

## THREE GREAT COMMISSIONS

In order to obtain a clear understanding of *our* great commission, let us now consider *three* great commissions given in succession by the Lord Himself; one before His crucifixion, another after His resurrection and a third after His ascension.

### A GREAT COMMISSION

Much stress has been laid on the "Go" of the so-called "great commission," but this was not the first time our Lord had commanded His apostles to "go." His *first* great commission to the apostles is found in Matt. 10:5-10:

**"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, GO NOT into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:**

**"But GO RATHER to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. "And AS YE GO, preach, saying, The Kingdom of heaven is at hand. "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils [demons]: freely ye have received, freely give.**

**"Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses. "Nor scrip [bag or satchel] for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat."**

To this our Lord added further instructions regarding their conduct among friends and enemies, and predicted some of the afflictions they would be called upon to endure. The whole of this commission actually covers all of Matt. 10 (See [Matt. 11:1](#)).

Surely this commission is not *our* "great commission," but if we had been among the twelve apostles when these directions were given we would certainly have considered them a "great commission."

The command to confine their ministry exclusively to Israel would not have seemed strange to them, for this was based on the well known Abrahamic Covenant that through Abraham's multiplied seed the nations should be blessed ([Gen. 22:17,18](#) cf. [Acts 3:25,26](#)). Moreover, the prophets had repeatedly predicted that the nations would find blessing and salvation through *redeemed* Israel. Not until Israel was *saved* could blessing flow through her to the Gentiles ([Isa. 59:20-60:3](#), [Zech. 8:13](#)).

It was perfectly normal, then, that our Lord should send the apostles first to the house of Israel exclusively. Indeed, He had emphatically declared concerning His own ministry:

**". . . I AM NOT SENT BUT UNTO THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL" (Matt. 15:24).**

This doubtless was taken for granted by those who recognized Israel as the chosen nation. The apostle Paul, looking back some years later, wrote:

**"Now I say that JESUS CHRIST WAS A MINISTER OF THE CIRCUMCISION for the truth of God, TO CONFIRM THE PROMISES MADE UNTO THE FATHERS: "AND THAT THE GENTILES MIGHT GLORIFY GOD FOR HIS MERCY; as It is written, For this cause I will confess to Thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name. "And again He saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people" (Rom. 15:8-10).**

Mark well the details of this millennial promise. It is *mercy* to the Gentiles but the fulfillment of *promises* to Israel. The Gentiles will indeed rejoice "*with His people*," but not until *His people* themselves have come to rejoice in Him.

Thus the Lord had come, first of all, "to save HIS PEOPLE from their sins" ([Matt. 1:21](#)), and He was now sending the twelve apostles forth as His co-workers. In harmony with all this the twelve were commissioned to proclaim the kingdom of heaven "at hand" and were given power to work miracles as the signs of the long-promised blessing (cf. [Isa. 35:5,6](#)). Surely *they* must have considered this a *great commission*.

In order to facilitate a comparison of this commission with the two to be considered later on, we will list the outstanding details by number:

1. Under this commission the apostles were sent to the nation Israel *exclusively* ([Matt. 10:5,6](#), cf. [15:24](#) and [Rom. 15:8](#)).

2. Under this commission the kingdom was to be proclaimed "*at hand*" ([Matt. 10:7](#)).

3. Under this commission the apostles were given *miraculous powers* ([Matt. 10:8](#)).

4. Under this commission they were *not to lay up provisions* for the future ([Matt. 10:8-10](#), cf. [5:42](#), [Luke 12:32,33](#)).

5. Under this commission *repentance and baptism were required for the remission of sins*. While water baptism is not mentioned in this particular passage, it is clear from the whole record that our Lord and His apostles, like John the Baptist, proclaimed the kingdom and required repentance and baptism for the remission of sins (See [Mark 1:4](#) and cf. [John 4:1,2](#)).

### **A GREATER COMMISSION**

After our Lord's death and resurrection He gave the apostles (excepting Judas Iscariot) a *greater commission*. This has come to be called, erroneously, "the great commission," "our Lord's last commands" and "our marching orders."

From this error has sprung much of the prevailing discord over water baptism, physical and political signs, etc. This new commission was in fact no departure from the prophetic program; it was a *further development* of it.

In the records of our Lord's command to go and preach "the gospel," there is no indication that He meant a different gospel from that which they had been preaching. And, remember, *their* gospel (good news) concerned Messiah and His kingdom. It is specifically and repeatedly called "*the gospel of the kingdom*" ([Matt. 4:23](#), [9:35](#), [24:14](#), [Mark 1:14](#), [Luke 9:2,6](#), etc.).

To *assume* that our Lord now sends these apostles to proclaim "*the gospel of the grace of God*" is wholly unwarranted. In fact, "*the gospel of the grace of God*" is not preached nor even mentioned until Paul is raised up and sent forth to declare it (See [Acts 20:24](#), cf. [Rom. 3:21-28](#), [Eph. 3:1-3](#)).

Let us now compare the pre- and post-resurrection commissions of our Lord, remembering that both were given to the same group of men:

1. As the apostles had been sent to one nation alone, they were now sent to *all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* ([Luke 24:47](#), [Acts 1:8](#)). This was no departure from the former program, but a further

development of it, for our Lord had dealt with Israel so that they might become a blessing to all nations. Now it was assumed that Israel would accept her risen Messiah and that the program would go on.

2. Under this commission the kingdom, formerly proclaimed "at hand," was actually *offered* for Israel's acceptance ([Acts 2:36-39](#), [3:19-26](#)). Here again is a further development of the *same* program.

3. Under this commission Christ's disciples were given *greater* miraculous powers than before ([Mark 16:17,18](#), [John 14:12](#), cf. early Acts). Again a further development of the same program.

4. Under this commission the *whole* Pentecostal church actually had *all things common*. Read carefully, Acts 2:44,45, 4:32-37 and see how this too is a further development of the *same* program.

5. Under this commission repentance and baptism were required for the remission of sins *and* the Holy Spirit thereupon bestowed ([Mark 16:16-18](#), cf. [Acts 2:38](#)). Once more, a further development of the *same* program.

If this commission embodies God's program for today, how shall we answer the Seventh Day Adventist when he teaches legalism from Matt. 28:20 and Matt. 23:2,3, or the so-called "Disciples of Christ" when they teach baptismal salvation from Mark 16:16, or the Pentecostals when they insist from Mark 16:17,18 that miraculous powers are the signs of true faith, or Rome when she quotes John 20:22,23 and insists on the right to remit sins?

## THE GREATEST COMMISSION

**"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 [creation]: 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" (II Cor. 5:16-19).**

But now Paul declares by revelation: "*Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.*" Does this not indicate a change in dispensation?

We now know Christ as the One in whom all fullness dwells ([Col. 1:19](#)), even all the fullness of the Godhead ([Col. 2:9](#)). We know Him as the One who has been exalted far above all ([Eph. 1:20,21](#), [Phil. 2:9-11](#)) and now sends forth His ambassadors to offer the riches of His grace to all who will receive.

The first two great commissions were originally given to twelve men because the promises to Israel, with her twelve tribes, were in view. The third great commission was originally given to *one* man because there was *one* God, *one* lost world, *one* Mediator and *one* body in view.

What a high and glorious mission is ours to proclaim the gospel of the grace of God and the offer of reconciliation! How we should hasten to carry it out! How the love of Christ for His enemies should constrain us to plead with men to be reconciled while it is still "the accepted time"! ([II Cor. 5:20,21](#)).