

ANALYZING THE COMMAND TO EVANGELIZE

Revision of 2014

INTRODUCTION:

A common doctrine that has arisen out of an interpretation of Mt 28:19-20 is that all Christians have been called upon by Jesus to fulfill what is called the Great Commission, to carry the message of the gospel (usually verbally or by "inviting them to church") to everyone on earth (or as many as can be reached in one's lifetime). This is stated rather strongly: God has this purpose for each Christian (some say the only purpose). Other passages have been used by different groups to support this view. It is the defining teaching of evangelicalism.

Gotquestions.org explains their interpretation as follows: *"The Great Commission is enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to be Christ's witnesses, fulfilling the Great Commission in our cities (Jerusalem), in our states and countries (Judea and Samaria), and anywhere else God sends us (to the ends of the earth)."*

The Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru.org) adds the following, *"If we take our Lord seriously, we must dedicate ourselves fully - time, talent and treasure - to the fulfillment of the Great Commission, not out of a sense of legalistic duty, but out of love and gratitude for what Christ has done for us. If we want to obey Him, He says, "Go," and that is sufficient reason for going. Mark 8:34-38 records our Lord's command to all who would be His disciples and, along with Mark 10:29,30 and John 14:21, promises rich rewards and great blessings to all who trust and obey Him."*

Part of their creed (statement of faith) reads as follows: *"The Lord Jesus Christ commanded all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to disciple men of every nation. The fulfillment of that Great Commission requires that all worldly and personal ambitions be subordinated to a total commitment to "Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.""*

The Guam Christian Church has this, *"Obedience – We recognize that Jesus commands us to obey the Great Commission by making Disciples, baptizing them AND teaching these Disciples to obey everything He has commanded."*

What is this Great Commission, to whom was it directed, and is it applicable today? The objective of this paper is to examine the relevant passages from a historical perspective, showing that the aforementioned viewpoint is incorrect.

I. Identity of the "Lost"

This expression is commonly used as though synonymous with "unsaved". We will perform an exegetical study of the pertinent Biblical passages in order to come up with a historical viewpoint as to the identity of the "lost".

- A. Ezek 34
- B. Lk 15
- C. Jn 10:1-18--Jesus as shepherd (fulfills Ezek 34:23ff).
- D. Other "lost"/"sheep" passages
 - 1. Mt 10
 - 2. Mt 15:21-28
 - 3. Lk 19:1-10
 - 4. Mt 18:1-17
 - 5. Jer 50:6
 - 6. Psa 119:176--"I have gone astray like a lost sheep."
 - 7. Isa 53:6--"All we like sheep have gone astray."
- E. Conclusions about the "lost" (or "lost sheep").

II. The Great Commission

- A. Luke 24:44-49 = Acts 1:4-8
- B. Matthew 28:16-20

III. The Great Commission Fulfilled: Pentecost

- A. Acts 2:5--All nations flock to Jerusalem. (remnant)
- B. v. 6-8--They heard and understood the message.
- C. v. 9-11--It was important enough to Luke to list nations.
- D. v. 17-36--Peter shows crowd that Jesus is Messiah.
- E. v. 37, 41--Responded to message & became Christians.
- F. Travelers would go back to their countries with the message.

IV. The Twelve From Pentecost to Paul

- A. Never mentioned as "the Twelve" in present narrative tense after Paul
- B. Acts 3-7--stayed in Jerusalem.
- C. Acts 8:1--under persecution: 12 stayed in Jerusalem.
- D. Acts 8:14-25--Peter & John go to see Samaritan (Jewish) converts.
- E. **No** gentile Christians until Acts 9!

V. Peter Told to Teach Gentiles (Acts 10-11)

- A. 10:3-6--Cornelius has vision to get Peter.
- B. 10:9-16--Peter gets 3 identical visions to go to Gentiles.
- C. 10:19-20--Peter told by a spirit to go to Cornelius.
- D. Peter took some Jews with him as witnesses. (10:23,10:45)
- E. 10:28--Peter only went to Gentiles since told to.
- F. 10:34-35--Peter came to realize that Gentiles okay.
- G. 10:36--Jesus brought the gospel to the Jews. I.e., Peter interprets Mt 28:19 as Jews only.
- H. 10:37-43--Peter preaches, using the Keys to the Kingdom once more.
- I. 10:44-46--Gentiles get gifts of Holy Spirit. Jews amazed.
- J. 10:47--Peter pleads with Jews to let him baptize gentiles.

- K. 11:1-16--Jews hear that Gentiles heard the message (v.1) and question Peter. Peter retells story.
- L. 11:17--"Who was I that I should be able to restrain God?"
- M. 11:18-21--Jews admit that gentiles can be saved.

VI. Referring Back to the Inclusion of Gentiles

- A. No one ever refers to Mt 28:19 as including gentiles.
- B. Acts 15:7-11-14
- C. Rom 1
- D. Gal 2

VII. Brief Notes about the Twelve

VIII. Conclusions about the Great Commission

IX. Other Writings Untwisted

- A. 2 Cor 5:18-20
- B. Phm 6
- C. The Fruit Passages.
- D. 2 Tim 2:2
- E. The "Jesus as an example" passages
- F. 1 Pet 2:21
- G. Phil 2:5
- H. 1 Jn 2:6
- I. Matt 11:12 and Lk 16:16
- J. The "building" passages

X. Conclusions

The Identity of the Lost

This expression is commonly used as though synonymous with "unsaved" or "non-Christian." In common usage, everyone who is not "saved" is "lost," and evangelicals claim that the Bible teaches that every Christian needs to save the lost. We will perform an exegetical study of the pertinent Biblical passages in order to come up with a historical viewpoint as to the identity of the "lost". Who are the lost, and what needs to be done about them?

Ezekiel 34 is the defining passage dealing with the lost. The usage of the term in the New Testament is certainly an extension of its use here.

And Yahweh's message came to me, saying, "Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and tell the shepherds the Lord Yahweh says this." "Shepherds of Israel, do shepherds feed themselves? Don't the shepherds feed the sheep? Look, you are feeding on the milk, and clothing yourselves with the wool, and slaying the fat – but you are not feeding not my sheep. You have not strengthened the weak one, and you have not given bodily help to the injured one, and you have not bandaged the bruised one, and you have not turned back

the wandering one, you have not sought the **lost** one; and the strong one you have overworked with labor.

“And my sheep were scattered, because there were no shepherds: and they became food for all the wild animals of the field. And my sheep were scattered on every mountain, and on every high hill. And they were scattered on the face of the land, and there was no one to seek them out or to bring them back.” For this reason, you shepherds listen to Yahweh’s message.

“I am alive,” the Lord Yahweh says. “If my sheep became prey, and if my sheep became food for all the wild animals of the field, it is because there were no shepherds, and the shepherds did not seek my sheep, and the shepherds fed themselves but did not feed my sheep.”

Against this, shepherds, Yahweh God says this: “Look, I am against the shepherds, and I will seek out my sheep from their hands, and I will turn them back so that they will not feed my sheep – the shepherds will no longer feed them. And I will release my sheep from their mouths, and they will no longer be food for them.

For Yahweh God says this: Look, I will seek out my sheep and will visit them. As the shepherd seeks his flock, in the day when there is darkness and cloud, in the midst of the sheep that are separated: so will I seek out my sheep and will bring them back from each place where they were scattered in the day of the cloud and darkness. And I will bring them out from the nations, and will gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land, and will feed them upon the mountains of Israel, and in the valleys, and in every inhabited place of the land. ... I will seek what is **lost**, and I will recover the stray, and will bandage the wounded, and will strengthen the weak, and will guard the strong, and will feed them with justice.”

During the Exile, when this passage was written, God wanted his people to know that the people were scattered into Exile “because there are no shepherds.” That is, there were no true leaders among the Israelite people. Among the Jewish people who had gone into exile was a group characterized as “lost.” These were the ones who had wandered from the teachings of the Torah not because they now hated God but because there was no one modeling its teachings to them. God’s sheep are the people of both kingdoms (Israel and Judah) who had been scattered into the Exile because there were no true leaders.

Ezekiel 34:24-31 was originally written about the Exile as well. Since the two kingdoms were going to be reunited after the Exile – so that there would no longer be a political distinction between them – God described the situation as being ruled by David again. David represents a united kingdom of Israel. The people would be allowed to return to their land, and they would no longer experience a political separation between the tribes.

This is indeed what happened. When Cyrus emerged and rose to power, he allowed the Israelite people to return to their ancestral homeland. Although they were no longer ruling their own country, politically, the tribes were united permanently. Now let’s see how the New

Testament authors use the imagery in Ezekiel about lost sheep to refer to people in their own time. **Luke 15** contains three parables, each about something “lost.” Let’s see from the context who the lost were:

15:1 *Now all the tribute takers and the sinners were drawing near to him to hear him. And both the Perushim and the scribes were grumbling, saying, "He is receiving sinners and is eating with them." But he told this analogy to them, saying:*

Earlier in Luke’s account there were three analogies that dealt with dinners or feasts. Here, Jesus tells three analogies that deal with losing and finding things. The first is told from the perspective of a man, the second from a woman's perspective, and the third – once again the most detailed – is directed toward everyone and addresses the conflict with the religious leaders most directly.

On this occasion, "sinners" – people who have left the teachings of the Torah (in the eyes of the leadership) – were flocking to see Jesus. These were the sorts of people who had been mentioned earlier as being socially unacceptable. Naturally, the Perushim (who were concerned with social matters) complained about Jesus' behavior.

It is in this context that Jesus told the three parables. There are two groups of people in play: the self-righteous religious leaders and the people who had been rejected by their religion but who were flocking to the Messiah. The parables are about those groups of people and focus on the latter.

The Lost Sheep

"What person from among you who has one hundred sheep and who loses one of them does not abandon the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And after finding it, he places it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And after coming into the house, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost!' I am telling you that in this way there will be rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who changes his mind, more than over ninety-nine just people who have no need of mental change.

By the time of Jesus, the Israelite people were expecting a single Anointed One, who would fulfill various roles that were in parallel to those found in the Hebrew Bible. One of the functions expected of the Anointed One was to seek out and retrieve "lost sheep" – the people who had wandered away from God's principles. Through the Messiah, God promised to "seek the lost, and ... bring back the strayed" (Ezek 34). Since he regarded the social outcasts as lost sheep, Jesus was fulfilling the role of shepherd.

The social outcasts were the focus of Jesus' work because God was already pleased with those who had embraced the Messianic message and who were not outcasts. They did not need the special attention that these "lost sheep" required. The Messiah, being a true shepherd, points out here that although the people were no longer physically in Exile, the ritual religion championed by the leadership had pushed people away in much the same way. Similarly, the religious leaders were behaving here like the leaders just before the Exile – the ones who were not really shepherds.

The Lost Coin

8 "Or what woman who has ten drachmas, if she loses one drachma, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek carefully until she finds it? And after finding it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found the drachma that was lost.' In this way, I am telling you, rejoicing happens in the presence of God's messengers over one sinner who changes his mind."

The message here is parallel to the first one. Once again, while God is already pleased with those who happily received his message, he is also ecstatic about the ones who had wandered away from the Torah and yet who came back to hear the message of Jesus. In this analogy, it is like the happiness over finding lost money.

The Lost Son

11 Now he said, "A certain person had two sons. And the younger of them said to the father, 'Father, give me the part of the property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them."

As the analogy begins, one son leaves the father's house and goes away. This son represents those "lost sheep" who had left God's teachings because they equated them with the religion of Priestly Judaism. Some of these probably left Judaism because the burden provided by the rabbinic instruction was more than they felt they could bear. The older son represents not just the religious leaders but all of those who had stayed behind and who had chosen to listen to the Messiah.

"And after not many days, gathering everything, the younger son traveled abroad into a distant country, and there he scattered his property about, living imprudently. Now after he spent it all, a strong famine happened in that country, and he began to lack food."

Jesus clearly implies that the "lost" who had left Priestly Judaism were actually searching for the truth. They had learned rather quickly that God provided them with nourishment but with the ritual religion of Priestly Judaism being the only option, they believed they had nowhere to go.

"And he went and joined up with one of the citizens of that country, and that one sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he strongly desired to be well fed by the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him any.

Since pigs were unclean animals, herding swine was viewed as socially unacceptable, just as these "lost" people were regarded as uncouth and "sinners." From Jesus' point of view, those people were not disgusting ne'er-do-wells; instead, they were ordinary people seeking for truth whose dignity had been removed, socially. In commenting on pigs, Jesus addresses his listeners for the first time – some of whom would have been disgusted by the son's behavior.

"But he came to himself and said, 'So many of my father's hirelings have an abundance of bread! But here I am, hungry and lost. I will get up and go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned before heaven and in your presence. I am not even worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hirelings.'"
And he rose up and went to his father.

Coming to one's self was their metaphor for our expression "coming to one's senses." The lost son realized that he needed his father. What this means in the reality of the situation is that those people who had been labeled as "sinners" by the religious leaders – the ones who thronged around Jesus – these people recognized that they needed God and that the Messiah provided genuine access to a relationship with God. In seeking Jesus' teachings, they were returning to their Father.

"Now while he was still at a distance, his father noticed him, and he felt compassion, and he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him passionately. But the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned before heaven and in your presence. I am not even worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the foremost robe and clothe him. And give him a ring for his hand and sandals for his feet. And bring the fatted calf, and sacrifice it, and let us eat and be glad, because my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and has been found.' And they began to be glad.

In the story, the father is so happy to see his son again that he throws a large feast. This parallels the statement in the coin analogy that God is overjoyed when those who have wandered away choose to return to him. If the analogy ended here, it would parallel the other two and say little more. Yet it continues:

"But his son, the older one, was in a field. And as he was coming near to the house, he heard a group of musical instruments and a group of singers, and he called one of the servant boys to him and inquired whatever these things might be. Now he said to him that, 'Your brother has come, and your father has sacrificed the fatted calf, because he has received him back healthy.'

In the analogy, the older brother wonders why there is such rejoicing and becomes jealous that his brother's return is being treated with such circumstance.

Some of those who had remained faithful to the Torah all their lives were questioning Jesus' motives in pursuing the lost. The account attributes the question to the Perushim, but the father's response to the older son's behavior indicates that the Perushim are not the intended target here. The "older son" is defined more broadly than just the religious leadership. What the Perushim were hoping to do by questioning Jesus at this time was to create a rift among Jesus' followers. Some were new converts from among the group of "lost sheep," while others had followed the Torah all along and had happily accepted Jesus as Messiah when he came.

"Now he was angry and did not want to enter. But his father exited and called him aside. Now he answered, saying to his father, 'Look: for so many years I have slaved for you, and I have never bypassed your precept. And you never gave me a goat, so that I would be glad with my friends. But when this son of yours came, the one who devoured your living with prostitutes, for HIM you sacrificed the fatted calf!'"

A goat would have been an animal to be slaughtered for a minor meal, perhaps a poor man's meal. The older son complains that he never once received a goat for a party, and yet the fatted calf was slaughtered for the younger son's return. To the faithful son this makes no sense. Why make such a big deal that an unfaithful son has returned home? Why not throw feasts on behalf of the faithfulness of the older son? Jesus has portrayed the jealousy of the older son (his faithful followers) as unwarranted. For those who might be receptive to the questions of the Perushim, Jesus does not allow them the prerogative to become jealous.

"Now he said to him, 'Child, you are always with me. And all things that are mine, are yours. But it is necessary to be glad and to rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is now alive. And he was lost, and has been found!'"

A faithful child of God will inherit the whole kingdom, and these who have been trustworthy have always been among God's greatness. This has not been the case with those who had known the greatness and had left it. They spent much of their time starving for truth -- starving for God's love.

Those who have always trusted God have no reason to be jealous because they have always had the security of knowing that they have had everything. They too should be as pleased as God is to know that their brothers and sisters have returned to join them in their happiness. For God's kingdom is not about what one can obtain for one's self but about love for others.

So, who were the lost? These were the Jewish people who had left God because the religion had pushed them away. In each parable, the lost always start out with God, but they wander off. Jesus portrays their becoming lost as though it were no fault of their own. They are sheep

without a shepherd. They are coins that were misplaced. They are children looking for truth – not having found any in their religion.

John 10 also takes up the role of the Messiah as the shepherd who seeks the lost sheep. The framework for the discussion is longer than that, and so we begin near the end of chapter nine.

*35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and, after finding him, said to him, "Do you trust in the Son of Man?" He answered, saying, "And who is he, sir, that I may trust in him?" Jesus said to him, "You have even seen him, and he is the one who is speaking with you. I came into this world for judgment, so that those who don't see may see and those who see may become blind."
Those Perushim who were with him heard these things and said to him, "And are we blind?"
Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you wouldn't have any sin. But now you say, 'We can see.' Your sin remains.*

Earlier in the narrative, Jesus had cured a man who had been born blind. By this time, Jesus had heard that the formerly-blind man had stood up for him in a legal proceeding. That beggar, then, was open to hearing the message and accepting Jesus for who he was. When Jesus met up with him, some members of the Perushim were still with him, perhaps escorting him home or rebuking him further.

Jesus' question presumed his own Messiahship. Did the man trust the Anointed One? The man's reply was one of slight misunderstanding, so that the reader should mark the question as an important one. "Who is he?" Jesus told him flatly, just as he had told the Samaritan woman, and Jesus gave him the final statement on spiritual sight and blindness: that there were people who simply lack the knowledge of God. Jesus came for those people, so that they would be able to receive the Messiah for whom they had waited. But there were also people who claimed to know God and who were "blind."

By this time, the leaders knew exactly what he meant: "are we blind?" He had implied that they could not know God. "If you were blind, you wouldn't have any sin." -- If you were merely ignorant, I would have given you the truth, and you'd be fine. "But now you say, 'We can see.' Your sin remains." -- They claimed to already know the truth. Therefore, they couldn't see the truth in the Messiah when he was right there with them. They would be judged by God for what they had done. This identification of the religious leaders as blind guide sets the stage for a discussion of shepherds and sheep.

10:1 "Indeed I assure you: the one who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate but goes up another way, he is a thief and a robber. But the one who enters through the gate is a shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out.

"When he has called out all of the sheep, he walks in front of them. And the sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will by no means follow a

stranger. On the contrary, they will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

6 This analogy Jesus said to them, but they didn't know what it was that he was saying to them. So Jesus said to them again, "Indeed I assure you that I am the 'shepherd of the sheep. All those who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't hear them.

The reading "door" in v. 7 is probably a mistake in reading. A scribe most likely borrowed the reading from v. 9. "Shepherd" is supported in v. 7 by various non-Greek manuscript traditions and the important manuscript p⁷⁵. It is the reading adopted by the NET.

The sheep represent the nation of Israel. There had been many false Messiahs, but Jesus was the true one. All those "who came before" Jesus had been impostors, and so God did not open the way to the sheep for them. The true sheep were Messianic Jews, and they would hear only the true Messiah's voice. This is a true analogy in terms of how sheep are able to recognize the voice of their shepherd. The passage borrows from the language of Ezekiel, applying the things there to the role of the Messiah.

As the people interpreted Ezekiel's prophecy, God was sending a shepherd (a successor to David, 34:24) to tend his flock, largely because the would-be shepherds have been eating the flock (34:1f.)! All of this happens in the context of the new covenant (37:25-8), brought by the Davidic king. In citing it with reference to himself, Jesus identified himself as the successor to David.

"I am the door. If anyone enters through me, he will be rescued and will come in and go out of the sheepfold and will find pasture.

"The thief doesn't come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I came so that you might have life [and abundance].

Jesus made a secondary identification of himself with the door to the sheepfold. As the door, he is the way into the fold of believers. No one listening could enter the sheepfold (representing the true Jews) except through the Messiah, but whoever accepted the Messiah's teachings would find "pasture" or "life and abundance." The "life" signifies eternal, spiritual, life; the "abundance" probably represents the fact that this life would be free of the guilt accompanying sin. Ritual religion was never the way to become a true member of God's flock.

The thieves were false Messiahs. Unlike those people who had come to further their own personal agendas – doing things that destroyed people, spiritually, Jesus had come to teach the teachings of life.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life on behalf of the sheep. Since he is not a shepherd and the sheep are not his own, when a hireling observes the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and flees. Then the wolf snatches and scatters them, because a hireling is only a hireling. He doesn't care about the sheep.

14 *"I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I am laying down my life on behalf of the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. It is necessary for me to lead them also. And they will hear my voice. And there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

Returning to the Davidic identification, Jesus identified himself ("I am") clearly as the Anointed One and shepherd (and the door, above). To be the shepherd and the Anointed One are one in the same. This time, however, Jesus added elements to the analogy of Ezekiel. Here, there are "hirelings." The good shepherd, the Messiah, is willing to die on behalf of his sheep -- something that Jesus would soon do. The hireling, whom some identify with the priests (those religious leaders who were sincere enough but whose status was chosen by lineage -- not because of their concern for Israel), would be unwilling to die for the sheep.

Jesus presented it then as necessary that the Messiah (shepherd) die for his flock. This tied the Davidic figure together with the "suffering servant" of Isaiah, although he did not mention Isaiah at the time. Instead, he continued to allude to Ezekiel. The Hellenists ("other sheep"), who were not Palestinian (mainstream) Jews, would be brought into the fold, so that (following Ezekiel) there would be only one flock, united under one Davidic shepherd (Ezek 37:24).

The original passage in Ezekiel referred to the twelve tribes, which had been divided into northern and southern kingdoms for centuries. In Jesus' time, the Jewish people were also divided. Not only were there "lost sheep" who had been pushed away by religion, but also there were people who were societal outcasts for other reasons. The Hellenists, who had adopted manners of Greek culture and who spoke Greek (at least primarily), were fringe elements of Judaism.

So, who were the lost sheep? These were Jewish people who had wandered away from God.

Other "Lost"/"Sheep" Passages

The above "longer" passages are not the only references to the lost sheep. In some shorter segments, Ezekiel is probably in focus, but in others Ezekiel 34 and 37 clearly are not in mind. Even so, the sheep always represent Israel, and becoming lost or wandering always refers to leaving God. Often this happens because of religious leaders.

The Original Great Commission (Matthew 10)

*Jesus sent out these twelve, charging them, saying, "You should not go out into a road of gentiles, and you should not enter into a city of Samaritans. But go instead to **the lost sheep of the house of Israel**. Now after you go, herald, saying that, "The kingdom of the heavens has neared." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out spirit beings. You have received freely; give freely."*

As we read in every other passage, the usage of the “lost” here is clearly limited in scope to those Israelite (Jewish) people who have wandered away because of the religion of Priestly Judaism. The scope of the commission to the Twelve was limited explicitly to those people. A word meaning “to send out” gives rise to the word commonly used of these people. They are αποστολοι; the word signifies envoys or emissaries – official representatives. It is clear from the beginning to whom they are emissaries: *...go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*”

These Jewish men, representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel, were sent to their own people – Jesus' people. These were the people to whom the Anointed One was sent. Their message is to be a simple one: *“The kingdom of the heavens has neared.”* The end is near. The crucifixion (scarcely mentioned yet), the resurrection (not yet mentioned), and the First Revolt with the destruction of the temple are all imminent events connected with this sending.

Some commentators attempt to extend this commission via the words in chapter 28, believing that somehow here the commission was limited only to the lifetime of Jesus. However, we read later on in this same passage that this is the first and only commission – so that the shorter version in Matthew 28 was simply a summary renewal of this one.

“But watch out for the people. They will deliver you over to Sanhedrins, and they will whip you in their gatherings. And you will be led to governors (but also kings) on account of me, as witnesses to them and to the nations. But when they deliver you up, do not be anxious about how or what you should speak, for what you should speak will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you that will speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaks within you.”

This warning about opposition has nothing to do with the lifetime of Jesus. The Twelve were not whipped in Jewish gatherings during his lifetime; neither were they handed over to the Sanhedrin. These things happened later, though. Here Jesus warns the Twelve that the opposition will become violent after he leaves them. They should say what God wants them to say, and shouldn't worry about what the opposition will do.

“Then brother will deliver up brother for death, and father will deliver up child. And children will rise up at their parents, and they will cause them to die. And you will stand as hated by all people on account of my name, but the one who endures to the end, this one will be saved.”

This is a prediction of the First Revolt. As the troubles escalate, the violence by Jews against Jesus' students will increase. The gentiles, too, would hate them, he says, looking ahead to Nero and Vespasian and their persecutions. Once again, the narrative points out that these things were intended as warnings for the Twelve for the time period after Jesus ascended. The commission to go only to Jewish people was their lifetime one.

"Now when they persecute you in this city, flee into the other. For indeed I am telling you: you should by no means complete the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

This refers to the judgment when the temple was destroyed in AD 70. The final warning is not a literal one. They would not be fleeing from city to city until the Revolt. In fact, other wording indicates that they were supposed to complete their mission. So what does this passage mean? These sentences address the imminence of the conclusion of their mission to the Jewish people, and of the destruction of the temple. They would barely have the time to complete their mission; that's how soon the end was going to come.

The Gentile Woman (Matthew 15)

21 And after exiting from there, Jesus withdrew into the parts of Ture and Sidon. And look, a Canaanite woman came out from those areas and called out to him, saying, "Have mercy on me, sir, son of David! For my daughter is being badly affected by a spirit being!" Now he did not answer her a word. And his students went to him and begged him, saying, "Make her go away, because she is calling out after us."

*Now he answered, saying, "**I was only sent out to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" But she came and bowed down to him, saying, "Sir, help me." But he answered, saying, "It is not a nice thing to take the children's bread and to throw it to the dogs." But she said, "Yes, sir. For even the dogs dine on the crumbs that fall from their lord's table." Then Jesus answered, saying to her, "O woman, your trust is great. Let it happen for you as you want." And her daughter was healed from that hour.*

This passage actually displays full force the strictly Jewish nature of Jesus' mission as the Anointed One. While his abolition of legalism would eventually benefit gentiles, he was sent to the Jewish nation only.

A Canaanite (gentile) woman asked for Jesus to heal her daughter, who was affected by spirits. He refuses even to answer. It would have been inappropriate for a rabbi to address such a woman. His students took a harsher view, that Jesus should get rid of her.

He responds by indicating the scope of his mission as the Messiah. She knew that his mission was limited to the Jews, but she asked him for help anyway. At this point, he was certainly testing her trust in the Jews' God.

Again in this passage, the expression "lost" was used consistently of those Jewish people who had wandered away from God because of the ritual religion.

Zacchai the Tribute-Taker (Luke 19:1-10)

19:1 And after entering, he was going through Jericho. And look, there was a man whose name was called Zacchai, and he was a chief tribute taker, and he was wealthy. And he sought to see who Jesus was, and was unable because of the crowd, because his stature was small. And he ran in front and climbed up a sycamore tree, so that he might see him, because he was about to come by.

The account of Zacchai the tribute taker is most interesting. First of all, he was wealthy. We have recently read (in Luke's account) how difficult it is for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom, and yet this man was wealthy. He was also a tribute taker, and a wealthy tribute taker was presumed to be corrupt. Socially, the man was most likely unacceptable to those who believed that Zacchai made his living by demanding unreasonable sums from his fellow Jews in order to split the profits with the Roman government.

And as he came to the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchai, hurry. Climb down, for today it is necessary for me to stay in your house." And he hurried and climbed down, and he received Jesus rejoicing.

Jesus called Zacchai by name when it is clear from the context that they had never met. Therefore, either God told Jesus who this wealthy man was who had humbled himself to the point of climbing a tree, or more mundanely, someone in the crowd mentioned to Jesus that the man in the tree was a tribute taker named Zacchai. It is also a third possibility that Zacchai was well-known. One way or another, he was overjoyed at the fact that Jesus wanted to remain with him that evening. Given his social standing, how would this play out?

And when they noticed, they all griped, saying, "He went to lodge with a man who is a sinner." But Zacchai stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, I give half of my possessions to the poor, Lord. And if I have extorted from anyone, I give back fourfold." Now Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has happened to this house, because he is also a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what had been lost."

For the social reasons mentioned previously, the people were outraged that Jesus would choose to stay with a man whom they regarded as sinful. Yet to Jesus, Zacchai was one of those "lost sheep" who had wandered away from Judaism and whom Jesus was going to call back. The discussion reveals that Zacchai was not as people perceived him but was an honest tribute taker.

Salvation came to Zacchai's house *since he was Jewish*.

Jesus' mission as the Messiah ("son of man") to the Jewish people ("sons of Abraham") included these lost sheep. Certainly, the application of Ezekiel mentions "seeking the lost" as only one role of the Messiah, but in accepting this tribute taker as one of his own students, Jesus was fulfilling a Messianic role.

Matthew 18:12–17 contains the Matthean account of the Parable of the Lost Sheep. Unlike Luke, which follows that parable with two others, Matthew's version contains an application:

Now if your brother should sin [against you], go up and reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained back your brother. But if he doesn't hear, take him aside with you and one or two others besides, so that "at the mouth of two or three witnesses every declaration would stand." But if he should disregard them, tell the assembly. But if he should disregard the assembly also, he will be to you just like the gentile and the tribute taker.

"Your brother," here, means the listener's fellow Israelite, and Jesus' application is about regaining your brother or sister Jew after something has gone wrong in a personal relationship. It's about helping those who were in danger of becoming "lost." The worst possible result here is that the brother makes a deliberate choice to leave – becoming like a gentile.

Jeremiah 50:6

"My people have become lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray."

Psalms 119:176

"I have gone astray like a lost sheep."

Isaiah 53:6

"We have all gone astray like sheep, each person going astray to his own way."

In the context, Isaiah 53 is about Israel.

Conclusions about the Lost (Sheep)

Whenever the expression indicates unfaithful people, it is always applied to those who were part of Judaism and left God. These were the "sinners" with whom Jesus met and ate. If we now view Jesus as working primarily as the Messiah, we do not run into the problem of ascribing Jesus' so-called mission to ourselves. Almost all of the things that Jesus did were part of His special role(s) as Messiah, role(s) that only he was capable of performing. Only he could save the lost.

The Great Commission

There are three accounts of Jesus' renewal of his sending of the Twelve in the undisputed canon. We begin with Luke 24:45ff. and Acts 1:4-8, which supplement one another and which were written by the same author.

Now he said to them, "These are my sayings that I spoke to you while I was still with you: that it is necessary for all the things that are written in Moses' Torah and in the Prophets and in the Psalms about me to be fulfilled."

Following John's chronology, Luke relates Jesus giving an explanation of his mission that same evening. Possibly because Thomas was not with them (Jn 20:24), Jesus repeated these things later in Galilaiah, just as he had told them he would go ahead of them into Galilaiah. He also summarized the whole matter forty days later at the Mountain of Olive Trees. Luke will collapse these events.

At this time, Jesus explained to everyone gathered what he had told Kleopas and his fellow-traveler: that it was necessary for the Messiah to go through all of the things that Jesus went through. Jesus separated the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms as he said these things because the third section of the Hebrew Bible -- the Writings -- had yet to be accepted with the same regard as the Torah and Prophets. Also, technically speaking, the Writings were still an "open" collection.

Then he opened their minds to understand the writings, and he said to them, "Thus it was written for the Anointed One to suffer and to be resurrected from among the dead on the third day, and for mental change to the point of forgiveness of sins to be heralded in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And look, I am sending my Father's promise upon you, but you are to remain connected with the city until you are empowered with power from on high."

At this point in time, Luke's account jumps ahead several days; we see this by comparing his account to the others'. Now we are outside Jerusalem at the Mountain of Olive Trees (Ac 1:12), and about 40 days have passed (Ac 1:3). Here, Jesus made his final restatement of the Great Commission. What do we see here?

First, Jesus opened their minds to understand all of the sayings that had been applied to the Messiah. Secondly, he explained that the Anointed One (the Messiah sent by God to the Israelites) was supposed to suffer. Furthermore, the Eleven were directed to be the Messiah's official representatives (heralds) to Jewish people of all nations. Their work was to begin at Jerusalem, to which they were instructed to return (also Ac 1:4, 12). The role of the Twelve as a unit was to be legal witnesses of everything that they had seen and heard; they were going to testify to the fact that Jesus was the Messiah. The gentiles were not looking for a Messiah. The context here is still exclusively Jewish.

Finally, Jesus instructed the Twelve to wait for the power from God. This is reiterated with more detail in Acts 1.

And he gathered them together and charged them "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise, which you heard from me, that 'John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized in holy breath' after not many of these days."

We see right away that Luke is reprising the final scene in his account of Jesus' life, providing further details. The Twelve (as a unit) were charged not to leave Jerusalem until they received "the Father's promise." Luke explicitly mentions that this promise is the holy breath ... God would empower them with what have come to be known as the "spiritual gifts." The Twelve need to wait until this happens. Jesus' quote about being baptized in holy breath had been spoken earlier, but here, when the author reprises it, he adds that the so-called baptism would take place in "not many...days." This quotation regarding the baptism is important; it foreshadows what will happen in chapter 2. The expression is only connected with **two** events, which are parallel -- the event in Acts 2 and the event that occurred in Acts 10 at the home of Cornelius.

So, after they came together, they indeed asked him, saying, "Lord, will you restore the kingdom to Israel at that time?"

The Twelve recognized that the Anointed One ("Messiah") was supposed to restore the kingdom to Israel. There are several OT passages that had come to be interpreted as predicting this restoration. Since Jesus had just mentioned an event that the Twelve were to wait for, Luke presents this as a logical follow-up question. Will this be the time when the kingdom is restored? Will this be the time when the Messianic prophecy is fulfilled?

The Twelve were supposed to wait for power, the holy breath, and then they were to take the message to Jewish people of all nations.

Now, he said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has placed in his own authority. However, you will receive power when the holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and as far as the farthest part of the land."

Most commentators focus on the first sentence. But the "however" which follows should be taken together with that first sentence. Jesus scolded the Twelve for asking about God's timing of events, but then he answered their question. The answer to their question, as we will see later, is "YES". Yes, the kingdom is about to be returned to Israel, but as the Twelve would find out, this would not happen *physically*, as most Jews were expecting.

Further informing them about what is to come, he tells the Twelve that the holy Spirit -- God acting in revelation to humanity -- will come upon them, and they will receive power (called "holy breath" and always connected with revelation). Then what?

Then they were going to be Jesus' witnesses. The Twelve, who had been with Jesus since the beginning, would testify in a legal (Jewish) setting to all the things that they had personally seen

and heard regarding Jesus. They would provide legal proof that Jesus was the Anointed One. These men would be witnesses not only to Jerusalemites, but to people who lived in every place where Judaism had a foothold.

As Luke 24 indicates, the Twelve would be heralding the covenant in the name of the Jewish Messiah. Because this scene is the first new one in the book, some commentators allege that this is the author's theme -- the spread of the message throughout the land. However, as the written work unfolds, occasionally we reach locations where the message had been established previously (19:1f.), and there are certain important locations (e.g., Rome) where the spread of the message to that city has been ignored by Lukas completely. This is not the theme for the book but the device of foreshadowing. Lukas is in the process of preparing the reader for the event that begins chapter two. The use of Jerusalem...Judea...Samaria...everywhere in the land selects all of the centers of Judaism (both mainstream and unorthodox), following the list by a catch all. Wherever there are Jews, there the message will soon be (after not many days).

Notice the context: Jesus had gathered "them" (the Twelve) together. After "they" (the Twelve) came together, they (the Twelve) asked him about restoring the kingdom. He told them (the Twelve), "It is not for YOU to know...however, YOU will receive power...and YOU will be my witnesses. The entire context is limited to the Twelve as a unit.

The locations that Jesus named in his renewal of the commission represent the center of mainstream Judaism and centers of Hellenistic Judaism. No primarily Gentile regions are named, because he had sent them only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The expression "to the farthest point of the land" need not mean "the ends of the earth", but was used to express any remote place. Most frequently, "the land" signifies Palestine.

Now let's see how Matthew's account meshes with Luke's version:

16 Now the Eleven students went into Galilaiah to the mountain where Jesus had put them in order. And when they noticed him, they bowed down to him, but they hesitated. And Jesus went to them, speaking to them, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make students of all the nations, baptizing them into [my] name, teaching them to keep all of whatever precepts I gave you. And look, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age."

According to Luke, the renewing of Jesus' commission to the Twelve took place at the Mountain of Olive Trees: *"Then they returned into Jerusalem from that mountain called the Mountain of Olive Trees, a sabbath's journey distant" (Acts 1:12)*

Both Mark's version and Matthew's account indicate that they were on the mountain when they received the renewal of their commission. This was where they had been sent out originally, and it was logical for Jesus to renew their sending at that place.

When Jesus appeared, he gave them a reminder of their own "mission." In Matthew, Jesus recapped several things: he reminded them that he was the Messiah with authority from God; he recalled the fact that Priestly Judaism was about to end; and he mentioned the sending of the Twelve (from Mt 10) to Jews everywhere -- that they would speak in the name of the Messiah, starting at Jerusalem.

Matthew records this conclusion as follows:

"All authority in heaven on earth has been given to me."

This is a summary statement that Jesus was God's Anointed One.

"Therefore, go and make students of all the nations, baptizing them into [my] name, teaching them to keep all of whatever precepts I gave you."

As in Luke, this is a reminder of Jesus' instructions to the Twelve. They should continue doing as he had instructed them (Mt 10), teaching Jews everywhere that Jesus was Messiah and about his key precepts (found in the Sermon on the Mount and summarized and detailed in Mt 21-25).

"And look, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age."

As in Luke, this is a summary reminder that the end of the age -- and with it, the destruction of Jerusalem -- was coming very soon. Having said these things, the final focus for the reader is on events to come. For the Twelve, they were about to spread the message; for the reader, there was one last reminder of the coming destruction of the temple.

The Great Commission Fulfilled: Pentecost

The events at the beginning of Acts are staged in a deliberate order that leads up to Pentecost in chapter two. First, Luke reprises the end of his account of Jesus' time on earth. The additional details that he supplies at this time are those that are necessary in order to follow the literary narrative through to chapter two.

The remaining Eleven had asked about the Restoration of the Kingdom. Jesus informed them that this was about to happen in "not many" days, and instructed them to wait in the city until it did happen. They would know that the kingdom was being restored because they would receive a "baptism" in holy breath.

After this event, Luke records how the Eleven recognized it as necessary to restore the number to Twelve prior to the important event that was about to happen. He names the Eleven, just all three synoptic authors did when the Twelve were sent out from the Mountain of Olive Trees the first time. Peter, whose mind had been opened to understand the writings about the Messiah, explains how important it was to replace Judah; after this, he provides the necessary criteria that an envoy must fulfill:

"Therefore, it is necessary that those men who have associated with us during all the time in which the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, starting from John's baptism until the day on which he was taken from us--one of these is to become a witness of his resurrection with us."

It was necessary for an envoy ("apostle") to have been sent by Jesus as a herald. But to be a member of the Twelve more was required:

- The person had to have associated with Jesus ever since his baptism.
- The person had to have been a witness of (and sent out by) the resurrected Jesus.

Indeed they selected a suitable replacement, attributing the final choice to God. The stage is set for the important event.

2:1 And on the full day of Pentecost, they were all one at the same place. And suddenly a sound from the sky happened, like that of a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And they observed with them forked tongues, like fire, that sat on each one of them. And they were all filled with holy breath, and they began to speak in other tongues, saying what the Spirit gave them to say.

The full day of Pentecost was the 50th day after Passover. Strictly speaking, the Jewish people were gathered for the Feast of (Seven) Weeks, which began 49 days -- 7 weeks -- after the earlier feast. The first full day, the 50th -- remember: the "day" starts at sunset -- was called "Pentecost" by the Greek-speaking Jews. Luke clearly identifies the day as a Jewish feast day.

Next, he indicates that the envoys were still all together "in one place"-- possibly the same building where they had met in chapter one, although we are not told this. A visible sign was provided over each of them. It wasn't fire, but it LOOKED LIKE fire. This, in essence, was their anointing--coupled with a sign to them that the things he had told them about ten days earlier (Acts 1) were happening. "Wait until you receive power (Lk 24)." Notice also that the author doesn't say there was wind ... he said it SOUNDED like there was a rushing wind. The miracle was virtually indescribable.

At this point, the Twelve -- whose number had just been restored -- were filled with holy breath. This expression signifies that they received miraculous powers of some sort. The reader will soon see of what nature these powers were. More specifically, though, they were empowered with prophetic utterance. The "holy Spirit" is God in revelation to humanity. God was about to speak through the Twelve.

Now, there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, pious men from every nation under heaven. Now when this sound happened, the crowd came together and were confused because each one heard their speech in his own language. Now they were astonished, and they wondered, saying, "Look, aren't all of these ones who are speaking Galilaians? And how is each one of us hearing in our own language

in which we were born? Parthians and Medes, and Elamites, and those who dwell in Mesopotamia, Judea, and also Kappodokia, Pontus and Asia, Frugia and also Pamphulia, Egypt, and the parts of Lybia near Kurene, and the Roman strangers-- Jews and also proselytes, Cretans and Arabians. We hear them speaking in our own languages the great things of God."

Jesus had earlier told the Twelve to wait in Jerusalem until empowered and to speak in the name of the Messiah to all nations. Luke sets up the reader so that he recognizes that this event fulfills the renewed commission (Lk 24:45-7; Mt 28:19; Mt 10:1f.) to the Twelve. First, the reader is taken somewhere else, possibly just outside the building. Everyone was **able to hear** what **sounded like** a rushing wind, and they headed toward this sound to see what it was. If Josephus' estimates for the year 65 are even close to the numbers for this year, there might have been as many as one MILLION people gathered for the feast!

Luke points out that these are pious men. These are not the unlawful. These are the **Jews** who have been honestly seeking God, to the point at least where many had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on foot (and possibly by ship) to participate in the feasts. These men had devoted their lives to God. Since this event fulfills the commission to the Twelve, Luke is also careful enough to point out where the men are from, naming various nations -- which comprise the region of Palestine plus all areas of the zodiac (i.e., people from all directions). He specifically writes that these men were "**from every nation under heaven.**" Summarizing: the Twelve were reminded to take the message to Jews of all nations, then their number was restored, then the sign happened that they had been awaiting, and now they would fulfill that commission.

Next, Luke points out one of the miracles -- a miracle of hearing. Whatever the Twelve were saying and however they were saying it, these devout men **heard** those things as though the men were speaking in their native languages! One first century Jewish source wrote about the "prophetic utterances." Such a miracle would not have been out of their understanding. Normally, the prophet would be carried away "in ecstasy," speaking praises to God -- but the faithful could **understand**. Here, the faithful Jews of all nations DO hear, and they DO understand. But they don't know what it means. The author is pointing out in detail that the message in its original form is being carried to Jews everywhere.

As some people were not open to the message, they heard gibberish and thought that the Twelve were drunk. This was enough to prompt Peter to take direct action.

14 *Now Peter, standing up with the Eleven, raised his voice and spoke clearly to them:*

"Men, Judeans and all those who are staying in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and heed my declarations.

"For these are not drunk as you are assuming, for it is the third hour of the day! On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel,"

It was Peter, the one to whom the "keys to the kingdom" had been given, who would speak first among the Twelve, attempting to explain WHY the Twelve appeared to be babbling. After all, it was 9AM -- too early to begin drinking. Having full understanding of the Messianic passages and possibly thinking about Jesus' answer (Acts 1) to their questions ten days earlier, Peter applies a passage in Joel to the event. Joel had said that these things would happen after the coming of the Messiah! What things?

""And it will be in the last days," says God, "I will pour out from my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young will see visions, and your elderly will dream dreams.

""And indeed on my male slaves and on my female slaves I will pour out from my spirit in those days," and they will prophesy.

""And I will give wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and majestic day of Yahweh comes. And it shall be that each one who may call on the name of Yahweh will be saved."

This was a quote from Joel chapter two -- a passage about the Restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. When the kingdom had been restored in Joel's time, there had been signs. The modern application to the Anointed One followed this one here, and God would send people proof of what he was accomplishing. God would pour out miracles for people everywhere. Both men and women would prophesy, and there would be signs. Peter does not continue the citation, but all the Jews present would have been familiar with the passage -- and what came next:

*"For look, in those days and at that time, **when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem**, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered among the nations, and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy to be a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine, and have drunk it....Proclaim this among the nations: prepare war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears." (Joel 3:1-3; 9-10)*

The passage (lasting the rest of the book) is long. It is a prophecy about the "restoration of the kingdom." This restoration was supposed to be accomplished (again) by the Messiah. Traditionally, a period of dominance would follow, with Israel ruling the other nations, and the Messiah as their leader. Peter says, "**This is happening now.**" The signs they were seeing showed that the reapplication of Joel was happening. This was the restoration of the kingdom-- and a time would follow where the Jewish people would dominate. There was now be a new, free, covenant, but only Jews could enter...until Acts 10.

Peter and Joel also indicate that the signs would be present "until the great and majestic day of Yahweh." The destruction of Jerusalem and end of Priestly Judaism was coming, and the period mentioned in the prophecy would soon pass, but the signs would be here for the time being.

"Men, Israelites, listen to these words. Jesus the Nazarene was a man who was pointed out to you as being from God through powerful deeds, and wonders, and signs, which God did through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know."

Peter appeals first to public knowledge. Folks, the Joel prophecy is coming to pass now because the Messiah was just here. He did all these signs, which you heard about. Jesus **was** the Messiah. Peter would now set out to prove this point.

"After this one was given up according to the fixed plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed and killed him through the hands of lawless ones. God raised him up, after loosing the pains of death, just as he could not be held under it. For David says for him,"

Yes, it's true that Jesus died, but this was all part of God's plan. So, when you people (speaking of Peter's whole race collectively) killed him, it was part of God's plan, and so was his resurrection. Peter has proof of this, too.

""I always saw Yahweh in my presence. Because he is at my right hand, I may not be shaken. On account of this, my heart was gladdened, and my tongue rejoiced; and furthermore, my flesh will also relax in hope -- because you will not abandon my soul into Hades, nor will you allow your godly one to see decay.

""You made the ways of life known to me. You will fill me with joy with your face."

Peter quotes another passage that everyone applied to the Messiah. David, speaking as Messiah, indicates that God would not allow the Messiah to decay (Psa 15:8-11). Jewish tradition held that a body decayed after 4 days in the grave. Thus, Lazarus (John 11) had begun to decay at day 4, but Jesus had risen from the dead before his body "saw decay" in the Jewish sense. In citing this passage, Peter was demonstrating Jesus' identity as the Anointed One.

"Men, brothers, it is lawful to speak freely to you about our ancestor David: that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is among us until this day.

But just in case someone might have said, "David was talking about himself," Peter pointed out that David had physically died. Not only did his body decay, it's still in the tomb right now...decaying! So David clearly was talking about the Messiah and not merely about himself.

"So, since he was a prophet, and since he knew that God had sworn an oath to him that God would cause someone from the fruit of his loins to sit on his throne, he spoke with foresight about the resurrection of the Anointed One, that he was not abandoned into Hades, nor did his flesh see decay. This Jesus God raised up; of this we are all witnesses."

David promised that someone -- his descendant, the Messiah -- would not be in the grave 4 days to see decay. He "spoke with foresight about the resurrection of the Anointed One." Then Peter and the Twelve stood up together and provided testimony that JESUS -- the one they'd already heard about -- had fulfilled this strongest of Messianic prophecies. God had raised him from the dead.

Important to our discussion of the Great Commission is the fact that Peter identified the Twelve as **witnesses** of Jesus' resurrection -- exactly as Jesus had indicated that when the restoration of the kingdom would happen, they would be his witnesses and would take the message about the Messiah to Jews of all nations.

"Then when he was exalted to the right hand of God and received the promise of the holy Spirit from the Father, he poured out this, which you see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself said, 'Yahweh said to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies as a footstool for your feet.' Therefore, let all of the house of Israel know for sure that God made him both Lord and Anointed One--this Jesus whom you have crucified."

Now, Peter's explanation rolls to a close. He has been explaining the **promise** made through Joel -- the promised holy breath from God. After Jesus resurrected, the time was right for the PROMISE to be "poured out" -- just as Joel predicted. Therefore, states Peter, "what you see and hear" is additional proof -- additional to the testimony of 12 witnesses -- that Jesus was the Lord of whom David spoke (the kingly figure, and see Psa 110:1) and the Anointed One. He was the one they'd been waiting for, and they (Israel) had killed him! Once again, Peter was not taking the message to gentiles, but he announces instead to "all of the household of Israel."

The Twelve were announcing God in public. They were Jesus' witnesses to Jews of all nations. The people heard the message. Those who were open to it understood the message. The next segment indicates that they accepted the message and realized that Jesus had been the Anointed One whom the Jewish people had been seeking. At this point the Great Commission was fulfilled, but Peter also noted:

...you will receive the gift of the holy breath, for to you is the promise--and to your children, and to all those who are far away--as many as Yahweh our God may call."

The PROMISE -- Joel's promise -- would apply to all who entered Jesus' covenant; well, to all those Jews who were listening, and their descendants ... all the way up until the "great and notable day;" that is, until the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The miracles would be available to as many as God would call during that time.

And with many other words he testified and advised them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

"This perverse generation" was the generation which would have their temple and way of worship destroyed. The listeners should no longer identify themselves with "this generation."

The expression had been used by Jesus frequently (and is especially prominent in Matthew's account). There is little doubt that Peter was borrowing the language of his teacher.

After a stay in Jerusalem, most of the travelers would return to the countries from which they originated, and the message would literally go everywhere.

The Twelve from Pentecost to Paul

After the spread of the message to all nations in Acts 2, the Twelve are only mentioned once more in a present narrative sense. This occurs in Acts 6, when the poor were being neglected. After the advent of Paul, the Twelve were never mentioned in a present narrative. Neither do any of the letters mention the activities of "the Twelve" as a collective unit.

In fact, in Acts 3 – 7, the Twelve remained in Jerusalem. Far from applying Matthew 28 as a command for them to physically go to all nations, they stayed right where they were. They correctly understood that they had sent the message out to Jews of all nations. Even at Acts 8:1, when Jesus' followers were being persecuted, the Twelve ***stayed in Jerusalem***. If any event could have been viewed as a time to get up and go, it would have been that persecution. However, they knew that their mission had been fulfilled.

Indeed, there were no gentile converts until after Paul. The followers of Jesus still attended synagogues and met in the temple courts. Acts 8 bridges the gap between Palestinian Jews and Paul. In it, the message explicitly reaches "fringe" Jews. Many Samaritans had heard the message – likely because of the people who had gone back to their own countries. They did not hear it through the envoys directly; the narrative says so. A eunuch was also a fringe Jew, since eunuchs were forbidden from even entering the tent of meeting (Deut 23:1), but Isaiah 56 (not cited in Acts) appears to indicate that in reality God himself had no problem with eunuchs. Who brought the message to the eunuch? Philip – not one of the Twelve.

Peter Told to Teach to Gentiles

When God wanted the envoys of Jesus to bring the message of freedom to gentiles, he made sure that they understood the change. In Acts 10, God first sent a divine messenger to the gentile, Cornelius, telling him to get Peter.

Now he said to him, "All of your prayers and your charitable works have gone as a memorial before God. And now, send some men into Yoppa to find a certain Simon, who is surnamed Peter.

The passage introduces this gentile with strong language to indicate how devoted to Yahweh he was...even though he was a gentile. In order to assure that Peter understood that he was being told to do something new and different, God sent three separate (and identical) visions to Peter, declaring that it would be "clean" for Peter to speak to a gentile. Immediately after

Peter received the third vision, Cornelius' messenger arrived – making it clear to Peter that he must speak to Cornelius. If that wasn't enough, God spoke personally to Peter, telling him to do exactly that:

Now as Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, three men are seeking you. But you get up, go down, and go with them. Doubt nothing, because I have sent them."

Being a pious Jew, Peter took some of his countrymen with him as witnesses (10:23, 45). When he arrived there, he made sure everyone knew that he was only speaking to gentiles since he was told to do so. This was not a man who had ever been sent to gentiles before; Peter had been given the message for Jewish people alone.

Now Peter opened his mouth and said, "I perceive in truth that God is not a respecter of persons. But in every nation whoever fears him and works what is right is acceptable to him."

At Pentecost, Peter did not speak until he was compelled to do so. This time, he has been sent by God. This first statement, Peter's bold perception of equality, is a turning point in the Acts, for it is with this proclamation that Peter opens the covenant to the first gentiles. How simply Peter said, "Whoever fears God and does right is acceptable." Now, Peter no longer was posturing himself socially. Now, he was "off the fence." His witnesses were about to hear Peter at his best!

"The message that he sent to the sons of Israel announced the good message of peace through Anointed Jesus. This is the Lord of all things. You know that declaration that happened throughout all Judea, beginning at Galilaiah, after the baptism that John was heralding: how God anointed that Jesus from Nazareth with holy breath and power, who went about doing good deeds and healing all those who were oppressed by the Accuser, because God was with him."

Until this time, God's message, "the good message of peace," had been sent only to "the sons of Israel." But the Messiah is everyone's Lord -- Peter now knew this.

Peter reminded the listeners in generalities about Jesus. These are things that it is possible they already knew. Peter used their existing knowledge about John the Baptizer and Jesus as springboard for the things he must tell them. Therefore, he added comments like "God anointed Jesus." Peter was testifying that what they had heard about Jesus was factual. "God was with him" -- this too is Peter's testimony. Luke is careful to point out the content of Peter's talk because it is our author's theme that the message has not changed. What Peter told Cornelius is precisely what he has been telling his Jewish countrymen.

After God takes action to compel Peter to bring these gentiles into the new covenant, Peter pleads with his fellow Jews to let him baptize some gentiles – something that clearly had never been done before. In chapter eleven, Peter's countrymen call him on the carpet for having done what he did. He defends himself, saying, "Who was I to be able to restrain God?" (11:17) After this, the Jewish people agree that gentiles can be part of their (Christian) group: "Now

when they heard these things, they were quiet, and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also given to the gentiles the change of mind that leads into life!"

This astonishment makes sense. Peter and the Twelve had been sent out to Jews in the name of their Messiah. Why would gentiles be involved at all? Even after this point in time, though, Peter did not regard himself or the others as having been sent to gentiles in general. Their mission was to the Jewish people.

Referring Back to the Inclusion of Gentiles

Throughout the remainder of the New Testament, no author ever refers to Matthew 28:19 as including gentiles. Even in Acts, when they discuss the gentiles being admitted into the covenant, they make no reference to the Great Commission since it was for Jews alone. Specifically, we read:

Now the envoys and the elderly got together to look into this matter. Now since there was much debate, Peter got up and said to them, "Men, brothers: you are familiar that from days past God chose from among you, that through my mouth the gentiles would hear the account of the good message and would trust. And God, who knows hearts, testified to them, giving them the holy Spirit just as he gave to us. And he judged no differently between us and them also, having cleansed their hearts through trust."

Both the envoys and the elderly, who were respected by all the Jews present, were included in the process of examining the issue of what to do with the gentiles who were now converts. At this point, neither Paulus nor Bar-Nabas is recorded as having spoken up. They were controversial figures, and so they took a passive role. Whatever points they may have made were not important to the solution of the problem; it was Peter who spoke first. Instead of addressing Matthew 28, Peter pointed out the revelation that he had received from God to take the message to gentiles. This (Acts 10) was the first anyone had ever heard of a "gentile mission," and so it made sense for the person who had received that revelation to be the first to make an address on the topic.

Peter justly points out two things:

God had granted revelation (and the accompanying miraculous signs) to gentiles, "just as he gave to us." Peter is equating the Jewish and gentile experiences. God "judged no differently between us and them." This restates Peter's point (at 10:34-5) that God shows no partiality. The gentiles' hearts were clean, just as God purifies Jewish hearts. After this, they would also hear from another respected Jewish (Christian) leader about the time when gentiles were first considered acceptable:

Now after they were silent, Jacob answered, saying, "Men, brothers: hear me. Simeon told how God first visited to take from the nations a people for his name. And the words of the prophets harmonize with this, as it is written, "'After these things, I will return and will construct again David's tent which has fallen down. And I will construct its ruins again, and I will set it up, so that the rest of humanity may seek out Yahweh--even all the nations on whom my name has been called,' says Yahweh, who is doing these things," which were known from the age.'" (Acts 15)

It was Jacob, perhaps the most respected Christian in Jerusalem, Jesus' own (half) brother, who addressed the group next. His testimony, while hearsay, would have been accepted by those who respected Jacob. He confirmed Peter's story, referring to him by his Jewish name of "Simeon." Jacob's confirmation comes not only from his own opinion that Peter had been truthful but also from an application of the Prophets. Amos 9:11-12 was referring to the restoration of the kingdom -- which was fulfilled in Acts 2. Since Jacob was living in the time of fulfillment of the "restoration" passages, the application of Amos was not surprising; everyone present would have accepted it. Jacob cites the portion [agreeing with the Septuagint] where "the rest of humanity" and "all the nations where my name is called" would be brought together to seek out God. One line ("the rest of humanity") is different here than in the later Masoretic Text. Since Jacob used Simon Peter's Aramaic name and addressing Palestinian Jews, we may presume that he was quoting a Hebrew source that predates the Masoretic Text. This passage (Amos) brings together the images in Joel (of the restored Judaism) and in Isaiah and Micah (of peace/equality among the nations). It is clear that the envoys now viewed the gentile mission as a logical extension of the restoration of the kingdom.

What they did not believe was that the Twelve had been sent to herald to gentiles. Instead, Jacob affirms that the first mention of a gentile mission came when Peter spoke to Cornelius. Even now, Matthew 28:19 did not apply to anyone but the Twelve, and it did not include gentiles. The time here was about AD 50, but later writings agree with this that the message was not sent out to gentiles from the beginning.

In Romans 1, written in 54 or 55, Paul writes that the message was being announced "both for the Jew first and for the Greek." He repeats the expression twice more.

In Galatians 2, written in 56, Paul reflects back on the meeting in Acts 15.

But on the contrary, when they saw that I was entrusted with the good message to the foreskinned, just as Peter to the circumcised, and when they realized the generosity that had been granted me, Jacob and Peter and Johannes (those who are thought to be pillars) gave Bar-Nabas and me the right hand of fellowship.

Paul's account of that meeting clearly indicates his own understanding of the Great Commission. Peter, Jacob, and Johannes had recognized Paul as an equal and acknowledged that the Twelve had been sent with the good message to their fellow Jews while Paulus had

been given the same message to take to gentiles. Even now, several years later, that commission was limited in scope to Jewish converts.

Some commentators recognize that the Twelve always understood their message as going to Jews only, but they try to imply that Matthew 28 was for everyone to take the message to everyone anyway. If Mt 28:19 was for everyone, then the Eleven (who could understand all of the writings about the Messiah) never realized it. This view would imply that although God wanted them to understand the commission, none of the Eleven understood it -- not even later on, for they never refer back to it. These eleven understood the writings about Jesus that pertained to a future Gentile "inclusion," but they never applied them to Mt 28:19 -- not even after Acts 10, and not even after meeting with Paul. None of the eleven hearers of the commission took it to include Gentiles--never in their lives. When they did meet Paul, he understood everything the way that they did, even though he himself *had been sent to gentiles*. He never extended the sending of the Twelve to include gentiles. Furthermore, none of the writers ever extended the sending of the Twelve to more broadly send anyone other than the Twelve.

Yet the evangelicals are bent on forcing a broad evangelistic interpretation on the passage. They cannot see outside of their own paradigm.

Brief Notes about the Twelve

When the Twelve replaced Judah, there were two people who were qualified, but the number had to be twelve. The number was deliberate; it represented the number of the tribes of Israel (Rev 21:12-4). Therefore, while their mission had yet to be fulfilled, they realized that it was necessary to restore the number to twelve. Yet by the time of Jacob's death (Acts 12), there was no need to replace him. After all, their mission was complete. No authors refer to those remaining as "the Eleven", like they did after Judah's death. This supports the idea that the Twelve as a unit were no longer necessary; their collective purpose had been fulfilled.

Conclusions about the Great Commission

The commission in Matthew 28:19 and its parallel in Luke 24:47 was a simple renewal of the commission to the Twelve in Matthew 10. The Great Commission was given to the Twelve. It was not given to all people, nor to all Jews, nor even to all of those whom Jesus sent out. It was only given to the Twelve -- representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Great Commission included Jewish people only (the sons of Israel). It never included gentiles, to whom the Twelve were not sent. The Great Commission was fulfilled at Pentecost, after which time the envoys established themselves as community leaders. They never physically traveled to all nations, although Paul announced that the message had gone out "to all creation" (Col 3).

When we interpret the Great Commission, we must do so in light of the actions of those who heard Jesus say it. The record of Acts and the statements made by the envoys there clearly

indicate that Jesus at first sent only the Twelve, and only to their fellow Jews. Other prophets arose, but none took the message to gentiles until after Peter spoke to Cornelius in Acts 10. All of them clearly understood their commission to include Jews only – even after Acts 15. Paul agreed with them that the Twelve had been sent only to Jews.

The rise of Judaizing is more easily understood through this explanation, as it would be natural for the "Nazarene" Jews to assume that gentiles needed to become Jewish proselytes under the first covenant before they could enter the second. They would naturally have viewed Christianity as properly contained in Judaism.

Other Writings Untwisted

Evangelicals do not rely entirely on Matthew 28 to support their view that the Great Commission is a “church” mission. There are other passages in which they see commands to evangelize. Let’s examine these as well.

Now all the things are from God, the one who reconciled himself to us through the Anointed One and who gave us the service of reconciliation. We have this because God was reconciling creation to himself in the Anointed One, not recording their wanderings against them. And he has placed in us the good message of the reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors on behalf of the Anointed One, as if God were advising through us. On behalf of the Anointed One we are begging: "Be reconciled to God." (2 Cor 5:18-20)

Evangelicals read this passage in a way that applies it to everyone. We’re all ambassadors, and therefore we must all preach a message of reconciliation. For example, gotquestions.org, operated by an evangelical group, claims that, “We believe in the Great Commission as the primary mission of the Church.” They claim:

Christians are God’s ambassadors in that they have been “approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel” (1 Thessalonians 2:4). As we go through this world, we represent another Kingdom (John 18:36), and it is our responsibility to reflect the “official position” of heaven. We are in this world, but not of it (John 17:16). God’s ambassadors are to be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we must take the message of our King to the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8), imploring men and women everywhere to be reconciled to God.

We can see now that they apply two evangelical passages (Matthew 10 and Acts 1) to themselves that rightly belong only to the Twelve. However, they also cite 1 Thessalonians. Are all Christians “God’s ambassadors?” Let’s look at the passage.

For, brothers, you remember our labor and hardship. Working night and day, so as not to burden any of you, we heralded God's good message to you. You and God are witnesses of how godly and justly and blamelessly we happened to be while we were with you, the trusting ones.

The authors – Paulus, Silvanus, and Timotheos – clearly distinguish between two groups, which they label “we” and “you.” The readers were “you,” while the inspired envoys were “we.” The envoys were sent to the readers. The readers knew that the envoys were blameless. The envoys, not the readers – and not everyone, were the ones who were sent out by God.

InTouch Ministries, another evangelical group, says this, “We are His tools, but He is the power. We are indeed “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20), and like earthly ambassadors, our function is to faithfully represent the One who sends us.”

The evangelical groups seem to have a block when it comes to distinguishing the inspired prophets who were indeed sent out (as Paul was) from everyone else. Let’s see how that “we” and “you” sorts out 2 Cor 5:18ff.

*Now all the things are from God, the one who reconciled himself to **us** through the Anointed One and who gave **us** the service of reconciliation. **We** have this because God was reconciling creation to himself in the Anointed One, not recording their wanderings against them. And he has placed in **us** the good message of the reconciliation. Therefore, **we** are ambassadors on behalf of the Anointed One, as if God were advising through **us**. On behalf of the Anointed One **we** are begging: "Be reconciled to God." For he made the one who knew no sin to be a sin-offering on our behalf, so that **we** might become God's ethics in him. Now since **we** are also working together with him, **we are advising you** not to receive God's generosity in vain.*

Always focusing on the more important spiritual principles, the envoys strove to regard no one "according to the flesh" – unlike the leaders of Priestly Judaism, who tended to regard physical circumcision (and the temple, and the synagogue, and physical lineage) as having great importance. Instead of that mindset, Paulus and the other envoys tried hard to look upon people not as "Jews" or "gentiles" but as individuals. Thus, whatever religious heritage they might have had, the envoys saw none of it: "the earlier things have passed away."

The envoys had been given a "service of reconciliation," calling people to return not only to God but to his guiding principles. As official representatives of that reconciliation, the envoys were "ambassadors." They asked simply that others "be reconciled to God." Was this something that the readers could argue with?

The readers were not partners in that service. They were recipients of the advice that came from the inspired envoys. In this case, Paulus and Timotheos – the authors – were writing about themselves.

Jerry Root, an evangelical Baptist whose conversion came through the Campus Crusade, sees evangelism in other Bible passages. He writes, "Yet be assured that if you make a commitment to practice the sacrament of evangelism, you will grow in your knowledge of God. In Philemon 6 (NIV) the apostle Paul wrote to a friend, "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing in Christ."" (from The Sacrament of Evangelism)

That translation, by evangelicals, equates the expression "sharing your faith" with personal evangelism. That's not what Paul was saying. Let's look at the passage in its context.

*I always thank my God, making remembrance of you in my prayers, hearing of your **love** and **trust** (which you have toward Lord Jesus and for all the holy ones), so that the **partnership of your trust** would become working in recognition of every good thing for the Anointed One that is in us. For we have much joy and comfort about your **love**, because the deep feelings of the holy ones have been refreshed through you, brother.*

In anticipation of the disclosure portion of the letter, Paulus reminds Filemon about the basic principles of Love and Trust, praising Filemon for displaying both of these qualities. In particular, Paulus expresses confidence in the fact that Filemon openly shows love toward others, because he is about to ask him to display more of the same. What is active here is his reader's trust and love – not through inviting people to church but in their natural ways. Remember that in this letter Paulus' goal concerned the treatment of a slave. Nothing in the letter connects with evangelism, and Paulus certainly does not tell his reader to get out there and speak to unbelievers.

The "**fruit**" passages in the New Testament have been misinterpreted worst of all by some. For example, Roger Poehlmann (of the San Francisco [International] Church of Christ) wrote, "The church in the 1st Century church grew, so we see it as a normal pattern that disciples make disciples in obedience to Christ's command. If you remain in the vine, you'll bear much fruit. Lack of growth is a warning sign that something is wrong--with the leaders, with the members, with undealt with sin, with lack of evangelism--that has to be figured out by prayer and Bible study and asking questions."

People with this belief regularly cite John 15:2, inferring that it means that churches (and possibly individuals) who do not evangelize are pruned away (cut off) – to make room for others who will evangelize. Let's see what the verse says:

Each branch in me which doesn't bear fruit, he takes away. And each one that bears fruit, he cleanses, so that it may bear more fruit... There's more:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me -- and I in him -- he bears much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. If someone

doesn't remain in me, he is cast out like the branch and is withered. (And people gather them and cast them into a fire.) And it is burned.

As Jesus and the Twelve walked around, no doubt they passed various vines that grew in the area, making a natural jumping off point for Jesus to further explain himself. "I am the True Vine." This is a metaphor often used of Israel in the Hebrew Bible. In contrast to Israel, then, Jesus is the **true** vine. A vine provides sustenance to its branches, and only through their Messiah could Jews receive "true" sustenance. The passage is about Love.

"Each branch in me which doesn't bear fruit, he takes away." -- Anyone who claims to be a follower of the Messiah but who does not practice his teachings (to live a life of love) will not be sustained. "And each one that bears fruit" -- each one who lives in love -- "he cleanses". In Greek, the word for "take away" and the word for "cleanses" are somewhat similar, so that a Hellenistic reader would recognize a word play. Also, "cleanses" and "prunes" signify the same thing, but "cleanses" has a greater significance (which Jesus uses). The Jew who has been cleansed becomes capable of loving even more.

He adds of the Eleven, "You are already clean." -- Since the Eleven had already embraced the Messianic message internalizing the Torah, they were "already clean." They were already capable of such love. As long as they continued to practice his teachings, they would be loving. They would "bear much fruit."

The concept that he is explaining here in chapter fifteen is what he calls his new precept: that students of Jesus (specifically the envoys) love one another. The topics of loving Jesus, loving one another, the precept(s), God's (Jesus') love for them, and the concept of asking and receiving are all tied together. The purpose of his talk is that they love one another. (15:17; 13:34-5; 15:12; 1 Jn 3:11; etc)

Love is the fruit (15:16-17). This is what is meant by keeping the precept(s). (13:34; 15:10-12; 1 Jn 2:3-11; 1 Jn 3:23; 1 Jn 4:7-8,12,21) This flows out of and is integral to "remaining in Jesus": living in love.

Another passage that is distorted by the evangelical point of view is 2 Timothy 2:1-2, which read...

2:1 *Therefore my child, be strong in the generosity that is in Anointed Jesus, and the things that you heard from me through many witnesses, entrust these things to trustworthy people who will also be competent to teach others.*

Evangelicals, and some traditionalists, interpret this passage like a multi-level marketing scheme. Paul converts Timothy. Tim converts "trustworthy people." They convert others, and the church organization grows. Let's see what he really means.

"The generosity" refers to the freedom from legalism that comes from living a life of trust and love, which Paulus has just said came through Jesus. Paulus wants Timotheos to live such a life but also so make sure that he teaches this internal way of thinking to other trustworthy people. Paulus has encountered many UNtrustworthy people -- even close associates -- who returned to Judaism or otherwise left the faith. Therefore, he urges Timotheos to make sure that he finds trustworthy people who will be able to do what he is doing: living a life of love and teaching this to other people. How does one teach: by being an example of Love. As he tells Timotheos later, he should pursue trust, love, and peace. Demonstrating these qualities is how the envoy's assistant is to teach. Paulus recognizes the dangers of losing the message about love that the Messiah brought.

The "Jesus as an Example" Passages

For this is generosity: if someone, through being conscious of God, endures sorrows and suffers unjustly. For what credit is it if you are sinning and endure a beating for it? But if you are doing good and endure suffering, this is favor with God. For you were called into this because the Anointed One also suffered on your behalf, leaving a copy behind for you so that you might follow in his footsteps: he didn't sin, "nor was any deceit found in his mouth." When he was verbally abused, he did not verbally abuse in return. When suffering, he did not threaten. Instead, he gave himself up to the one who judges justly. (1 Peter 2)

Reading the verses surrounding this one, especially those which immediately follow, we see that Peter is not urging Christians to suffer nor to evangelize but to endure their suffering as Jesus endured his. Peter quotes from the suffering servant passage in Isaiah 53.

Phil 2:5 – *"For you should have this attitude in you that was also in Anointed Jesus."* This passage is not saying that everyone should do whatever Jesus did...including evangelize. "Let this attitude be in you which is in Anointed Jesus." The surrounding verses make the context of humbling oneself and regarding others more highly than oneself as clear as a bell. The "attitude" is not an evangelistic call. It is a view that Christians should have toward one another.

The one who says that he knows him and who does not keep his precepts is a liar, and in this person the truth is not. But the one who keeps his message, truly, in him God's love has been made complete. In this way we know that we are in him: the one who says that he is remaining in him is bound to walk just as he walked. Beloved: I am not writing you a new precept, but an old precept that you had from the beginning. The precept, the old one, is the message that you heard.

1 Jn 2:6 – The passage urging people to "walk just as he walked" is not about evangelism either. The whole passage is talking about loving one another. The precepts mentioned in v.3,7,8, etc. are all Jesus' teachings toward loving one another. Verse 9 begins John's accurate explanation.

The entire letter concerns this admonition (see also 3:10-16, 3:22-24, 4:7-13, 4:18-21). John focuses himself on those who have begun to claim that Jesus was not the Messiah. His reminder of the precept of love is clearly made so that none should develop bad attitudes about the others. His comment in 2:6 is contained in an admonition to follow the precept of love toward one another. In this context, we must live our lives as Jesus lived his.

Matt 11:12 -- *"From the days of John the Baptizer until the present the kingdom of the heavens has been invaded, and invaders have been seizing it."*

The verb βιάζω, invade or attack with violence appears here in the passive voice, saying then "has been invaded" rather than "has been forcefully advancing" like the NIV reads. Their error is understandable, for the middle voice and passive voice look alike. Realizing the error, the correctors of the NIV changed the wording to "has been subjected to violence" for the TNIV.

Perhaps they were trying to parallel this with a statement Jesus makes in Lk 16:16 which is similar in appearance. Scanning the contexts of each reveals that not only are the two passages different, but that Mt 11:12 must be passive and not active. After Jesus finishes his support for John the Baptist in v.14, He begins to describe and explain what He has been saying. Verses 16 through 24 focus entirely on how God's kingdom is being attacked, not on how it is attacking.

"John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he is demon possessed. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a wine drinker! A friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" Then he proclaims "woes" toward the cities which have rejected his good message. The emphasis is clearly on the rejection of the message, not on its spreading. But these English words have been used to insinuate that we "need to advance the kingdom".

Lk 16:16 appears similar to Mt 11:12, but the context is completely different. Even so, in Luke the versions essentially agree how βιάζω ought to be rendered. The KJV uses "every man presseth into it". Some say "presses toward it". The REB has "everyone forces a way in". The REB is in line with the meaning of the verb: "to invade". The NET has, "From then, God's kingdom has been announced as a good message, and everyone is invading it."

Though the passages are not parallel and the kingdom is not doing any "forceful advancing", the idea is similar to what is in Matthew: people are attacking the Messiah and his good message. The Messiah is not attacking, but his kingdom is defending from attack.

The evangelicals will object, saying that the "church is like a building." Church of Christ minister, Johnny Ramsey, and the author of "Christ-Centered Lessons," agree with that interpretation of 1st Corinthians 3:

"We get the cart before the horse in our evangelism. Instead of asking how many we will baptize, let us ask how many we will teach. That is our responsibility in the great commission. The honest and good hearts will respond and be baptized.' The increase to be brought forth is God's duty, not ours (**1 Cor. 3:7**). Ours is to plant the seed of the kingdom."

What does this passage actually say? 1 Cor 3:9-15 refer to the concept of building the assembly. But Paul makes a distinction between the traveling evangelists (Paul & Sosthenes, Apollos) and the building in the passage. The divinely commissioned envoys are again kept separate from the readers and congregation by the use of "you." Those who are part of the structure are not the "builders". The builders are the ones who have received a divine commission to teach. This is actually the third of Paul's analogies to the point that the Corinthians should not be divided by following men. He is not making an appeal to build by adding members. Rather, he says that if anyone should feed other food to the congregation (as in 3:2-3) or water the congregation (as in 3:6-9) or lay more bricks (as in 9-15), that is if anybody should teach the people, then sound teaching will remain and build up the individuals who form the congregation, but unsound teaching will not. Nowhere does Paul insinuate that "to build" is to add "members to the local congregation". The action of the traveling evangelists is their teaching. Good teaching makes people stronger.

Other "building passages" (such as Eph 2:20-22 [where the illustration is made for unity], 1 Pet 2:4-18) have been forced to read the same way. These should be taken as separate analogies, since they do not all have the same thing in mind and do not match up with one another. Because of its wording, 1 Pet 2:9 has been particularly singled out as a command to evangelize. But Peter does not say that "we" are declaring the perfections of Jesus by word of mouth. Let's see what it says.

But you are a chosen race, a "royal priesthood, a holy nation", a people for "God's possession," so that you may declare the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. You are those who were once "not a people" but now are a people of God, those who once "did not receive mercy" but now have received mercy.

Israel viewed themselves as a chosen people, and rightly so, for God had chosen the Jewish people to pass his message down from generation to generation. God had covenanted with the descendants of Abraham, and he gave them Moses and the prophets. Yet Peter says that it is the messianic Jews who are the "chosen race." He mentions Ex 19:6, where Yahweh God instructed Moses to tell the people that they would all be his priests -- a nation devoted to God.

"You will be my own possession among all peoples," God said. Yet so quickly did those same people turn away from God to serve idols. By the time of Samuel, they wanted to be like the other nations, with earthly kings ruling over them (rather than judges passing on God's wisdom). Peter refers then to Messianic Jews as receiving the true intent of God's relationship with humanity -- the readers, not their opponents, are the royal priesthood. The readers are part of the holy nation. The readers are God's own people, along with all who embrace the Messiah that God sent.

Next, Peter alludes to Hosea, where the prophet has named two of his children "Not My People" (Lo-Ammi) and "Did Not Receive Mercy" (Lo-Ruhamah). This had been done at God's

direction, for God viewed Israel as having broken their covenant with him: "I will have mercy no longer on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all" (Hos 1:6), and "You are not my people, and I am not your god" (Hos 1:8).

It was Israel who had spurned God, and in Peter's eyes, it is those who accept their Messiah who receive the blessing. Where once they were part of that group who was called "not my people" and "did not receive mercy," now they are God's people and have received mercy, since the readers who retain Jesus will have a covenant to cling to during and after the First Revolt. For the promise made in Hosea to Israel is that despite their rejection of him, enough will later accept him so that God will say, "You are sons of the living God." As Peter views it, these are the Messianic Jews.

How then are they declaring the virtues of God? On the contrary, according to v.11ff, our actions proclaim God's attributes. When people are around Christians, God ought to be apparent in the lives of the godly. Peter discusses godly conduct, which is proper even under persecution. His whole letter urges first century Christians, who are being persecuted, to act like Jesus did when persecuted. It does not say that we should "evangelize until persecuted" but that we should live godly lives whether persecuted or not.

Conclusions

The Ethiopian Treasurer (Ac 8:26-39) was not given any special instructions. He was in no way "trained" to evangelize. He just lived his life by God's principles: Love and Trust. That's what we should all do.

We have now seen that there is never anywhere given a general enjoinder to evangelize. James' letter contains over 30 admonitions of action. But it contains no command to evangelize. Nor does any other letter contain a call for all to evangelize or preach. The only other "evangelistic" passages are spoken by evangelists and apostles about themselves and one another, people who were given personal calls to preach. Those same people were gifted with the "signs of a genuine envoy" and received miraculous guidance to ensure that they knew the truth. In the context of the Joel passage, all of these things went away when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

Are numbers of converts important? No. John the Baptizer says in one of the fruit passages (Lk 3:7-9ff), "Do not begin to say among yourselves, 'We have a father: Abraham.' For I assure you that God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham." The point of the passage is that being loving is what is important (bearing good fruit). If a "numbers" were important, then God would simply "raise up children" from stones. He is not interested in how many warm bodies occupy the building each week. Nor is he interested in "your" rate of conversion, or how many people you're "studying with."

What was evangelism in the old days? A first century evangelist ("good messenger") was sent by Jesus to speak the message to people who had not heard it. Although uninspired, today you might find people that you didn't previously know and show them how to come to Jesus. This is good. Do it as often and as fervently as you are moved to.

More importantly, share your lives with friends and confidants who can attest themselves to the change in your life that Jesus has brought. These are your friends; you care about them. If your life in the "church building" is the same as that without, your friends probably know about Jesus through being with you on an ordinary basis, whether you teach them in words or not. This is "being a light on a hill". People see it and flock to it. Your life is the witness. That's being the "salt of the ground." Your actions speak more loudly than your words.

"Invitationalism" is not evangelism, while sharing your own life with someone actually spreads the message. Don't hand someone an invitation; serve him or her in love. Befriend him, and do the good thing that comes naturally (whatever that is) out of love. The Christian purpose isn't evangelism. **God spreads the message when you live a godly life. Be an example of Love and Trust.**

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