and that it is the last order of the Lord for “the Church”. This is a fundamental misreading of this passage. It is not about evangelism. It is not a commission directed to “the Church” by way of Apostolic succession. It will not be the successors to the twelve Apostles that will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. It will be the twelve Apostles themselves. Regarding reading this as strictly a commission to evangelize, I do not know whether it would ever have been misread this way except that it has been coupled together with Mark 16:15 and forced to “harmonize” with 2 Corinthians 5:20.

Some have recognized this and somewhat shifted their statements of importance to “making disciples”. In this “disciple making” endeavor, there is of course an emphasis on baptism, as well there should be if one takes this as the Lord’s standing orders, and interprets this baptism to indeed be the baptism with water as John the Baptist preached. But an important question about this baptism comes up: How should baptism be done? It seems that the majority of evangelical denominations are firm that immersion is the only Biblical method. Some still prefer sprinkling or pouring and argue for this method as being the correct Biblical method. This argument between the method and meaning of baptism has created an unbridgeable divide that can only be crossed temporarily when they argue against a common foe: Those who have come to the *Scriptural* conclusion that in the Body of Christ there is but one baptism (Ephesians 4:5), and that is the baptism in which the Holy Spirit baptizes the believer into the Body of Christ. In doing this, the Spirit baptizes us into Jesus Christ identifying us with His death, burial, and resurrection. See Ephesians 4:3–6, 1 Corinthians 12:13, and Romans 6:3–4.

With that said on baptism, we will leave the subject for now. In regard to the baptism in Matthew 28:18–20, it is best understood that baptizing nations in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is about claiming *all nations* as under the sovereignty of the One to Whom all authority in heaven and in earth is given and is not a physical water ceremony. In relation to this observe the following passage from Isaiah:

Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently, He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men: So shall He sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at Him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider. (Isaiah 52:13–15)

Another wrong view of this commission belongs to the Roman Catholic Church. This apostate theology views itself that *it* is the manifestation of God’s kingdom on this earth. The Roman Church would shy away (outwardly) from the idea of a “world conquering church” presently, but this has not always been the case. This theology places itself as the mediator between God and man (see 1 Timothy

2:5¹ for the much needed correction to this doctrine of devils). This “world religion” sees itself as the successors to the twelve apostles and as such this commission belongs to them. The “world conquering church” had Europe in a stranglehold for over 1000 years, where the “Christian nations” were not even allowed a Bible that they could read! A clash of world conquering religions gave birth to crusades to conquer the Holy Land², in which the pope from the so-called “seat of St. Peter” offered great riches and eternal rewards to those who would take up his call to arms. Further, Catholic nations would go worldwide to conquer and convert people groups to a so-called “Christianity” which was really nothing more than swapping old idols for new ones. Bad doctrine gives birth to bad action and practice.

This “conquering church” idea is not unique to Roman Catholicism either. Many post-millennial Protestants, i.e., “reconstructionists”, have this same “world transforming”, or “Christianizing the world” view of these verses in Matthew. This line of thought emphasizes law-keeping for Christians, while speaking of the need for Christians to establish God’s law as the law of nations. While all of the nations of the earth would do well to walk in the precepts of the Lord, the role of Christians is not law enforcement or to bring the nations under subjection, but to preach the word of reconciliation. The emphasis on law keeping is the result of wrongly applying this commission. The Lord did say that they were to teach all nations to observe whatsoever things that He commanded. But this is the Kingdom commission, to be taken up during the Kingdom, when Our Lord Jesus takes to Himself His great power and reigns *on the earth*.

Pentecostal “Dominionist” theology views this somewhat the same way. This “theology” speaks of taking dominion over everything and advancing God’s kingdom on earth with such things as the “seven mountain mandate”. It fancies that this world has been getting better over the last 2000 years and is continuing at a greater and greater trajectory. Really? This “New Apostolic Revival” is another take on apostolic succession, and as such their leaders’ words are supposed to have the authority of apostles so they are above questioning. But we must ask who it is that gave them this authority. It certainly wasn’t the Lord.

The primary error of all these views is that “the Great Commission” was given to “the Church”. It was not given to the Church, but it was given to the Twelve Apostles. There is no “Apostolic succession” stated here at all. The Twelve Apostles will still be the very agents to carry out this commission. I can say that because I believe what the scriptures state about their place and the regeneration (Matthew 19:28). That they have all died is irrelevant. I also believe in the resurrection.

¹ 1 Timothy 2:5 — “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”

² The “Holy Land”, i.e., Israel, has been under the control of one Gentile nation after another because of rebellion and unbelief. Current war and bloodshed in that land are the results of that which Peter plainly told them in Acts 3:14–15: “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.” The cry of the chief priests, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15) has been the order of the day ever since.

As Jeremiah the prophet prophesied against Israel, and lamented the fulfilment of his own prophecies, so do we, as the Lord lamented, “Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem” (Matthew 23:37), we mourn this even today.

Romans 10:1 — “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.”

In conclusion, this commission in Matthew is the standing orders of Christ's Apostles in His 1000 year (millennial) Kingdom yet to come. The Kingdom of God will come, and the will of God will be done, *on earth as it is in heaven*. Now, as we are here living in this present evil world (Galatians 1:4), we are to **live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.** (Titus 2:12–13)

In the next chapter, we will study the account in Mark 16, in which the Lord sends His disciples to preach the gospel to every creature. Meanwhile, I will ask you: Have *you* believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished provision for your redemption by His blood? He is all that you need, *but you do need Him!*

THE COMMISSION IN MARK: MARK 16:14–18

Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen. And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In My Name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

At the end of Mark's Gospel, a second record of a commissioning to preach is given. The eleven were sent to preach the gospel to every creature in all of the earth. That is a far reaching, we could say "global" mission. Many are inspired by this call even today to global missions in this command. But as a matter of Bible study, the details matter, and the student of Scripture who truly wants to know and follow his Lord's commands must be sure that he understands them, and has every "i" dotted and every "t" crossed.

DETAILS OF THE COMMISSION IN MARK

With that said, let us look at the details of the command:

- The Lord commanded the eleven to go into all the world. The word "world" here is κόσμος "*kosmos*"—world arrangement, world structure, or the world as all peoples of the world. It seems as any of these or a combination of these would fit the understanding here.
- They are to preach the gospel in all the world—to every creature
- The one who believes and is baptized is saved
- The one who does not believe is damned, this being the case whether one is baptized or not
- certain signs will follow the ones believing: casting out devils, speaking with new tongues, taking up serpents, immunity to any poison, healing the sick

This command must be understood in its entirety if it is to be understood at all. In many cases, those who do desire to take this passage in its entirety come to one or more of these conclusions:

1. Baptism is necessary for salvation
2. Sign gifts will follow believers
3. That Mark 16 verses 9 through the end are not found in the "most ancient manuscripts", therefore we do not have to deal with them.

Conclusion 3 listed above is the usual conservative evangelical and fundamentalist answer to any group insisting on baptismal salvation and/or the exercise of “Pentecostal” sign gifts. Since there is “no new thing under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9), I would not be surprised if this is what the scribes responsible for the omission in the Sinaitic and Vatican texts were also trying to accomplish.

What is done more often though, is to take verse 15, to go **into all the world, and to preach the gospel to every creature**, and to go no further. This though, is not handling the Word of God honestly. We must take the entire passage into account if we want to really listen to the Word of God.

WHICH GOSPEL?

The first issue that should be addressed is the issue of “preach the gospel”. What is the gospel that is commanded to preach here? Now most will say that there is only one gospel. That makes it quite simple, but is it really the case that there is only one message of good news in the entirety of Scripture? If so, what is the authority to say this is the case?

The plain fact of the matter is if I or someone else were to tell you that I have good news for you, your first response would likely be something like “good news about what?”, or “what is the good news?” It should not be difficult to see that in Scripture, we can understand that the gospel (good news) that is being spoken of can be defined by its context. Let us look at the gospel in this passage to determine what is that good message that is to be preached.

An obvious glad message in this context is that the Lord Jesus is alive, though He was crucified. The disciples were upbraided with their unbelief, so now they are being given this glad message for the world to believe. They had been given a message before the Lord was crucified three chapters earlier:

And the gospel must first be published among all nations. (Mark 13:10)

Now a particular gospel message is not given here in Mark, but the context is clearly “things to come”, and the 70th week of Daniel’s prophecy, otherwise known as the great tribulation, is clearly in view. What is more, this is a “parallel passage” to Matthew chapter 24, where we read:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Matthew 24:14)

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

This is good news about a King and His coming Kingdom! In the context of Mark 16, the King who was crucified is now risen! The gospel of the Kingdom is good news that can be believed because the King cannot be defeated even by death! This gospel of the Kingdom is addressed in the very beginning of Mark’s gospel record:

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. (Mark 1:14–15)

Another thought regarding the content of this good news is to look at the content of the message that the 12 Apostles proclaimed after this commission was given. The early chapters of the book of Acts give us the details:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it. ... Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, Until I make Thy foes Thy footstool.

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, Whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. (Acts 2:22–24, 29–40)

It should be recognized in this passage that the very good news that we rejoice in as believers is not mentioned here at all. Sure, one may say that the death, burial, and resurrection are all spoken of here, and that is absolutely true. The subject of His death, however, is not here as good news. His death is spoken of that this Jesus, whom they crucified, is the One that God has made both Lord and Messiah! He is pointing the finger at them declaring them guilty of the murder of God's Anointed. What is more, this murder victim is alive! I cannot think of any case where the murderer would think it was good news for the murder victim to come back to life. The good news (gospel) here, is that the offer of repentance and remission of sins that was to be first preached in His Name beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47) would cover even this horrific deed.

That they must believe and be baptized here is consistent both in Mark and in Acts. As the people declared that “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matthew 27:25), so they now must be “baptized every one of [them] in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). This would be identification with His Name as the Messiah as they also identified themselves as guilty of murdering Him. Peter, by the Holy Spirit confirms this guilt. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved. The one not believing, whether baptized or not, will be damned. The question is, could one refuse baptism and be saved?

And all the people that heard [John the Baptist], and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. (Luke 7:29–30)

The one who answered in faith to this call would not reject the counsel of God against himself. He would be baptized with the baptism of repentance. Period.

Now this commission, as seen from the passage we are studying, along with the account of Peter’s address to the “men of Israel”, on the Jewish holy day of Pentecost (Shavuot, “Weeks” Leviticus 23:15–21), shows that the 11, soon to be 12 again with the appointment of Matthias in Acts chapter 1 *were* sent to baptize. It is absolutely a part of this commission. The answer of faith to God’s command is to do as He says.

The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: (1 Peter 3:21)

Peter was God’s spokesman. He was speaking by the Holy Spirit. He was the one to whom the Lord said:

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

PAUL’S GOSPEL

Now, let us take a little excursion and ask a question: Were the Twelve and the Apostle Paul laboring under the same commission? Notice that Paul says to the Corinthians:

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. (1 Corinthians 1:17)

Baptism was bound to the gospel preached by the Twelve. They were sent to baptize. John the Baptist the “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). This is very consistent with Peter’s message at Pentecost. But Paul was not sent to baptize. He was sent to preach the gospel.

Again, could the same commission be both to baptize and not to baptize? Yes, Paul baptized *some*, but he was *not sent to do so*. He was sent to evangelize. He was sent to preach the gospel. What is more:

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:11–12)

Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God to the Gentiles, did not receive his gospel message or commission from anyone but from the Lord Jesus Himself. This includes the Twelve.

Paul follows up that which he said about Christ not sending him to baptize but to preach the gospel with this:

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. ... But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23–24)

This is the good news about the cross. Paul does not preach the cross as a crime to be repented of, but as a glad message, a ***gospel***, to be believed. It is the gospel by which we are saved!

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. (Galatians 6:14)

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the *gospel* which I *preached* [evangelized] unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I *preached* [evangelized] unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: (1 Corinthians 15:1–4)

The cross, where man declared his enmity against God and His Christ, is the very place of propitiation, where God is satisfied (Romans 3:25). It is where we are reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20–22).

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Corinthians 2:7–8)

Yes, Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles who the Lord Jesus Himself called “a chosen vessel unto Me” (Acts 9:15), had a distinct commission separate from this commission to the Twelve. They had their job to do, and he had his. They preached the gospel that they were given to preach, but the nation that was to first receive it (Luke 24:47) rejected the King, His Kingdom, and the messengers that He sent after Him to preach the good news of the Kingdom. Only the MARVELOUS GRACE of our gracious God could intervene against His righteous judgment upon all nations, including His chosen Nation. It did, and is still intervening after nearly 2000 years. But “behold NOW is the accepted time; behold, NOW is the day of

salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). The day of wrath will come, and the Kingdom will be established in spite of man’s opposition.

As we proceed, we will explore the second part of this commission and the signs that will follow. But before you proceed, “receive not the grace of God in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1). Christ Jesus died for ***your sins. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and THOU SHALT BE SAVED.***

SIGNS SHALL FOLLOW.

When we come to verse 17, our Lord very clearly states: ***And these signs shall follow them that believe...***

In this verse, we would have to ask “Did He mean what He said?” This is a rhetorical question, because of course the answer is YES!

These signs are often thought of as the “foundational gifts” that were in place until “the Church” was established. It is a much more scriptural statement to call them the powers of the world to come (Hebrews 6:4–5). What is this world to come? Peter, by inspiration, even filled with the Holy Ghost, explained the sign gifts during his address at Pentecost this way:

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2:16–21)

These are not spoken of as the “foundational gifts for the establishment of the Church”, but of things that will come to pass in the last days. These are things that would come to pass before the “great and the terrible day of the LORD” would come (Joel 2:31). Peter, by inspiration states that “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel”. It was not “This is the birth of the Church”, but the ***“last days...before that great and notable day of the Lord come”***. This outpouring of the spirit was fulfillment of prophecy, not the beginning of the so-called “Church Age”. The Church which is His Body, the Body of Christ, was still a “mystery, hid in God” (See Ephesians 3:1–12). The Body of Christ would be revealed by the Apostle Paul, and to find truth regarding the Church which is His Body, we need to find it in his epistles.

These signs were to follow those that believe, and they absolutely did. Look at how Mark’s Gospel ends:

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. (Mark 16:20)

The book of Acts witnesses to this fact with more details. Were devils cast out in the Name of the Lord Jesus? Yes! See Acts 16:18. Did they speak with new tongues? Yes! See Acts 2:4. Did they take up serpents? Yes, see Acts 28:3–5, and what is more, in the coming Kingdom:

And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. (Isaiah 11:8)

Did anyone drink a deadly thing and find that it did not hurt them? The record in Acts does not mention this, but Elisha the prophet did in 2 Kings 4:38–41, and this same type of sign would follow the Apostles' preaching of the gospel. Did anyone lay hands on the sick and cause them to recover? Yes! Was this new power? No! These apostles were first given these signs when they were first commissioned early in the Lord's earthly ministry:

When the Twelve were first called and instructed, the Lord **gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. ... Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give** (Matthew 10:1, 8).

Now some may also say that several examples that are given above were not from the ministry of the Twelve, but from Paul's ministry. That is true—in fact, he said himself to the Corinthians that **the signs of an apostle were wrought among [them] in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds** (2 Corinthians 12:12). These "signs of an apostle" were very much to confirm the Apostles' ministry to Israel. See what Paul says to the Hebrews:

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will? (Hebrews 2:3–4)

The "we" and "us" in this passage should be interpreted to mean "we Hebrews", and we can understand this passage without it arguing against Paul's authorship of this epistle. Now the signs and miracles were intended for Israel: "The Jews require a sign" (1 Corinthians 1:22). Miracles exercised in the presence of Gentiles in Acts 14 did not have the effect of bringing them to Christ, but they treated Paul and Barnabas as though they were gods. The signs exercised by Paul were to confirm to Israelites that he was indeed an apostle, one sent by Christ.

Now the sign gifts did not continue. Israel rejected God's Christ who is still to reign over the Nations on David's throne. The signs stopped being a witness to the Jews, **for the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles** (Acts 28:28). Jews are now saved just as Gentiles (Acts 15:11), not because of the covenants of promise, but because of His mercy—in one body, by the cross. During the period covered by the book of Acts, we go from prisons in Jerusalem and Philippi that could not hold God's

servants to His apostle in a Roman prison. At the end of 2 Timothy, we see Paul seemingly rejected by all, in prison without rescue. And healing? **Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick** (2 Timothy 4:20). **Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities** (1 Timothy 5:23).

If tongues are still a gift now, why do we need Bible translators? If healings, why are faith healers not at hospitals, and why is health care a daily issue in our world? The dead are not raised to life and the lepers are not miraculously cleansed. It is interesting too that the disciples were told that they were to freely give because they freely received, and yet the so-called healers are always asking for a donation if people want to be healed.

As to whether having enough faith would cause these signs to return, it was not faith that caused them to be manifest to begin with. They were gifts. They were manifest in the recipients whether they had faith that they would get them or not.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you... (Acts 1:8)

They were not given because of “saintly” behavior or superior spirituality. The sign gifts were given because the gift of the baptism with the Holy Spirit was “promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). The assembly at Corinth was described as “carnal”, “babes in Christ”, and “puffed up” (1 Corinthians 3:1; 5:2), yet they possessed the sign gifts, and the way for them to properly exercise the gift of tongues, and all the spiritual gifts (gifts given by the Holy Spirit), was laid out for them *because* of their misuse of them. One way that the Corinthians were told to “express” their spirituality was this:

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 14:37)

Indeed, words to take to heart. Let us also remember that Satan, the great counterfeiter, loves showing his counterfeit power. Some “miracles” are easy to fake. Some take work and a little bit of help. Remember the scriptural teaching on how the *man of sin* will deceive:

For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. (Matthew 24:24)

Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (2 Thessalonians 2:9–10)

We must remember not to look for signs, but to put our faith in the written word of God. The administration of the sign gifts has passed, and the gifts that the Lord has given (past tense) to His Body are these:

And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: (Ephesians 4:11–12)

In the next study, we will look closer at the commissioning of the apostles in the last chapter of Luke. Until then, have you heard of the gospel by which you will be saved if you believe it, how that Christ died for your sins and rose again for your justification (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, Romans 4:25). If you have, what have you done with this message of glad tidings?

BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED!

THE COMMISSION IN LUKE: LUKE 24:44–49

And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

As we study the commission that our Lord gave to His apostles before He left to take His place at the right hand of the Father, we come to instructions at the conclusion of *The Gospel According to Luke* that further shed light on carrying out their divinely appointed task. I would like to point out first the exact contents of what the Lord told His apostles to preach: **That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.** This “repentance and remission of sins” is a constant theme throughout Luke’s gospel account, the “Gospels” in general (especially the “synoptics”), and into the book of Acts. Let us trace this through Luke and Acts in a few passages:

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto His people³ by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:76–79)

³ The term “His people” in this verse, as well as in most occurrences in the gospels should be understood as “His people Israel”. If a search made in a concordance or an internet Bible website such as www.blueletterbible.org for terms such as “my people” or “his people”, it becomes very clear that allowing for very few exceptions, the meaning is the Covenant people, the Nation of Israel. In Matthew’s gospel, where it is said “for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21), the obvious sense is Israel. The same is true in Isaiah 53, concerning the words “our”, “we”, and in verse 8 where the prophet says “for the transgression of my people was He stricken”. Whether it is the prophet calling them “my people”, or the LORD calling them “My people”, does not change the fact that this should be understood as Israel. Understanding the terms “His people” and “My people” in most of these places will help to clear up and do away with the idea of “limited atonement”. This is also true for the terms in the Old Testament, “My Chosen”, and “My Elect”. They are usually referring to the Nation of Israel, or to Israel’s Messiah. None of this takes away from the fact that Christ died for all, or that Gentiles now receive salvation through Christ apart from covenants and promises. It does, however, do away with many “proof verses” for limited atonement.

And [John the Baptist] came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins... (Luke 3:3)

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:32)

And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:47)

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 2:38)

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:19–21)

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, Whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, Whom God hath given to them that obey Him. (Acts 5:30–32)

Notice that the change between verses 3:3 and 24:47 in Luke's Gospel is simply one of authority: now that the Lord Jesus has risen from the dead, the repentance required would be preached "in His Name". When Peter preached at Pentecost, the message did not change — "**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins**". Do you think that Peter understood what he was supposed to preach?

IT BEHOVED CHRIST TO SUFFER

Now to go back to the beginning of this passage, the Lord speaks to the eleven gathered, and He opened to them the scriptures. This was when they came to understand that His death was indeed not a catastrophe, nor a "bump in the road". The two on the road to Emmaus heard the same thing, as the Lord called them "fools", and "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). He spoke of His coming crucifixion several times while He ministered:

And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, He said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask Him of that saying. (Luke 9:43–45)

But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! (Luke 12:50)

But first must He suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. (Luke 17:25)

Then He took unto Him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. (Luke 18:31–34)

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee. (Matthew 16:21–22)

While they were indeed “slow of heart to believe” what He had told them about His impending death, the Lord now opened their understanding as well. They could now be witnesses of these things. Peter could declare during his sermon on the Day of Pentecost that **Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it** (Acts 2:22–24). What was the purpose of their witness? Repentance and remission of sins! Dare I say that in addition to all the sins that resulted in the captivity of God’s chosen people to the Gentiles, the need for repentance was infinitely greater now that they crucified God’s Anointed!

THE NATION ON TRIAL

Early in December of 2016, I attended a sermon where the pastor had been going through a sermon series on Acts. He spoke about the theme of Acts being “the Gospel on Trial”. On that particular Sunday, he was preaching from Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7, and though his title indicated that the Gospel was in the position of the defendant, everything that he said was very consistent with the truth in Acts that Stephen was bringing charges AGAINST ISRAEL for rejecting God and His messengers at every time in their history. These witnesses were not witnesses for the defense! They were witnesses for the prosecution! The nation was on trial, and they were to repent! That is why “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM”! Remember the Lord’s lament for Jerusalem:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! (Luke 13:34)

Now speaking of their witness, as an aside, look at what will be preached *for a witness* before the end comes:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Matthew 24:14)

They were to wait for the promise of the Father in Jerusalem. Recall that in Luke 12:12, the Lord told them that **the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say**. The power from on high would be the gift of the Holy Ghost, so that they would be speaking the very word of God as a witness against Israel. They would be witnesses to call the Nation and its leaders to repentance. While they were indeed to go into all the world (Mark 16:15), and teach all nations baptizing them in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19), they were to begin at Jerusalem. The “holy Nation” that was to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6) was to be brought into subjection to the King of kings and Lord of lords first.

The “Acts record” shows that the chosen Nation’s reaction to this message to them was still one of rejection. Even the dispersed children of Israel for the most part rejected this message to them. See Acts 5:33, 7:54–58, 9:23, 9:29, 13:44–46, 17:5, 18:12–13, 22:17–24, 28:19–29. If not for the grace of God, nothing was left for the nation, or the world, but judgment. Instead, the grace of God called the Saul of Tarsus, also known as Paul, with the “gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24), the “preaching of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18), and the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18), and for 2000 years and counting judgment has been delayed. As for the chosen nation: as a nation, they have fallen (Romans 11:12, Hebrews 6:6), but as John declared at the beginning of his Gospel:

But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12–13)

The believing Israelites would now be saved in the same way that Gentile believers are saved. Peter made this statement at the “Jerusalem council”, and while sometimes we may pass over this without a second thought, consider this: the prophets witness Gentiles as being saved through Israel’s acceptance of God’s Christ. The nation of Israel as a collective sent the message after the King saying “we will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). Look at the change of things:

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. (Acts 15:11)

The “we” in this verse is best understood as “we Jews”, and “they” would be the Gentiles. The context on this is very clear. Gentiles are saved by grace through believing the Gospel that Paul preached (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). Jews are saved in the exact same way.

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:12–13)

As we continue, we will look at the commission in Acts as a follow-up to Luke’s record. Now while judgment is delayed and grace is being proclaimed:

...receive not the grace of God in vain... behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:1–2)

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. (Acts 16:31)

THE COMMISSION IN ACTS

In the last chapter, we looked at the commission in Luke, which had its main point that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in the Name of the Lord Jesus among all nations beginning at Jerusalem. In this study, we will look at Luke's "latter treatise", to shed further light on the apostolic commission, and the call of them as witnesses:

When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:6–8)

This passage begins with a question: **Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?** Many see this as the disciples showing their ignorance. Look at these quotes from two prominent Christian leaders across several centuries to see the understanding that many have had regarding prophecy and the coming kingdom:

"So then the question which the apostles put to Jesus when they met together (Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?, 6) was not altogether the non sequitur it sounds. For if the Spirit was about to come, as he had said, did this not imply that the kingdom was about to come too? The mistake they made was to misunderstand both the nature of the kingdom and the relation between the kingdom and the Spirit. Their question must have filled Jesus with dismay. Were they still so lacking in perception?"—John Stott⁴

He then quotes another notable commentator with the following:

"He sheweth that the apostles were gathered together when as this question was moved, that we may know that it came not of the foolishness of one or two that it was moved, but it was moved by the common consent of them all; but marvelous is their rudeness, that when as they had been diligently instructed by the space of three whole years, they betray no less ignorance than if they had heard never a word. There are as many errors in this question as words." —John Calvin⁵

I am really convinced that rather than the Apostles, who had the scriptures opened to them personally by the Lord Himself (Luke 24:45), both Stott and Calvin show *their* ignorance in what *they* wrote.

⁴ Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1994. Print.

⁵ "Acts 1 Calvin's Commentaries." *Acts 1 Calvin's Commentaries*. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Jan. 2017. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/acts/1.htm>.

Why would they ask about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel? Could it be that the Lord Jesus Himself was **seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God** (Acts 1:3)?

As Peter preached to the men of Israel gathered at the porch that is called Solomon's, he spoke of the **the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began** (Acts 3:21). The word that is translated "restitution" is ἀποκατάστασις (*apokatástasis*). The term "restore again" in Acts 1:6 is ἀποκαθίστημι (*apokathistēmi*). I am no Greek scholar, but they look as though they are related. Restore and restitution in English are definitely related. Interestingly enough, the prophets spoke of a *kingdom restored to Israel*.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Jeremiah 23:5–6)

And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one King shall be King to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be My people, and I will be their God.

And David My servant shall be King over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in My judgments, and observe My statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob My servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and My servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore. (Ezekiel 37:21–28)

The Lord's answer to them was not one of upbraiding them as He had for their unbelief (Mark 16:14). His answer never intimated anything to the effect of "O fools slow of heart to perceive that this is a spiritual kingdom and not an earthly one", as the theologians quoted essentially said. His answer was to answer their question about the timing: "Lord wilt thou AT THIS TIME restore again the kingdom

to Israel” was met with “It is not for you to know the TIMES OR THE SEASONS, which the Father hath put in His own power”. He was being consistent with what He said to them previously:

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.
(Matthew 25:13)

In looking back through Luke’s Gospel, it appears as though the Lord is speaking in this commission that which He spoke in a parable before He entered into Jerusalem:

And as they heard these things, He added and spake a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. (Luke 19:11–13)

They were to see His ascension soon, and were to understand that He would receive for Himself a kingdom. They were to do His work while He was receiving His kingdom. The work that He gave them was that they were to be witnesses unto Him. Their witness was to be specific *geographically*: **in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.**

WITNESSES

Today, most of us take this command as a way of saying that Christians should evangelize first in their hometown⁶, then in the larger area around them, and eventually toward world missions. While there is nothing wrong with evangelizing this way, this is not the point of this command. They were to specifically be witnesses unto Him in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Specifically, they were to be witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 1:22, 2:32).

This should also shed some light on the choice of Matthias as the replacement of Judas. Matthias was there when the Lord was baptized by John, and continued until the Lord was taken up (Acts 1:21, Luke 22:28–30, Matthew 19:28). He would not have been one of the two “finalists” if he had not. In the last verse of Acts chapter 1, Luke states by inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16) that Matthias was “numbered with the eleven apostles”. Peter and the other apostles were fully within their right *and responsibility* to do so, for Peter was specifically told by the Lord that he was given **“the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”** (Matthew 16:19).

Some would say that Peter should not have done this before the Holy Ghost was poured out, but they neglect that the Lord had already given the Holy Ghost:

...He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost... (John 20:22)

⁶ Interestingly, Jerusalem was not the apostles’ hometown. They were “men of Galilee” (Acts 1:10)

They were now to wait to be “baptized with the Holy Ghost”, but they already had the Lord’s “downpayment”, and acted correctly in doing this. They were also faithful to their call to witness in Jerusalem in spite of persecution (Acts 8:1). While the nation of Israel and specifically its religious leaders sent a message after the Lord, saying, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14), in doing so they signed the warrant for their own execution:

But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me. (Luke 19:27)

God intervened in grace and did not immediately judge the nation, although the kingdom was taken away for a time.

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. (Matthew 21:43)

A NATION BRINGING FORTH FRUIT

It is a mistake to make the nation bringing forth the fruits of the kingdom to mean the church which is His body, and to therefore make “the church” the kingdom of God. It is better to make the nation bringing forth fruits the future restored nation of Israel that, as the LORD spoke by His prophet, **“shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn”** (Zechariah 12:10). It will be the nation that says “Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord” (Luke 13:35), and whose heart has turned to the Lord, and the vail is taken away (2 Corinthians 3:16). Only then will the kingdom be restored to Israel. It is for this reason that Peter gave this offer to the men of Israel gathered on Solomon’s porch:

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:19–21)

This offer of the kingdom will again be preached to Israel, but since their rejection of this call to repentance from the witnesses, the nation at that time was under judgment:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame. (Hebrews 6:4–6)

In spite of the Nation’s rejection, all Israelites can still be saved, for the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16). They are saved even as the Gentiles are, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who was crucified and died for our sins,

buried, and raised again (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, Romans 4:25, Ephesians 2:8–9). Have you believed *this* gospel?

A NATION BRINGING FORTH THE FRUITS THEREOF: JAMES TO THE 12 TRIBES

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. (Matthew 21:43)

As we study the Scripture, we come to another man with a book bearing his name—James. Now this man, not of the 12 apostles, was called by the Lord for a specific purpose. I state that it was a specific purpose, because as it has been well stated:

“It shall greatly help ye to understand Scripture if thou mark not only what is spoken or wrythen, but of whom and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goeth before and what followeth after.” ~ Miles Coverdale (1488–1569)

To make an attempt to apply Scripture to one’s self without understanding its scope or purpose makes it easy to fall into error and confusion. It is important to know James’ call and purpose to understand the purpose of God in calling him to write his epistle.

There is no record in Scripture directly of the Lord commanding James to write, so we must search the Scriptures to find answers as to God’s purpose in calling James, the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19), to write this epistle. The first place that we should think to look is the book of the Acts of the Apostles. While the Lord’s brethren are present with the 120 in the upper room in Acts 1, he is not mentioned by name. This James is first mentioned by name in Acts, appearing in chapter 12 verse 17, after Herod killed another James, the brother of John, who was one of the Twelve (Acts 12:2). He does appear named in Acts 12:17, and he already appears to have a place of authority to some extent, but it has not yet been stated why, or what that authority was. When we come to chapter 15, and the “Jerusalem Council”, he has what seems to be the last word, and the word that settles the matter in question, which is essentially, “do Gentiles need to become Jews do be accepted by God?” His having the last word, however, does not explain how he got to that position.

It is interesting, that to find anywhere in Scripture the authority for James’ epistle, it will be found in the epistles of...you guessed it, Paul. I find that interesting, because so many attempt to pit these two servants of Christ against each other, especially in the “scholarship community” (those who call themselves Bible scholars, but study almost anything but the Bible to learn about the Bible, and place more weight on “extrabiblical resources” than on the Holy Scriptures of God).

And that [Christ] was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. (1 Corinthians 15:5–8)

So this tells us something. It tells us that the Lord appeared to James prior to appearing to Paul (Saul of Tarsus) on the road to Damascus. It also tells us that the Lord appeared to James after appearing to the Twelve and that he was not one of the Twelve. Now a record of the Lord's appearing to anyone is not a record of a haphazard appearance, so it is likely that at this time the Lord gave him "orders".

It is also from Paul that we learn that this James was "the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19). The Lord's brothers while He walked this earth were not believers until later, after His resurrection (John 7:5, Acts 1:14). Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 identify a James as one of the Lord's brethren, sons of "the carpenter" and Mary. That is the extent of what we know about James from the "Gospels", but there is an episode where we may gather a little bit understanding of James, specifically because he was "the Lord's brother".

While [Jesus] yet talked to the people, behold, His mother and His brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him. Then one said unto Him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is My mother? and who are My brethren? And He stretched forth his hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother. (Matthew 12:46–50)

So James opens up his epistle:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. (James 1:1)

This one verse tells us much about this letter. First, its human author does not designate himself "the Lord's brother", but calls himself "a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ". Family relationships could earn nothing in the kingdom of God; but those doing the will of the Father, those have the position of brother, and sister, and mother. This is the new family relationship.

This verse also says much about they to whom this letter is written. It is to the "twelve tribes which are scattered abroad". This absolutely places this letter into the hands of Jews, and these were Jews who were scattered abroad, or of the "*diaspora*". These were referred to by the Pharisees speaking among themselves in John's gospel:

Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will He go, that we shall not find Him? will He go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? (John 7:35)

The twelve tribes ALWAYS refer to Israel, and to make this refer to "the Church" is a far stretch. The Church which is His Body is never referred to as a nation or as "tribes", or Israel. Does that mean that we should ignore this letter? No. But it does mean that to properly read and interpret and apply anything from it, we must understand the sender and the receiver.

To properly understand James' epistle, we must review what the Lord said through the prophets of Israel throughout the Old Testament. An example follows:

For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. (Jeremiah 7:5–7)

The Lord spoke of one of whom “among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet” (Luke 7:28), and He was speaking of John the Baptist.

The burden of the ministry of John the Baptist was not the “beginning of Christianity”. John was an “Old Testament prophet” with a message consistent with the messages of the prophets.

But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. ... And [John] shall go before [the Lord] in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:13, 17)

John looked for and demanded fruits worthy of repentance:

Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. (Luke 3:8–14)

The fruits that were worthy of repentance were not ethereal or immaterial. They were actual works and attitudes that were tangible. This is the same burden that James brings to the recipients of his epistle. As he addresses the “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad”, he tells them that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17, 26), and reminds them that Abraham’s faith brought forth fruit (James 2:21).

Notice that James speaks to the covenant people about Abraham as under the covenant. He takes the twelve tribes scattered abroad back to Genesis 22, while Paul, speaking of the faith of Abraham in Romans 4, actually takes us back to “Abram” in Genesis 15 before the covenant of circumcision.

Now the prophet Isaiah spoke of a nation (Israel) that did not bring forth the fruits that the LORD looked for:

Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. (Isaiah 5:1–7)

Compare this to a parable in Matthew’s gospel:

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?

They say unto Him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. (Matthew 21:33–43)

The vineyard is told to us in Isaiah to be the house of Israel. The husbandmen, they are the rulers of Israel. In the time when Jesus Christ ministered on earth, this would have been the chief priests and Pharisees—Israel's religious leaders (Matthew 21:45). They sat in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2). Who is the nation bringing forth the fruits? The Lord spoke in Luke to a group of people to whom the Father would love to give the Kingdom:

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. (Luke 12:32–33)

Keep this in mind when you read in James about the poor and the rich, the rich made low, and the miseries coming on the rich. (See James 1:10–11, 2:1–7, 5:1–3). Now this group in the land would not be the only members of that nation that were to be the recipients of the kingdom.

I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. (John 10:14–16)

These became the believers of the *diaspora*. These are they to whom James writes. Now if the nation did not bring forth the fruit that the Lord of the vineyard desired and so the leaders of that nation lost the privilege as the husbandmen, what would be required of the little flock? They were to bring forth “grapes”, not “wild grapes”. The Lord should expect to look for judgment (justice) and find it, but not find oppression. James chapter 2 starts at this place when speaking of the treatment of the rich and the poor in the assembly (James 2:2 — Greek: συναγωγή — *synagōgē* — “synagogue”). Read James 2 with this thought in mind and see if this does not fit together perfectly. Notice especially this:

Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy Name by the which ye are called?

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. (James 2:5–13)

In every way, James' epistle to the scattered Israelites points back to the “Sermon on the Mount”, which is in every way the charter of the Kingdom of Heaven. There, we see the Lord speak about who it would be that would enter into that Kingdom:

Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name have cast out devils? and in thy Name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21–23)

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. (Matthew 7:20)

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. ... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:17, 26)

This is where James is coming from in his epistle. There are a few things which are *not* spoken about in James' epistle. This does not imply an oversight, but that they are outside the scope of the purpose of this epistle. Three very important doctrines are these:

1. The cross
2. Justification by grace
3. Redemption by the blood of Christ

How could such important matters be overlooked? They are beyond the purpose of this epistle, to continue the message of John the Baptist, the Lord Himself, and His Apostles to call a Nation bringing forth the fruits of the kingdom. At the time in which James wrote, these doctrines may not have been revealed as they are now revealed to us in the Apostle Paul's epistles. Some, including C. I. Scofield in the *Scofield Reference Bible*, while keeping Ussher's date of A.D. 60 in the center column, from content assumes a very early date of James' epistle.

DATE: Tradition fixes the martyrdom of James in the year 62, but his Epistle shows no trace of the larger revelations concerning the church and the distinctive doctrines of grace made through the Apostle Paul, nor even of the discussion concerning the relation of Gentile converts to the law of Moses, which culminated in the first council (Ac 15.), over which James presided. This presumes the very early date of James, which may confidently be set down as "the first Epistle to Christians."—Weston.

At the opposite end of the dispensational spectrum⁷, E. W. Bullinger has this to say:

⁷ By dispensational spectrum, I mean simply this: Scofield held to the beginning of what many call "the church age" at Pentecost in Acts 2. Bullinger migrated throughout his writings further and further through Acts from what seems to be chapter 13 with Paul and Barnabas turning to the Gentiles to chapter 28 with Paul finally turning to the Gentiles. In his later days he became an "Acts 28 dispensationalist", splitting Paul's epistles into two separate dispensations.

Some commentators rightly place the time of writing before the Jerusalem Council of about A.D. 45. (According to tradition, James was martyred in 62 or 68.) One well qualified to value fairly the evidence says, "And a careful study of the chronological question has convinced me that they are right who hold the Epistle of James to be perhaps the earliest of the New Testament writings. It belongs to that period of the Pentecostal dispensation when the whole Church was Jewish, and when their meeting-places still bore the Jewish designation of synagogues"" (ch James 2:2)."

If these learned Bible students are correct, James wrote before Galatians and Romans were written. But aside from arguments about chronology, the fact still remains that James and Paul were not at odds with each other, but were writing to a different people about a different subject for a different purpose. The *dispensation of grace* was not given to James, it was given to Paul (Ephesians 3:2), and it would be through Paul that the riches of grace would be made known.

We can see that as late as Acts 21, James was still ministering in the temple to believers in Jerusalem, and the Jewish believers there still considered themselves under the Law of Moses, for they were still "zealous of the law" (Acts 21:20). And here, Paul, to the Jews became a Jew (1 Corinthians 9:20), which is seemingly contradictory to the epistles of Galatians and Romans, but remember that the "Jerusalem Council" decided nothing about Jews observing the Law. They only agreed with Paul *and God* that Gentile believers were not bound by the Law. In Romans, it begins to be very evident that Jews were not under the Law anymore either, and in an epistle from a Hebrew of the Hebrews to the Hebrews, we find an end to the things of the Old Covenant and the believing Jews commanded to go on to perfection to the better things of Christ.

In Romans, we learn from the Apostle Paul, that by the Law we are found to be sinners. We learn that we need righteousness without the Law.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. (Romans 3:21–28)

Will you, dear reader, believe this good news from God and accept the death of Christ on your behalf as complete for the forgiveness of your sins and believe on Him "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25)? The righteousness of God is the greatest of treasures, given freely to those who believe. God's gospel is simple—Believe it!

THE COMMISSION IN JOHN

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. (John 20:19–23)

Now the truth that the Lord Himself gave to these apostles that He sent the authority to remit sins is often overlooked when preaching “the Great Commission”. Indeed, it has to be, for to take this official power to the remission of sins on “the Church”, would bring Protestants who hold firmly to the Great Commission to be “the Church’s” standing orders right back to the Roman Catholic Papal tyranny that they so opposed in the Reformation. In the 1599 Geneva Bible, the note attached to verse 23 appears as follows:

The publishing of the forgiveness of sins by faith in Christ, and the setting forth and denouncing the wrath of God in retaining the sins of the unbelievers, is the sum of the preaching of the Gospel.

However, that is not what the Lord said to His apostles. He gave them authority to remit sins. It was not just to state the terms. Remember that they **which had followed [Him], in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, [they] also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel** (Matthew 19:28). Further, as Luke records, the Apostles who were with Him were appointed a kingdom (real, literal, physical, governmental):

Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto Me; That ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:28–30)

Now this kingdom also was not something that is merely forced upon the Lord of Glory only because of a promise, but as He said to the Apostles, and all of His disciples:

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32)

It will be fulfillment of the promise, and a joy when the Lord gives to them His kingdom and grants to them their positions of responsibility and greatness. Now one may, and probably will say, “but only God can forgive sins.” To this, I would have to answer, “who are you to argue with what the Lord Jesus Christ said!” He gave to these apostles who would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel authority to forgive sins. Remember that He said **“all power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth”** (Matthew 28:18). Part of that power (authority) was to forgive sins. Even before He said this, even before His crucifixion and resurrection, He had this authority:

And He entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into His own city. And, behold, they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. ... But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men. (Matthew 9:1–2, 6–8)

For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son... And hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man. (John 5:22, 27)

Now, let us bring this home to our present passage:

as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you...Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

According to this passage, these Apostles were commissioned with authority to forgive sins.

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)

This is the extent of apostolic authority. Most Protestants and Evangelicals will not entertain the thought of this authority. They have no answer to the Roman Catholic claim of Apostolic Authority, especially since all will claim the “Great Commission” as the “last words of Jesus” and the marching orders of “the Church”. One Lutheran minister has noticed this and wrote a 2-part magazine article speaking about the weakness of the Evangelical interpretation of the great commission. He notices some very important points that most will simply “brush under the rug” and not talk about. The fatal flaw that his argument falls on is that he speaks of this authority as being given to “the Church”. It was not! It was given to the Apostles as the official sent representatives of Christ who would occupy until He returns. After He returns, they will be on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The answer to this dilemma, like so many others, is that of “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Because of Israel’s rejection of the King and the promised kingdom that He would establish, the “Great Commission” was postponed to a still future date when Christ will rule over the nations. Today, in spite of it being the “present evil age” (Galatians 1:4), God is offering to the world reconciliation through the blood of Christ before the day of wrath comes:

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.) (2 Corinthians 5:19–6:2)

Please study these things with a mind open to the Lord's leading, and more importantly with an open Bible. Now no amount of Bible study will save you apart from Jesus Christ, but the holy Scriptures of God **"are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"** (2 Timothy 3:15). Please take God at His word, and ***believe on the Lord Jesus Christ who died for your sins and rose from the dead, and that will save you.***

PAUL'S COMMISSION

No study would be complete without writing on Paul's great commission and where it fits within the entirety of Scripture. Witness from his own testimony the commission and apostleship that he received from Christ our Lord:

Acts 26:13–18—At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.

Three times in the book of Acts, there is a retelling of the story of the Lord Jesus' "arrest" of Saul of Tarsus. While there are many important events in the Acts account, this event gets the most mentions.

When Paul was still known as "Saul of Tarsus", here, in his own words, is a description of the character that he had at the time:

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, Who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting. (1 Timothy 1:12–16)

Here we see several important characteristics of the ministry that the Lord gave to Paul. The ministry was merciful because only mercy would impart ministry to one who up until this time was an ignorant unbeliever. The exceeding abundant grace with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus caused Paul to write to the Romans that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners is most evident in that He saved this man who was persecuting Him. What is sin, but enmity against God, and what is enmity against God, but sin. As mankind thinks itself worthy of the love of God, it declares itself enemy of God by not submitting to His righteousness, and therefore exalts sin. How better for the Lord Jesus Christ to show His longsuffering than to save rather than destroy the one who was so maliciously persecuting Him (Acts 9:4)? The chief of sinners saved by grace is a pattern to us all, hereafter that believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to life

everlasting. How so, you ask? That we are saved by His mercy, not because we are His friends, but He showed us mercy while we were His enemies.

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled... (Colossians 1:21)

But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. (Romans 5:8–11)

So, the Apostle Paul could speak first-hand about what God is accomplishing during the "present evil age" (Galatians 1:4) in which we live. He is reconciling His enemies to Himself sparing them from His wrath.

Please bear with me for the short word study:

From Strong's:

μακροθυμία makrothymía, mak-roth-oo-mee'-ah; from the same as G3116; longanimity, i.e. (objectively) forbearance or (subjectively) fortitude:—longsuffering, patience.

It is from a compound of μακρός (G3117) and θυμός (G2372).

From Vine's

Longsuffering (Noun and Verb):

"forbearance, patience, longsuffering" (*makros*, "long," *thumos*, "temper"), is usually rendered "longsuffering," Rom 2:4; 9:22; 2Cr 6:6; Gal 5:22; Eph 4:2; Col 1:11; 3:12; 1Ti 1:16; 2Ti 3:10; 4:2; 1Pe 3:20; 2Pe 3:15; "patience" in Hbr 6:12 and Jam 5:10.

See PATIENCE, and *Note* under FORBEAR.

θυμός thymós, thoo-mos'; from G2380; passion (as if breathing hard): —fierceness, indignation, wrath. Compare G5590.

See the comparison of this word rendered "longsuffering" with the word as rendered in the book of Proverbs:

From the English translation of the Old Testament:

He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly. (Proverbs 14:29 KJV)

From the Greek translation of the Old Testament:

μακρόθυμος ἀνὴρ πολὺς ἐν φρονήσει ὁ δὲ ὀλιγόψυχος ἰσχυρῶς ἄφρων (Proverbs 14:29 LXX)

So longsuffering is essentially the idea of slow to wrath, slow to fierce anger. While the world, summed up in the person of Saul of Tarsus, was fierce in its animosity toward God and His Anointed, God has been and is continuing to be slow to act in His anger toward sin, and was in Christ in reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). The Apostle sent to proclaim this grace would be a living and breathing example of this matchless grace. He would speak what he knew by experience.

Essentially, the present dispensation of grace that we are living under can only be accounted for as God's longsuffering and His kindness. We also do not know how long it will last, so urgency in teaching the gospel is essential.

... behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation... (2 Corinthians 6:2)

AN AMBASSADOR IN BONDS

...whereof I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church: whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily. (Colossians 1:23–29)

Here, in the epistle to the Colossians, we come to a "parenthetical" explanation of Paul's ministry and stewardship. Paul's office was "ambassador of Christ", and the world by nature is enemy of God, yet Paul is representing the ascended Christ in preaching grace and peace. That Paul is preaching the message of grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ from prison is no coincidence. He was Christ's "ambassador in bonds" (Ephesians 6:20) because the world is still acting as enemy toward God.

It is quite interesting to note that suffering for Christ was an essential part of Paul's commission. In Acts 9:16, the Lord told Ananias, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake." That Paul received suffering from the world is beyond question from the record of Acts. He also received attacks from Satan which seem to have gone unhindered by the Lord. But the sufferings had their purpose, and the Lord would reveal to Paul how He would use them:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7–10)

So now, as Paul ministers and works for the Lord from a Roman prison, he rejoices in his sufferings which are for the Lord, and also for the body, of which the Colossian saints were members. Indeed, all who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and His shed blood on their behalf are baptized into this body by the Spirit. To think, all that have suffered for the sake of the Lord and of His Body have suffered on your behalf. When we suffer for the sake of the Lord and of His Body, we have grounds of rejoicing too. I am reminded of when I played football in high school. We would often be bruised with helmet marks on our arms and welts and all such marks. These were marks taken for the team, and these often had pain, sore muscles and joints and all that went with it. But also, the injuries carried with them a sense of honor because they were the reminders of the struggle to win the game. They were the reminders of my contribution to the team. That is possibly a way to think of how Paul could rejoice in his sufferings for the saints. He was called to suffer, allowed to suffer, and learned to rejoice in his sufferings. As the Captain of Salvation was made perfect through sufferings (Hebrews 2:10), so the messenger of the gospel of the grace of God would fill up in his body the sufferings that are *allowed* to him for the cause of Christ. Indeed, all who name the Name of Christ are called to suffering for His Name sake:

For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake... (Philippians 1:29)

Paul was called, and given to suffer on behalf of Christ. Paul was also made a minister of the gospel "according to the dispensation of God" (vs. 25). Just what was this dispensation of God? A "dispensation" is the translation of the Greek word οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*), which is translated in Luke 16:2,3, & 4 "stewardship". It essentially means the management, oversight, and administration of another's affairs (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). It is house management. So with this definition, the management, oversight, and administration of God's affairs were given to Paul. This is exactly what he said when he said "the dispensation of God which is given me for you". He was given this dispensation so that he could *with authority* fulfill the word of God. Now remember that this is not my words. This is the word of God as Paul wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It was given to him to fulfill, or complete, the word of God. Just what was this completion of the word of God? It is stated in the very next verse: **"the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints"**. Interestingly enough, Paul calls himself and the ministers of God the "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1).

This mystery hid from ages and generations is what completes the word of God. It is what makes us understand why the prophecies of scripture have not yet been fulfilled. Remember that we discussed

previously that the Kingdom as promised where "the LORD shall be king over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9) will still be fulfilled as it is written, but presently, God is dealing with mankind in grace. That is why Paul says:

If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward... (Ephesians 3:2)

Notice again—it is the dispensation given to Paul. It is his job, his calling, to steward the riches of God's grace. Again, it is in reference to this mystery that was revealed to Paul to make it known to all the world:

How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power. (Ephesians 3:3–7)

Let us not water down this revelation. The revelation of the mystery was given to Paul to make known. It was not given to Peter, James, John, Jude, Luke, Mark, or Matthew. Paul's gospel is "the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest" (Romans 16:25–26), which is something different than prophecy "which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21, c.f. Luke 1:70). By understanding the difference between these Scriptures, we are not "Bible-choppers", but we are believing what God has said in His Word. The mystery given to Paul was "hid in God" (Ephesians 3:9). This is not because Paul was intrinsically superior to the other apostles in any way. As the passage in Ephesians goes on:

Unto me [Paul], who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him. (Ephesians 3:8–12)

It could easily be argued that Paul was given this special task regarding the out-calling of the body of Christ and the dispensation of the grace of God expressly because of his unworthiness and his former estate as a blasphemer and persecutor (1 Timothy 1:13). As stated in part 1 of this series, he goes on to say why he was called as he was:

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting. (1 Timothy 1:16)

Yes, if this man can be reconciled by the blood of the cross, so can all sinners. What a wonderful pattern! What a wonderful Savior! And this mystery of Gentiles by nature ("dogs"—see Matthew 15:26) being not simply allowed to partake of the blessings of the Covenant People (Israel) by eating the crumbs from their table, but being "fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" is unheard of outside of Paul's revelation of the mystery. Indeed, now Gentile believers are "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

That is what this passage is referring to when it speaks of the riches of the glory of this mystery. The riches of the glory is referring to Christ in you, Gentiles. The promised Anointed Savior of Israel is in you Gentiles. Now Gentiles have a hope of glory. Our hope of glory is in Christ, and only in Him. Now Paul has been commissioned to preach Christ, to warn and to teach every man—all mankind and every person individually—the riches of Christ, and yes, warnings of what rejection of Christ will cost. The eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41) is also the last place for those not found written in the book of life (Revelation 20:15). But it does not have to be that way. Eternal life is found in Christ and He has reconciled the world unto Himself:

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Only believing on the death of Christ for your sins is standing between life and death, and God wills that you would be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), and the reconciling work of Christ on the cross has made it possible. Why put off another day or minute accepting the gift of salvation and righteousness that God offers you?

Paul carried out his great commission with amazing energy to a world ripe for God's judgment, and all Christians everywhere will do very well to follow in preaching Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, which is no longer a mystery, but preached in the whole world, and warning every man and teaching every man the righteousness and grace of God, and God's love toward sinners in sending His own Son to die for us. Amazing Grace!

THE WORD OF RECONCILIATION

2 Corinthians 5:14–6:2 — “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

“We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)”

Reconciliation is one of the great “theological” words of the scriptures.

It is also the word that truly affects the sinner first. The affect of the finished work of our Lord Jesus on the cross on God is that of *propitiation*, by which He is satisfied. See the following prophecy from Isaiah regarding the propitiation:

Isaiah 53:10–11 — “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities.”

In the New Testament, the apostle John writes of the propitiation:

1 John 2:2 — “And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

1 John 4:10 — “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

The apostle Paul also writes of the propitiation, as our Lord Jesus Christ has become the place of propitiation:

Romans 3:24–26 — “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His

righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of Him which believeth in Jesus."

God is in every way satisfied with the accomplishments of His beloved Son on the cross. If no sinner was saved by the grace that is offered through faith in His blood, it would not lessen the effect of the satisfaction that He accomplished with God. Yet God has made the accomplishments of the cross affect every sinner in a real way. This is the word of reconciliation.

...God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ ... God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Think of the weight of that statement! God is not counting sins (imputing) against "them". I see no reason to think that "them" is anything but the world that He is reconciling to Himself, and that being all of the people in it. Sin is no longer standing between the sinner and God, because God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ:

Colossians 1:20–22 — "And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight..."

Now I *do not* say that this means that all are saved. Sin is still against God, and still carries death with it. There are still consequences to sin. In fact, it is in the context of *saved* people sinning that the word of God says that **the wages of sin is death** (Romans 6:23). The natural consequence of sinful behavior will always be death, and the more that one sins against God, the more he makes himself an enemy of God by wicked works. But God is not counting sins against anyone *right now*; but "He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

This day we live in now, however, is the day of salvation, and not the day of wrath. If we find ourselves wondering why God does not immediately judge sin and break through heaven to destroy sinners and judge sin, the reason is that this is the day of salvation. Wrath and judgment are not what God is doing in the world today. What He is doing is saving sinners, and offering salvation to all, *without exception or distinction by the cross*. This is this wonderful word of reconciliation. God has given this message of peace to us. The message of the heavenly army at our Savior's birth was a message of peace. It was a message of peace that man rejected, but it surely was a message of peace:

Luke 2:14 — "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The usual introductory message of Paul's epistles is grace to you and peace. God is not acting toward the world in "wrath and war", but in "grace and peace". The question is not now one of sins, for

the vilest of us will find salvation by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ at His cross. This salvation is applied to those who are justified by faith:

Romans 5:1 — “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Romans 5:6–10 — “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have now received the atonement.”

The reconciliation is the current state of God’s attitude toward man. This is the time when we preach the word of reconciliation, and

“pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

“Receive not the grace of God in vain. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 5:20–6:2)

“...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...” (Acts 16:31)

IN CONCLUSION

Apostolic commission and apostolic authority without apostolic power are not found in scripture. It would behoove the reader to rather than try to latch on to one particular commission to someone else to be his own marching orders, but to rather study the scriptures to know the whole counsel of God. In the present age, God's counsel for us is found in the Pauline epistles, and the rest of the Bible is understood in light of this revelation. We can indeed much better understand the entirety of Scripture when we recognize "the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery".

Romans 16:25–27 — ***"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."***

