

# The Great Commission and Salvation in the Book of Acts

## Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16

### Introduction:

- A. What would you tell someone if today were the last day you had on earth?
  1. What advice or instructions would you give to your children?
  2. What advice would you give to your children and those you left behind?
  3. This is the situation we find Jesus in when He gives the Great Commission.
    - a. The end of the gospel account given by Matthew records the Great Commission in these words: "All power has been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:18-19).
    - b. Mark recounts these words: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).
- B. The last words of Jesus, while He was on earth, was a command to fulfill the Great Commission.
  1. Acts 1:8 - "ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."
  2. These were the last words of Jesus before He ascended into heaven.
- C. What was the Great Commission?
  1. Jesus first declared His authority.
    - a. All power has been given unto me in heaven and on earth.
    - b. This means all things were placed under His control (Hebrews 2:8).
    - c. It is based on the authority that Christ received that He gave the Great Commission ("therefore" in Matthew 28:19).
  2. He told them to "Go."
    - a. This involves action required on their part.
    - b. It was not a suggestion, but a command.
    - c. Since Jesus has all authority, that means His command to "go" must be obeyed, otherwise it is disobedience.
  3. He instructed them to preach/teach the gospel to every nation.
    - a. Just as we do today, the apostles lived in a lost and dying world.
    - b. They needed to spread the gospel.

- c. God does not want people to be lost, but for them to repent and obey the gospel (II Peter 3:9).
- d. It was up to the Apostles to start taking that message everywhere.
- e. This again involves an action.
  - (1). This shows they had a responsibility to preach.
  - (2). This shows they had a responsibility to preach it to everyone, not just those with whom they were comfortable.
- 4. Jesus Christ expressed the need for baptism.
  - a. Remember, these are the last things commanded to the disciples.
  - b. This shows Jesus Christ's view of the importance of baptism.
  - c. When combined with faith, baptism saves (Mark 16:16).
- 5. The importance of continued teaching is stressed by Jesus.
  - a. The command, according to Matthew, is "Go ... teach ... baptizing ... teach."
  - b. These new converts were to be taught to observe (keep, do) the things that Jesus had instructed.
  - c. The ones who hear and do are wise (Matthew 7:24).
- D. The last instructions regarding carrying out the Great Commission are found in Acts 1:8.
  - 1. The apostles would be witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judaea.
  - 2. The apostles would be witnesses in Samaria.
  - 3. The apostles would be witnesses unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

### **I. The Great Commission in the Book of Acts: Jerusalem and Judaea.**

- A. The apostles began to fulfill the Great Commission on the Day of Pentecost following Christ's ascension (Acts 2).
  - 1. The Holy Spirit fell upon them (Acts 2:1-4).
    - a. This allowed them to speak in tongues (2:4)
    - b. This also allowed them to speak exactly the words Jesus wanted spoken (John 16:12-ff).
  - 2. The apostles began doing exactly what Jesus told them to do in the Great Commission.
    - a. They taught "all nations" (Acts 2:5, Matthew 28:19).
    - b. Many believed (Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:36-37).
    - c. The apostle baptized those who believed (Acts 2:38, 41, Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16).
    - d. Those people then were saved (Mark 16:16, Acts 2:41, 47).
    - e. The apostles continued to teach them (Acts 2:42, Matthew 28:20).
- B. The apostles continued fulfilling the Great Commission in Jerusalem.

1. After healing the lame man at the temple gate, Peter preached another sermon (Acts 3).
  - a. Peter and John were arrested because of their preaching (Acts 4:1-3).
  - b. But because of their preaching, many more believed (Acts 4:4).
2. Peter and John preached to the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-22).
- C. The apostles taught others to also fulfill the Great Commission.
  1. This is evidenced with Stephen boldly proclaiming Jesus as the Christ to the council (Acts 6:9-7:60).
  2. Other Christians also worked together fulfilling the Great Commission.
    - a. Saul started a persecution of the church (Acts 8:1-3).
    - b. The people that were scattered went all over Judaea (Acts 8:1).
    - c. While they went, they preached the word in every place (Acts 8:4).
  3. If this was a command only to the apostles and to no one else, there would have been no reason for anyone else to take the gospel to the world.
    - a. Some brethren today actually claim that the Great Commission does not apply to us!
    - b. It is obvious by the actions of the Christians who were scattered that they were sure it applied to them.
    - c. If it applied to those Christians, it applies to us as well!

## **II. The Great Commission: Samaria.**

- A. Who are the Samaritans?
  1. The capital of the northern kingdom of Israel was the city of Samaria (I Kings 16:29, 21:1, 22:51).
    - a. It is here that all the kings lived and reigned, and most were buried.
    - b. Later, the entire northern kingdom began to be called "Samaria," after the name of the capital city (II Kings 1:3, 17:24, 23:19, Amos 6:1).
  2. The northern kingdom was taken captive by the Assyrians.
    - a. The people were taken and forcibly moved into cities of the Medes (II Kings 17:6).
    - b. The Assyrians took foreigners and put them in the land of Samaria (II Kings 17:24).
    - c. The poor Samaritans who were left in the land intermarried with the foreigners, and their offspring became spiritual half-breeds.
    - d. This is why the Jews referred to them as "dogs."
  3. God had promised that there would be a place in the new kingdom for the Israelites of the northern tribes.

- a. He said He would "bring back the captives of my people of Israel..." (Amos 9:11-15).
  - b. "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee. I will surely gather the remnant of Israel" (Micah 2:12).
  - c. So it makes complete sense that Jesus would include Samaria in His final instructions on fulfilling the Great Commission (Acts 1:8).
4. It is important to realize that these people were not Gentiles, but also not fully Israelites.
- a. There was not an uproar of opposition when the Samaritans heard the gospel.
  - b. There was tremendous opposition when the Gentiles heard the gospel (Acts 15).
- B. Philip preached in the city of Samaria (Acts 8:5-25).
- 1. He preached the gospel to them (Acts 8:5, Mark 16:15).
  - 2. After hearing the gospel, they believed (Acts 8:12a, Mark 16:16).
  - 3. They then were baptized (Acts 8:12, Matthew 28:19).
  - 4. Philip continued preaching in the city (Acts 8:13-15, Matthew 28:20).
    - a. Simon the sorcerer believed and continued with Philip (8:13).
    - b. Word reached the apostles in Jerusalem (8:14).
    - c. Peter and John came up to Samaria (8:14).
    - d. This did not happen instantaneously, but would have taken at least a few days, and Philip was still there preaching until called away by the angel of the Lord (8:26).
  - 5. He, like Stephen, is an example of a Christian (not just the apostles) fulfilling the Great Commission.

### **III. The Great Commission: The Uttermost Part of the Earth.**

- A. Beginning with Cornelius, the gospel was proclaimed to Gentiles.
- 1. It took miraculous intervention for Peter to go to the house of a Gentile (Acts 10:9-22).
    - a. God showed him the vision of the sheet with the unclean animals (10:11-13).
    - b. Afterwards, the Holy Spirit spoke directly to him, telling him to go with the men who came on behalf of Cornelius (10:19-21).
  - 2. It took miraculous intervention for Peter and the Jews to completely accept that the Gentiles were welcome into the kingdom/church (10:44-48).
  - 3. Peter taught them the gospel (10:36-43, Matthew 28:18-19).
  - 4. Peter did not suggest baptism, but commanded that they be baptized (10:48, Matthew 28:18-19, Mark 16:16).
    - a. If baptism is not essential, why did Peter command it?

- b. An angel of God told Cornelius that Peter would speak unto him the "things that are commanded...of God" (Acts 10:33).
  - c. The angel told Cornelius that Peter would tell him words by which he and his family "shall be saved."
  - d. The words/commands Peter gave were for them to be baptized (Matthew 28:19).
- B. The apostle Paul carried the Great Commission into the ends of the earth.
- 1. He began preaching in Damascus (Acts 9:19-22).
    - a. Damascus was the capital city of Syria (I Kings 15:18).
    - b. This preaching was initially only to the Jews (9:20).
    - c. Because many Jews were being converted, there were Jews who wanted to kill him (9:23-24).
  - 2. He carried the Great Commission through Asia Minor.
    - a. This he did on his three missionary journeys.
    - b. There were many taught in Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe (Acts 13:51-20).
    - c. Afterwards, Paul and Barnabas returned to those cities to teach them more (Acts 14:21-23, Matthew 28:20).
  - 3. He followed the commands of the Lord, spreading the word even to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-17:34).
    - a. To the Philippian jailor, Paul and Silas preached "the word of the Lord" (Acts 16:32, Mark 16:15).
    - b. He believed, and was baptized "straightway" or "immediately" (Acts 16:33-34, Mark 16:16).

#### **IV. The Great Commission: the purpose.**

- A. As Jesus stated in His giving of the Great Commission, the purpose is to save souls!
- 1. "He that believeth and is baptized SHALL BE SAVED" (Mark 16:16, see also I Peter 3:21).
  - 2. This is what people wanted to know about when the gospel was preached to them.
    - a. On the Day of Pentecost, the people gathered said "men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).
    - b. The Philippian Jailor said "what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).
    - c. Paul himself asked this on the road to Damascus "what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6).
  - 3. The response was what Christ commanded in the Great Commission.
    - a. "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38).
    - b. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31), followed by immediate baptism (Acts 16:33).

- c. Saul was told to go into the city and it would be told what he "must do" (Acts 9:6), and was told "arise and be baptized, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).
- B. The Great Commission is for all Christians to fulfill.
  - 1. This includes the preachers (such as Philip, Stephen, Timothy, and others).
  - 2. This includes the elders, who are to be "apt to teach" (I Timothy 3:2).
  - 3. This includes every Christian, male and female (Acts 8:1-4).
  - 4. We are ALL supposed to be out teaching others.
- C. There is no guarantee that the people we teach will obey the gospel.
  - 1. The apostle Paul ran in to many who refused to listen (Acts 17:5, et al).
    - a. Jews in general did not receive the gospel (Acts 17:5).
    - b. Felix would not heed his words (24:25).
  - 2. Peter and John tried to teach some who would not obey (Acts 4:13-22).
    - a. These were the rulers of the Jews.
    - b. They refused to believe and obey, even though they knew the apostles could perform miracles (Acts 4:16).
  - 3. There were some that Jesus Christ Himself could not convert!
    - a. The religious leaders obviously did not become followers of Jesus, but instead plotted to kill Him (Matthew 26:3-5).
    - b. The chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees all rejected His teaching which was directed at them (Matthew 21:45-46).
    - c. The rich young ruler refused to follow the commands of Jesus because he was too materialistic (Matthew 19:16-22).

### **Conclusion:**

- A. Because the Great Commission is a command of Jesus Christ, all Christians must be working to fulfill it!
- B. If we do not proclaim the gospel to others, we are not confessing Christ before men (Matthew 10:32-33).
  - 1. This is tantamount to denying Christ, because we are not telling others about Him.
  - 2. If we are not out proclaiming the gospel to others (confessing Him), He will deny that we are His at the judgment day (Matthew 10:33).
- C. We are all soldiers of Christ (II Timothy 2:3-4), members of the army of the kingdom/church of Christ.
  - 1. Soldiers are to contend earnestly for the faith (defend the faith - Jude 3).
  - 2. Soldiers are also to expand the kingdom, conquer new territory for the king.
  - 3. Soldiers of Christ Arise!

D. If you do not carry out the Great Commission, you condemn others to hell.

1. People must hear in order to have faith (Romans 10:17).
2. How can they hear without one teaching it to them? (Romans 10:14).
3. It is impossible for someone to hear the gospel if no one is proclaiming it.
4. Do you want the people in this city to be lost eternally?
5. The only way for them to be saved is for you to go out and teach them the gospel.
6. There is a song called "You never mentioned Him to me."
7. When Jesus asks at the last day why you did not take the gospel to others, do you really think He'll accept the excuses?
8. Not one person in the book of Acts was saved apart from someone else teaching them; it's still the same today.

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