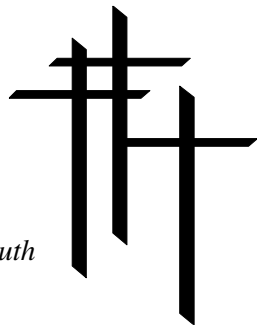


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

Volume 68 No. 4

Fall 2008

THE SO-CALLED GREAT COMMISSION

By Gregg Bing

*“Go ye into all the world
and preach the gospel to
every creature” (Mark
16:15)*

This command from Jesus is commonly referred to as the “Great Commission.” Most fundamental, evangelical Christians believe it is our commission today as members of the Church, the Body of Christ. Many think it is the only commission found in the Scriptures, but that is not true. The Scriptures contain many different commissions, even in the Old Testament. God gave separate commissions to men such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, as well as many others. They were great commissions, and we can learn much from

studying them, but none of them is our commission today. What about the so-called “Great Commission” of Mark 16? Is this our commission today during this present dispensation of God’s grace? This is a critical question for believers. If we are to effectively serve the Lord, we must know what He has commissioned us to do and what message He has entrusted to us to proclaim. The salvation of men’s souls rests on this issue.

As with any portion of Scripture, we need to examine the text of the so-called “Great Commission,” looking at the context and being careful to rightly divide the Word of truth. We need to ask these questions:

- To whom did Jesus give this commission?
- To whom were they sent to preach the gospel?
- What gospel message were they to proclaim?
- When was this commission

in effect (i.e. what age)?

- What was required of those who heard the message?
- What else was a part of this commission?

This so-called “Great Commission” is found, not only in Mark 16, but in several passages of Scripture: Matthew 28, Luke 24, John 20, and Acts 2. To get a complete picture of this subject, all of these Scriptures need to be considered, however, for the purposes of this study, we will concentrate on Mark 16.

To whom did Jesus give this commission?

Verse 14 of Mark 16 tells us Jesus “appeared to the eleven.” Jesus directed His words to the twelve apostles, who at that time were only eleven in number because of the loss of Judas Iscariot. The commission was not spoken to the multitudes, nor even to all of Jesus’ disciples, who numbered much more than just twelve (cf. Acts 1:15). It was given to the twelve men chosen by God to go to the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthias, who was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot, was not present at this time, but the commission was passed on to him as well (Acts 1:15-26).

These twelve apostles had a distinct ministry and commission from that given to Paul, God’s apostle to the Gentiles (2 Tim. 1:11). This fact alone indicates the commission Jesus gave the twelve is not the commission for the Church, the Body of Christ.

To whom did Jesus send the twelve apostles?

Verse 15 of Mark 16 indicates Jesus sent the twelve apostles into “all the world” (compare Matt. 28:19 “all nations”). Because this commission involved “the world,” many reason that this must also be our commission. As we examine other passages of Scripture, we find more specific instructions given to the twelve. They were to be witnesses for Christ “beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47), then moving out from there into “all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Why Jerusalem and Judea first? Because their ministry was initially limited to the Jews only. In many ways, this commission was very similar to the commission Jesus gave them while He was here on earth: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the

Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6).

After the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea rejected the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the twelve apostles, “repentance to life” was granted to the Gentiles when Peter was sent to minister the Word to Cornelius, an uncircumcised Gentile (Acts 11:18). Even after this, the Jews still had the prominent position as salvation was offered “to the Jew first and also for the Greek (Gentile)” (Rom. 1:16).

Is this the order of our ministry today: “To the Jew first, then to the Gentile”? Not at all. Today God is building the Church, the Body of Christ, in which no distinction is made between Jew or Gentile (Col. 3:11). God desires “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Our ministry is to all people without consideration for nationality, race, religion, or social position.

What gospel message were the twelve apostles to preach?

Let’s first consider the gospel Jesus proclaimed while here on earth. Matthew 4:23 says: “And Jesus went about all Gal-

(Continued on page 4)

TIMELY MESSENGER

Published quarterly by:

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

1450 Oak Hill Road
Fort Worth, TX 76112-3017
(817) 451-0937

Website:

www.gracebiblechurch-fw.com

Email: gbcfw@sbcglobal.net

Gregg Bing — Editor

Sent **free** to anyone upon request. If you live in the Fort Worth area, we invite you to worship with us.

Sunday Services:

10:00 AM	Sunday School
11:00 AM	Morning Worship
6:00 PM	Evening Worship

Mid-Week Services:

Tues.	10:00 AM	Ladies Class
Wed.	7:00 PM	Bible Study

ADDRESS CHANGED?

If so, please notify Grace Bible Church. Be sure to include your name, your old address, and your new address. This will help us keep our mailing list current and reduce the cost of postage.

*Thanks for your help
in this matter!*

(Continued from page 3)

lee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.”

After Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan river and temptation in the wilderness, He went into Galilee to begin His public ministry, which Matthew describes this way: “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17).

Jesus was a minister to the circumcision (Israel) “to confirm the promises made to the fathers” (Rom. 15:8). He proclaimed that their promised kingdom was “at hand” (near), and He called upon Israel, a nation in covenant relationship with the Lord, to repent of their sins and turn back to the Lord. This was not just a spiritual kingdom in the hearts of men, but the literal, earthly kingdom reign of the Son of David promised to Israel throughout the Old Testament Scriptures.

This same gospel was preached by Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-2) and by the twelve apostles during their initial ministry (Matt. 10:7). When Jesus commissioned them for their Acts period ministry, the gospel they

were to proclaim didn’t change. Jesus told the twelve that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

Before their promised kingdom could be established on the earth, the entire nation of Israel had to repent and turn back to the Lord. The twelve were instructed to preach the gospel of the kingdom “to all nations” because the people of Israel had been dispersed throughout the world as a result of the Assyrian (721 BC) and Babylonian captivities (606 BC).

Is the gospel of the kingdom the message we are to preach today in the dispensation of God’s grace? No. We are not in covenant relationship with the Lord, as Israel was, thus we are not called to “repent” and turn back to the Lord so that the kingdom can be established.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul declared the gospel message which he received from the Lord and delivered unto them to be 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 Cor. 15:3-4).

Though it is difficult for many to believe, this simple

truth of Christ's substitutionary death for our sins was not part of the good news Peter preached to Israel on the day of Pentecost.

How could Jesus' instructions to the twelve apostles be our commission if the very gospel message they were given to preach was different than the gospel we are to preach today?

When was this commission to the twelve apostles in effect?

Contrary to what most people think, the day of Pentecost did not mark the beginning of a new age, that of the Church, the Body of Christ. Instead, it was a continuation of a prophesied program of God, a program which was to culminate in Christ's return to earth to establish Israel's long awaited kingdom. Jesus spoke of this age in His Olivet discourse to His twelve apostles. He taught them about the signs of His coming and of the end of the age. These signs included the "beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:4-8), the tribulation period (Matt. 24:9,15-21), and the signs in the heavens (Matt. 24:29). Jesus told them that, during this age, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a

witness to all the nations, and then the end (i.e. of the age) will come" (Matt. 24:14).

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). They expected God to fulfill His prophesied promises to Israel. The "sufferings of the Christ" had been fulfilled (Acts 3:18). All that remained was "the glories to follow" (1 Pet. 1:11) which would be realized by the return of Christ to establish His kingdom. Jesus responded: "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). The ministry of the twelve was simply to offer the kingdom to Israel (Acts 3:19-21); they were not to know how the nation would respond.

As Peter stood to speak to the Jews gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, he declared: "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). He then quoted from Joel chapter 2, verses 28 to 32, which speak of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Israel as well as the signs in the heavens that will precede the return of Christ to the earth. Peter did not say the events of Pentecost completely fulfilled the proph-

ecy of Joel, but he did indicate that what took place that day had been prophesied by Joel.

The so-called “great commission” was to be carried out during a prophesied age that would end with the second coming of Christ to begin His kingdom rule on earth. The Acts period, at least in its initial stages, marked the beginning of the “last days” of this prophesied age. But when the nation of Israel rejected the gospel of the kingdom preached by the Holy Spirit through the twelve apostles, this age was interrupted and the prophesied kingdom was postponed.

The Acts period closes with Paul’s pronouncement of blindness upon Israel, as prophesied through Isaiah (Isa. 6:9-10). This was followed by a final turn to the Gentiles (Acts 28:25-28). From his prison house in Rome, Paul then wrote letters to several churches (Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse) fully revealing a new, unprophesied purpose of God for a new body of believers: the Church, the Body of Christ. This is the age in which we are living today.

The commission given to the twelve apostles was for the “last days” leading up to Israel’s prophesied kingdom; it has nothing to do with the pre-

sent dispensation of the grace of God which was kept secret until revealed to the Apostle Paul (Eph. 3:1-6).

When God completes His Church and the Lord comes in the air to take us home, the prophesied age will resume. The commission given to the twelve will be continued during Daniel’s 70 week, commonly referred to as “the great tribulation period.” During that time, Jesus’ words will be fulfilled: “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14).

What was required for salvation under this commission?

In verse 16 of Mark 16, we read: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

The baptism referred to here is water baptism. This was what was practiced by John the Baptist, by Jesus and His twelve apostles during His public ministry, and then by the twelve apostles during the Acts period (Acts 8:38, 10:47-48). What does this verse teach about the place of water

baptism? At that time, water baptism was required for salvation! Water baptism, alone, did not save anyone, but this verse states that for a person to be saved from their sins they must believe **and** be baptized.

Peter understood this requirement. After preaching to the people of Israel on the day of Pentecost, the people asked, "What shall we do?" Peter responded, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). To have remission (forgiveness) of sins and to receive the Holy Spirit, a person had to repent and be baptized (in water).

Some who believe Mark 16:15 is our commission today accept water baptism as a requirement without any hesitation. Others hold to this as our commission, but reject the idea that water baptism is a requirement for salvation. They reason that the second half of Mark 16:16 which says, "He who does not believe will be condemned," implies that only belief is necessary for salvation. But remember, the concept of "belief" involves not only faith but obedience as well. At that

time, if a person believed God's Word, they would obey God's accompanying command to be baptized. If a person did not believe, obviously they would not be baptized either.

The real problem comes in trying to explain the first half of Mark 16:16, "He who believes **and** is baptized will be saved." They have to reinterpret this verse as meaning, "He who believes is saved and should be baptized (as a testimony to others)," but this is plainly not what this verse says.

To reject water baptism at that time was a rejection of the will of God. This was demonstrated by the Pharisees who refused to be baptized by John (Luke 7:29-30).

In contrast, when the Apostle Paul speaks of salvation, water baptism is never said to be required, only faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on Calvary. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Paul did baptize during his Acts period ministry, when he was also a "minister of the new covenant" (2 Cor. 3:5) to the people of Israel, but he never spoke of water baptism as a requirement

for salvation. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul said, “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ... For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 1:14-17). Clearly, Paul did not include water baptism as a part of the gospel he preached.

There is no need to reconcile the ministries and gospels of Peter and Paul. Each received his own distinct commission from the Lord.

What else was part of Jesus’ commission to the Twelve?

After declaring how a person is saved under this commission (vs. 16), verses 17-18 of Mark 16 declare that “these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will:”

- Cast out demons.
- Speak with new tongues.
- Take up serpents.
- Drink anything deadly without harm.
- Lay hands on the sick who will recover.

Those who try to take Mark 16 as the “Great Commission” seem to pick and choose what they want from this list of “signs” that follow. One group follows the command to preach

the gospel, but omits all of the signs that follow, saying they are not for us today. Another group preaches the gospel and stresses casting out demons, speaking with new tongues, and healing the sick, but they don’t attempt handling serpents or drinking deadly poison. Still other groups preach the gospel and attempt to practice all of the signs. This is what happens when people fail to “rightly divide the word of truth” and distinguish the different commissions found in the Scriptures—there is confusion and division.

Let’s leave this “great commission” where it belongs: with the twelve apostles who were sent by the Lord Jesus to preach the good news of the earthly kingdom to the people of Israel.

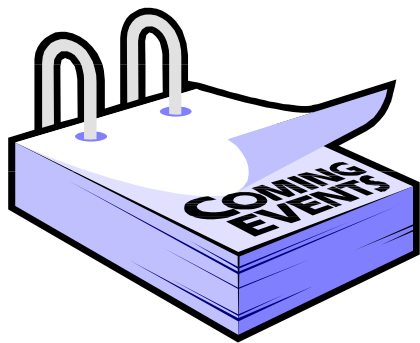
Some will ask, “If Mark 16 is not our great commission, then what is?” In our next issue, we will pursue this question as we look at “The Grace Commission” given to us in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

These things we also speak,
not in words which man’s
wisdom teaches but which
the Holy Spirit teaches,
comparing spiritual things
with spiritual.

1 Corinthians 2:13

If or we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

—Titus 3:3-7



WINTER YOUTH RETREAT

January 1-3, 2009



*“Our Adversary
the Devil”*

*... walks about like a
roaring lion seeking
whom he may devour.*

Our Winter Youth Retreat will be January 1-3, 2009 at Three Mountain Retreat in Clifton, Texas. This retreat is for young people, ages 13 through college age. There will be good Bible teaching, praise and worship, recreational activities: horse-back riding, touch football, indoor games, and the “Big Night Game.” Registration forms are available on our website:

www.gracebiblechurch-fw.com

Or, email us or call us and we will send you the forms. The registration deadline is:

Sunday, Dec. 21, 2008.

ALONE

By John LaVier

(Written in March, 1947)

It is human to stand with the crowd; it is divine to stand alone. It is man-like to follow the people, to drift with the tide; it is God-like to follow a principle, to stem the tide.

It is natural to compromise conscience and follow the social and religious fashion for the sake of gain or pleasure; it is divine to sacrifice both on the altar of truth and duty.

“No man stood with me, but all men forsook me,” wrote the battle-scarred apostle in describing his first appearance before Nero to answer for his life for believing and teaching contrary to the Roman world.

Truth has been out of fashion since man changed his robe of fade-less light for a garment of faded leaves.

Noah built and voyaged alone. His neighbors laughed at his strangeness and perished in style. Abraham wandered and worshipped alone. Sodomites smiled at the simple shepherd, followed the fashion, and fed the flames.

Daniel dined and prayed alone. Elijah sacrificed and witnessed alone. Jeremiah prophesied and wept alone. Jesus loved and died alone.

And of the lonely way His disciples should walk, He said, “Strait is the Gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

Of their treatment by the many who walk in the broad way, He said, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world ... therefore the world hateth you.”

The Church in the wilderness praised Abraham and persecuted Moses. The Church of the Kings praised Moses and persecuted the prophets. The Church of Caiaphas praised the prophets and persecuted Jesus. The Church of the Popes praised the Saviour and persecuted the saints. And multitudes now, both in the Church and in the world, applaud the courage and fortitude of the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and martyrs, but condemn as stubbornness or foolishness like-faithfulness to truth today.

WANTED—TODAY:

men and women, young and old, who will obey their convictions of truth and duty at the cost of fortune and friends and life itself.

BIBLE STUDY BOOKS



The following Bible study materials are available free of charge for your personal use or for use in teaching a Bible class.

by Charles Wages

- Written for Our Learning
- Stepping Stones to Truth
- Past Pentecost to Paul
- Points to Ponder
- The Ages
- Saved by Grace
- Ministry of the Church
- The Perfect Will of God
- Once in a Lifetime
- Fellowship in Christ
- Hidden in God
- Thoughts on Vision
- Spiritual Fitness
- What Saith the Scripture
(Set of 6 Diff. Tracts)

by Mrs. Charles Wages

- Seasons
- Spiritual Thoughts for Young Minds
- A Man Named Paul
- Studies for Women

by R.B. Shiflet

- Informal Study: Philippians
- Informal Study: Ephesians
- Personal Meditations on Paul's Post-Acts Ministry
- Giving Under Grace
- Ultradispensationalism
- The Lord's Supper

by Ike T. Sidebottom

- The Book of Acts
- Through the Bible Dispensationally
- Prophetic Gleanings
- Saved, Settled and Sure
- Fellowship of the Mystery

by Gregg Bing

- Keys to the Word : Understanding the Bible
- Unless the Lord Builds the House
- A Good Conscience
- That I May Know Him
- Making Good Choices
- For God So Loved the World
- It is Finished!
- Conformed to the Image of His Son
- The End of the World
- Assurance : Can We Know that We are Saved?

by John D. LaVier

- Yokefellows : Paul and His Companions
- Sure Words of Prophecy
- The Lord has Spoken
- Why is Heaven Silent?

S *tudy to shew
thyself approved
unto God, a workman
that needeth not to
be ashamed, rightly
dividing the Word
of truth.*

— 2 Timothy 2:15