



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume VIII
Issue 193

Israel's Great Commission

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-20; Luke 24:45-48; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:4-8

The passages of Scripture listed above are generally referred to as the “Great Commission,” “The Marching Orders of the Church,” and “The Saviour’s Last Words.”



student should be fully aware, have been used by the saints over the years.

An excellent example of these principles is clearly seen in the sixteenth century writing of Miles Coverdale (1488-1569):

If one regards the writing of Paul to be for the Body of Christ they are forced into a very strange position indeed. Certain portions of the “Great Commission” are totally incompatible with Paul’s gospel.

It shall greatly help ye to understand Scripture if thou mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goeth before and what followeth after.

This has led many to believe that only parts of the “Great Commission” are to be followed today. Much of the preaching today from the “Great Commission” are centered on a few select words such as “Go ye” and “Lo, I am with you always” from Matthew, and “Every creature” and “All the world” from Mark, etc.

It is not our desire to use all of these principles in this article, for some of the teachings of these passages are generally received by believers; but there are a number of these Bible study principles which seem to have been completely overlooked or disregarded.

Such messages are usually merely devotional in nature and not doctrinal. It has probably been a long time since you have heard a detailed exposition of them. In fact the truth may be that you have never heard a true study of them; for most of the time given to their “exposition” is used in explaining away parts of them.

WHO IS BEING ADDRESSED?

We want to look briefly at these passages using the standard means of proper Bible interpretation. I am sure that most of our readers are well aware that the Bible is not given to any private interpretation (II Peter 1:20). We cannot jump headlong into a passage of Scripture without using some standard principles. These principles, of which the average

Most people understand clearly who is speaking in the “Great Commission,” but it seems only a very few know to whom He was speaking. This is of utmost importance in properly understanding the Scriptures. Read the passages again closely and

(see **GREAT**, page 1871)

Israel's Great Commission	1869
Editorial	1870
Did You Know?.....	1875
The Latest Word.....	1876

Dear Precious Family,

A Reminder Of God's Steady Work

God is steadily at work carrying out His purposes of grace. This is one thing of which we can be assured! I was reminded of that recently.

Not long ago we received a call from a lady who has been greatly blessed by our book *I Choose*. She had read it and had been passing it around to family members and friends who had been touched by it also. She called today to order 3 copies, and a copy of our book *The Salvation of All*.

The whole story reminded me how the Lord works. I met this sweet lady a number of months ago on an overnight trip that my wife and I had made. She was very approachable and we shared some sweet things of the Lord with one another. When we returned home we mailed her a copy of *I Choose*.

We never heard anything from her again until today. She had not even acknowledged having received the package. For all we knew, the book had ended up somewhere on her bookcase; but lo and behold, God had been busy using it for His purposes all along, and we were only finding out about it today.

Suppose she had never called, but just kept passing the single copy of the book around, and it had managed to touch a few folks helping to affect how they viewed the Father and their life? If we had never "heard," would the Father's work have been any less real or effective?

We surely like to "hear" of God's workings, but I was reminded today that there are many "untold" stories of God's steady work through us, His channels. We must all learn to ultimately rest in this immutable truth,

*So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth:
it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish
that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing
whereto I sent it (Isaiah 55:11).*

Those of us who have a glimpse into our Father's loving nature and ultimate goal, more than others, should live in the assurance of this verse, even when we are not "encouraged" by "seeing" the results. This morning, I was rightfully touched by the phone call – it meant a lot to us – but it is as if I could feel the Father smiling at me saying, "Did you really need that as proof that I am always working?"

It was indeed evidence that God is moving and working; but it is even more a reminder that He is doing so in *many MORE* ways than we will ever truly perceive here in this stage of life, and it is His work to encourage us from time to time by allowing us to "see" just a small glimpse into His great, eternal work.

We are all on a journey, the *Great Adventure of Faith!*



Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume VIII, No. 193 – June 16, 2009

This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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GREAT (continued from page 1869)

notice who was being addressed.

The **eleven disciples** went away into Galilee ... And Jesus came and spake unto **them**, saying ... “Go **ye** therefore ...” (Matthew 28:16-19).

Afterward He appeared unto the **eleven** ... And He said unto **them**, “Go **ye** into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:14-15).

“And **ye** are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:48).

The **disciples** were assembled ... Then said Jesus to **them** again, “Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent Me, even so send I **you**” (John 20:19-21).

He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the **apostles** whom He had chosen ... He said unto **them** ... “But **ye** shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon **you**: and **ye** shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:2, 7-8).

In every passage Israel’s Apostles are the only ones present. Now by what strange rule of Bible study do we interpret these passages to be “commissions” to anyone but to whom it says?

This then is indisputably not *OUR* “Great Commission,” but rather the commission of Israel’s Apostles. It might also be noted that this is *NOT* our Lord’s *last* command, for He spoke from heaven through Paul giving us a “Grace Commission” (c.f. II Corinthians 5:14-21).

WHAT IS BEING SAID?

As we have mentioned earlier the “Great Commission” is usually dealt with devotionally and not doctrinally; therefore its contents are obscure to the average church-goer. The size of this work will not allow us a full study of each passage but

what follows are a few of the sections for our consideration.

Teaching them to **observe all things** whatsoever I have **commanded you** ... (Matthew 28: 20).

In the “Great Commission” Israel’s Apostles were to teach their converts all of the commandments that Christ gave while He was here on earth so that they might observe them. Honest brothers, even while deceived into believing that this commission is theirs, usually do not teach new believers to observe *all* of Christ’s commands.

Note the following example:

Christ commanded a total disregard for the physical and material things even to the point of bare subsistence.

“Take **no thought** for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on ... and **seek not** ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind ... **sell that ye have**, and give alms ...” (Luke 12:22-33).

“So likewise, whosoever he be of you that **forsaketh not all** that he hath, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33 – Also see Matthew 6:19-34; 10:8-11; 19:21).

Jesus taught His Jewish followers to sell all that they had – forsaking all – and to take no thought for their physical sustenance. This is exactly what the Twelve Apostles did. They forsook all and followed the Lord.

Then answered Peter and said unto Him, “Behold, we have **forsaken all**, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?” And Jesus said unto them, “Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon Twelve Thrones, judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel. And **everyone** that hath **forsaken** houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or ►

mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an **hundredfold**, and shall **inherit everlasting life** (Matthew 19:27-29).

Obviously the Twelve Apostles took the commandments of the Lord to them literally. It is also obvious that He intended them to do so.

Under the "Great Commission," these Apostles were to teach "*whatsoever*" the Lord had commanded *THEM*, and they did just that.

*They continued steadfastly in the **Apostle's doctrine ... and sold their possessions and goods** (Acts 2:43, 45).*

*Then Peter said, "**Silver and gold have I none ...**" (Acts 3:6).*

*Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of **lands or houses sold them ...** (Acts 4:34).*

*And ... Barnabas ... having **land, sold it ...** (Acts 4:36-37).*

Could anything be clearer? What Jesus commanded, the Twelve observed. What Jesus commanded, the Twelve taught under the "Great Commission" to their converts. What Jesus commanded, the converts of the "Great Commission" observed.

Now let's note the contrast between these things that Jesus commanded during His *earthly* teaching ministry, and what He later taught in His *heavenly* ministry through Paul. The Lord *does NOT* teach *us* to sell all that we have – forsaking all – and to take no thought for our physical sustenance.

If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel (I Timothy 5:8).

The children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children (II Corinthians 12:14).

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, Who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life (I Timothy 6:17-19).

One should take special note that in this last reference the rich are *NOT* instructed to *sell all* that they have, but that they have a proper attitude and make good use of their riches.

Now, all of this is just one example of what Jesus commanded during His *earthly* teaching ministry to Israel (while He "*was a minister of the Circumcision*" – Romans 15:8). These commands were all incorporated into the "Great Commission."

WHICH GOSPEL WAS PREACHED?

Preach the gospel (Mark 16:15).

Which "gospel" were the Israel's Apostles commissioned to preach? There are a number of gospels in the Scriptures: "*the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven*," "*the gospel of the Circumcision*," "*the gospel of the Uncircumcision*," "*the Everlasting gospel*," "*the gospel of the Grace of God*," etc.

The gospel mentioned in the "Great Commission" is denoted simply as "*the gospel*" showing that it had already been defined in "The Gospels" (*i.e.*, in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

This "gospel" could not be "*the gospel of the Grace of God*" which was revealed to and committed to Paul (*i.e.*, "*my gospel*" – Romans 2:16; 16:25-26; II Timothy 2:8), for it was still hidden at this time.

Upon further study one will note that the "gospel" of the "Great Commission" is clearly Israel's "*gospel of the Kingdom*" (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14). This gospel will again be preached one day by Israel (Matthew 24:14).

BAPTISMAL SALVATION

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16).

In the gospel of the “Great Commission,” baptism was essential for salvation from that “untoward generation.” Could this be any clearer?

Israel’s baptismal salvation was also found in John the Baptist’s message.

*John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the **baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*** (Mark 1:4).

Peter understood well what the “Great Commission” said, because water baptism for salvation is exactly what he preached on Pentecost.

*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).

Because of the problems which many preachers have trying to make Israel’s “Great Commission” ours, they must begin to alter the text. This involves *changing* or *explaining away* certain words in some of the other passages.

MIRACULOUS SIGNS

These signs SHALL follow them that believe (Mark 16:17).

Again, the words of the “Great Commission” are unmistakable. Signs were to follow the Jewish believers. It is not that they *could* follow them, but that they *shall*.”

It should here be remembered that this is the same word (“shall”) that fundamentalists are so often quick to stress in other verses (like in Romans 10:13).

The Bible is explicit in its teaching that miraculous signs were for Israel.

The Jews require a sign (I Corinthians 1:22).

The signs belonged to Israel and their land.

*We see not **our** signs* (Psalms 74:9).

*... for signs and for wonders **in Israel** ...* (Isaiah 8:18).

References to signs in the Scriptures are always found in a Jewish setting. The first mention of miraculous signs should give any student of the Scripture a clear message of its relationship to Israel (Exodus 4:8).

The “Great Commission” had water baptism as a requirement for salvation with miraculous signs following. This is *exactly* what happened in Acts chapter 2 and in the early part of the Acts period.

JERUSALEM

Both Luke chapter 24 and Acts chapter 1 make the geographical procedure of the “Great Commission” known. They were to start at Jerusalem – it was to the *“Jews first.”*

The Jews were first, over the Gentiles, because in the Kingdom gospel the Gentiles could only be blessed in Israel’s national rise (c.f. Genesis 22:17-18; Isaiah 2:4; 60:1-3; 62:1-3). Therefore, under the “Great Commission” Israel must first accept the message.

All is different under the gospel committed to Paul for *“the dispensation of the grace of God.”* In *“the gospel of the Grace of God”* the Gentiles were to be blessed, *NOT* through Israel’s rise, but through Israel’s fall (Romans 11:11-13).

How many of us have heard the interpretation “where you are is your ‘Jerusalem?’” What type of interpretation is that? If this is our “Great Commission” and we are to follow it literally, we would have to sell all of our possessions and go to Jerusalem with *“the gospel of the Kingdom”* (c.f. Acts 3:25-26; 13:46).

REMISSION OF SINS

“Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them” (John 20:23).

How many messages have you heard on this part of the “Great Commission”?

Again this passage is clear; and was in perfect harmony with Christ’s *earthly* teaching ministry. For the Lord Jesus told Peter,

“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; c.f. Matthew 18:18).

Many a believer and even preacher has been left perplexed and confused by failing to follow Paul’s instruction that we are to be “*rightly dividing the Word of Truth*” (II Timothy 2:15).

Once again we are dealing plainly with the message of Israel’s Kingdom, during which the Twelve would have authority in the Messiah’s absence.

WITNESSES OF WHAT?

Ye shall be witnesses unto men (Acts 1:8).

Under the “*Great Commission*” Israel’s Apostles were to be “*witnesses*” but “*witnesses*” of what?

Before we deal with the answer to that question, let’s first find out what a witness is.

Noah Webster defines the word witness as,

A person who knows or sees anything; one personally present.

So, to be a witness, one must have firsthand knowledge concerning the thing which is being witnessed. Of what were the Twelve actually witnesses? On this the Scripture is abundantly clear.

“*Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ*

to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day ... and ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46, 48).

“*Wherefore of these men ... must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection*” (Acts 1:22).

“*This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses*” (Acts 2:32).

“*Whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses*” (Acts 3:15).

“*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus ... and we are His witnesses*” (Acts 5:30-32).

“*And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; Whom they slew and hanged on a tree, Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead*” (Acts 10:39-41).

“*And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people*” (Acts 13:31).

How clear are all these verses! The “*Great Commission*” was for those who had been actual eye-witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ’s ministry, especially of His **resurrection**.

What if you read in your local newspaper of a horrid crime which had been committed in your community, but one that you had not personally witnessed. Then suppose that you showed up at the trial and offered to testify and were subsequently placed on the witness stand. While on the stand you vividly and accurately describe the details of the crime as they had been recorded in the newspaper article. During the examination you are asked, “Where were you when you saw this crime committed?” To which you would respond, “Why, I didn’t see the act, but I did read all about

it in the paper.” Your proclamation of the details of that crime may be true, or not, depending on the accuracy of your source; but one thing is for certain: your testimony would not be accepted because you *did not witness the event*. Your witness would be thrown out as inadmissible evidence.

We never witnessed the death, burial or resurrection of Jesus Christ. We heard His Word and believed its message (Romans 10:17). Although we cannot bear witness to the resurrection, we can *PROCLAIM* it. We are teachers of this wonderful truth and all that it means.

We can give witness and testimony to God’s wonderful work of salvation in our own lives, but we can never fulfill the “Great Commission’s” duty of being “*witnesses chosen before of God.*”

GRACE

One should take particular notice that not once in all five of the “Great Commission” passages does the word “*grace*” even appear. This is not to say, of course, that God did not have grace during this time, for He did – as He always does – for it is an attribute of God’s own character and nature. If it had not been for grace Noah could not have been saved (Genesis 6:8).

Yet we must remember that there is a difference between the grace of God as a part of His nature, and the dispensation of the Grace of God where the administration of all of God’s dealings is conducted in full and total grace (Ephesians 3:2; *i.e.*, grace being the ruling principle – Romans 5:21). This

was not true of Noah’s day, for God did not at that time show grace to the rest of the world. The world perished. Grace was then, for that time, selective and limited.

There is not even one reference to “grace” – let alone to “*the Gospel of the Grace of God*” – in any part of Israel’s “Great Commission.” The fact is that it was still hidden at that time. The free gift of God’s grace, as well as the Jews and Gentiles in one Body were not to be found anywhere. These were all still yet unrevealed truths. None of them were known or preached until Paul (I Timothy 1:16; Galatians 1:25). Paul received them by revelation (Galatians 1, 2).

The plain truth of the matter is that God, in Paul’s epistles, has given us a complete and independent body of truth for this dispensation in which we now live (Romans 2:16), and a “*much more*” blessed commission than that found in “the Gospels” (II Corinthians 5:14-21; Ephesians 3:8-9).

Let us recognize that our position today is *NOT* one of being a “*witness*” under Israel’s “Great Commission,” but instead of being “*Ambassadors for Christ*” of the grace of God (II Corinthians 5:20). We have the “*ministry of reconciliation*” given to us (II Corinthians 5:18), and the “*Word of reconciliation*” committed to our trust (II Corinthians 5:19).

“Be ye reconciled to God.”



Did You Know?

Did you know that one of the books of the Bible was written by a bartender? The book of Nehemiah was written by Nehemiah, bartender for the king.

... I was the king’s cupbearer ... I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king ... (Nehemiah 1:11-2:1).



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