

Final Instructions**Matthew 28:16—20****(Also Mark 16:12—19; Luke 24:13—53; John 20—21)**

Jesus was crucified around Passover and after rising from the dead He was on earth for 40 days (Acts 1:3). During this time He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, then the women who went to the tomb after Mary (Matthew 28:8—10). He then appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13—27) and to Simon (Luke 24:34). He also appeared to the 11 Disciples both in Jerusalem (John 20:19—26) and Galilee (Matthew 28:16—20). Paul adds in 1 Corinthians 15:5—7 that Jesus Christ also showed Himself to more than 500 believers at one time.

He also appeared after His ascension. As Stephen is being stoned the heavens open up and Stephen is able to see Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father (Acts 7:55). Peter heard Jesus Christ while in a trance (Acts 10:9—16) and Paul heard Him speaking from heaven while on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3—9). Jesus Christ also appeared to Paul to instruct him about the new Dispensation of Grace (1 Corinthians 15:8—9; Galatians 1:11—12).

When Jesus Christ appeared to His followers He opened up Scripture to them helping them understand all the events that just occurred and how they related to prophecy. Jesus spoke only of Israel's prophetic program while on earth, even after rising from the dead. There was absolutely no hint that the Church, the Body of Christ would come into being. Jesus Christ consistently spoke of Israel's leading role in the earthly Kingdom that would soon be set up. This is evidenced by the Disciples' question as to the restoration of Israel's Kingdom in Acts 1:6.

It is these appearances and teachings that give encouragement to the remnant of Jewish believers and the impetus to boldly proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom. During this 40-day period, Jesus Christ has stopped dealing with unbelieving Israel and is concentrating on giving believers final instructions, preparing them to take over the ministry of gathering the lost sheep of the house of Israel, bringing them through the Tribulation and into the Kingdom that will be set up at Christ's Second Coming. I believe the Tribulation was only a few months away at this time but delayed by God's mercy when the invitation for Israel was extended an additional year (Luke 13:6—9). When Israel continued to reject the call to come into the Kingdom by stoning Stephen, God put Israel's prophetic program on hold and ushered in the Dispensation of Grace, our Mystery program, as revealed through the apostle Paul.

The Great Commission

One of the best known but least understood teachings of the Bible is what is commonly called the Great Commission. A commission is nothing more than an authoritative order to accomplish a certain task. This one commission is emphasized as being the most important commission ever given by Jesus. Most people can only name this commission even though there are a number of commissions presented by Jesus that are almost totally ignored.

In one of Jesus' first commissions He tells the Disciples that they were to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5—8). They were given the authority to heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out demons.

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ gave the Disciples another commission, the authority to forgive sins (John 20:19—23) in preparation for them to step in after His ascension. They would be taking over the ministry of presenting the Gospel of the Kingdom as we see in early Acts. This is the Gospel Peter was preaching in Acts 2:37:39. This gospel includes repentance and baptism for forgiveness and receiving the Holy Spirit. They were to preach this Gospel beginning in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46—47; Acts 1:8).

Matthew, Mark and Luke all contain accounts of Jesus Christ giving the Disciples commissions before He ascends into heaven. All three commissions seem to have been given while the Disciples were in Jerusalem,

however, the accounts differ enough that it's possible that they were commissioned on three different occasions. Each commission was specifically given to the Disciples and was to be carried out under the Gospel of the Kingdom. Lets analyze the commission given in Matthew.

Make disciples of all nations

Notice that the Commission in Matthew 10 tells them to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. They are now to make disciples of all nations including the Gentiles. However, they were to follow a specific order. Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8 both say they are to begin in Jerusalem. Although many people spiritualize this to mean begin where you live, Jesus Christ specifically meant to begin by witnessing in Jerusalem, saving the leadership of Israel so that Israel could finally accomplish the task of reaching the world with the Gospel. Acts is more specific in that they are to continue spreading the Gospel of the Kingdom by going into Judea then Samaria then to the uttermost parts of the world, which would include the Gentiles. It would be done in this order because Israel's leaders needed to be saved so they could lead Israel to go out with the Gospel to the whole world. This model of evangelism is found in Revelation with the 144,000 witnesses. They will be preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and this Gospel will be spread throughout the whole world (Relation 7; Matthew 24:14).

Baptize them

This is consistent with what Jesus, John the Baptist and the Disciples preached (Matthew 3:2; 4:23; 9:35; 10:7—8). It is also constant with Peter's sermon in Acts 2:38. According to John 1:31 baptism was how John the Baptist declared Jesus to Israel. Baptism was required for salvation as shown by Luke 7:30. When the Pharisees and Lawyers did not get baptized Jesus declared that they were rejecting God's purpose for themselves. Remember, however, that they were saved by faith (as we are) but they were required to demonstrate that faith by being baptized. Those with a true faith would be baptized while those who rejected baptism revealed their lack of a true faith.

Today under the Mystery program, we in the Church, the Body of Christ are only required to experience one baptism, that of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:5) which we receive at our salvation. Water baptism was for Israel under the Gospel of the Kingdom. It went hand-in-hand with repentance, confession and physical healing.

If the members of the believing remnant of Israel are to become priests in the Millennial Kingdom as promised in Exodus 19:6 (also Isaiah 61:6), they will need to be inducted into the priesthood. As Aaron and his sons were baptized to become priests (Leviticus 8:6) so all of Israel will need to be baptized to fulfill their role as priests bringing the world to God during the Millennial Kingdom.

Teach them

Jesus specifically commanded them to go throughout the world and teach the same doctrine that He taught them. This would include following the Mosaic Law (Matthew 5:17), presenting gifts to the altar (Matthew 5:23—24), giving to them who ask of you (Matthew 5:42; Luke 6:30), Don't worry about tomorrow nor store up treasures (Matthew 6:19; 25—33) and sell all your possessions (Luke 12:33). Are these concepts being actively taught and obeyed today? When taught, they are usually modified to make them fit with today's church. Instead of selling all we are told to be willing to sell all. Instead of not storing up treasures we are told we should not become too desirous of earthly possessions. Jesus taught these things with the desire that the Disciples and Kingdom believers would obey them.

Our commission

The Apostle Paul tells us what our commission is in 2 Corinthians 5:20. This commission relates specifically to the Church, the Body of Christ and just as we cannot take the commission given to the Disciples for ourselves, they cannot operate under our commission. We are ambassadors bringing the message of reconciliation to the world. We do not act as the go-between between the world and God but we do have a message that will bring people into a direct relationship with Jesus Christ.

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