

Articles

Having Gone, Disciple All Nations: Context, Canon, Commission, and Charisma

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Abstract

Doug Lowenberg, Ph.D., provides an exegetical analysis of Matthew's Great Commission focusing on the historical and textual context of the passage, showing that the going aspect of missions is a prerequisite to the actual carrying out of the command to make disciples of all nations. He emphasizes that living in the cross-cultural setting is necessary to fulfill the great commission. He challenges theological institutions to prepare and inspire students to go to the unreached peoples. He concludes that all believers must heed the commission of our Lord inscribed in the canon of Scripture, live and interpret Scripture dependent on the charisma of the Spirit, and go where others have not yet gone—to disciple all nations.

Introduction

Guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Matthew concluded the writing of his Gospel quoting the words of Jesus: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20 NIV). Not only is it highly significant that Matthew ended his writing with the statement of Jesus' Great Commission, but it is also shocking, yet deliberate, that he did not add any reference to Christ's ascension. Matthew's inspired intention was to leave the words of Christ's missional mandate reverberating in the minds of his first readers—most likely the church in Antioch,¹ the first great mission-sending church (Acts 11:20-23; 13:1-4)—and in us, the church of the 21st century.

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As the biblical text is read today in English with the double imperative found in most translations, “go” and “make disciples,” has the singular focus of Jesus’ missional mandate found in the Greek text been obscured? Likewise, do we need to reconsider the grammar of the commission in order to acknowledge the essential, supportive actions that make possible the single imperative? Did Matthew record Christ’s words to describe the means by which the Great Commission would be fulfilled? With special attention given to these final words of Jesus in their historical and cultural context, this study will consider the steps necessary for the disciples of Jesus Christ, then and now, to obey his final command: disciple all the nations.

Context

Before examining the actual words of the commission, a comment on the original historical context of the original recipients of this Gospel should be considered because of its impact on the meaning. D. A. Carson states, while admitting that one cannot be certain of the first readers, “Most scholars take Antioch as the place of composition. Antioch was a Greek-speaking city with a substantial Jewish population; and the first clear evidence of anyone using the Gospel of Matthew comes from Ignatius, bishop of Antioch at the beginning of the second century. ... The only reasonably certain conclusion is that the Gospel was written somewhere in the Roman Province of Syria.”²

If Antioch was indeed the receiving church for this ancient biography,³ it brings into question the general assumption that Matthew was a Jew writing to a primarily Jewish audience attempting to prove from Old Testament references that Jesus was the fulfillment of Jewish prophecies regarding their long-awaited Messiah.⁴

Matthew certainly writes from a Jewish-Christian worldview and addresses issues related to the impact that Judaism and Pharisaism were having on the church in the last half of the first century.⁵ But if the gospel was composed for the church in Antioch, based on Luke’s description of that assembly (Acts 11:20-23), many of the believers from its inception were Gentile. Ralph P. Martin comments, “Matthew’s church is quickly becoming predominantly Gentile.”⁶ He adds that one must consider “the missionary motif which runs through the Gospel, stretching from the visit of the Magi (2:1-12), anticipating the wider outreach of the Good News and the appearing

of Christ's light to the Gentiles.”⁷ In fact, it seems the missional motif of the book starts in 1:1 and continues to 28:20. Jesus Christ is the “son of David” and the “son of Abraham” (1:1)—capturing the imagery of the promise made to David of an heir who would be king of an eternal kingdom and would rule the nations (2 Sam. 7:13, 16; Ps. 2:8); and the seed of Abraham who would be a source of blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18; Gal. 3:8). Matthew points out that Jesus' genealogy, confirming him as the legal descendant of David, includes at least three, if not four, Gentile women (1:2-16).⁸

The first people mentioned in the gospel who came and worshipped Jesus as divine and acknowledged him as “king of the Jews” were Gentile Magi from the east (2:1-12). This gospel describes the fulfillment of God's promise to send a King and Savior for all humankind (Matt. 8:10-12; 12:17-21; Is. 42:1-4; 49:6; Zech. 9:10; the perspective that the Old Testament prophesied a Savior for “all nations” is asserted by Jesus himself; see Luke 24:46-47).

Matthew, the well-educated Jewish tax collector, through his years of being discipled by Jesus and later filled, transformed, and guided by the Holy Spirit, became an apostle and advocate for the proclamation of the Good News to all people.⁹ And the church to whom he wrote, if it was indeed Antioch, had the ongoing responsibility of continuing what the Holy Spirit started among them with the sending of Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-4) to proclaim this gospel to all nations, make disciples, and plant indigenous churches. This church in Antioch, along with all ensuing churches of every country, ethnicity, and age, was given the assurance that Immanuel would be with them until the end of human history (Matt. 28:20).

Canon

There are several nuances in the Greek grammar of the commission that merit fresh consideration due to their possible impact on the intended meaning of the text. The “therefore” (οὕτως) reflects back to Christ's previous words of welcome to his startled, worshipping and doubting disciples: “All authority in heaven and on the earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). During His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated authority over the forces of nature and every spiritual and human predicament. But now, following the humiliation and weakness represented in His death on the cross, there may have been questions in the minds of His disciples about their Master's sovereignty and divine authority. Having conquered the powers of sin and death in His resurrection, Christ announced His supremacy over every sphere of the

created order including heaven and earth.¹⁰ He followed this triumphal declaration with the command known as the Great Commission. The one with all authority had the right to command his followers where to go and what to do. As Randy Hurst notes, “When the Lord commands anything, there is no choice about which commandments to obey. Lordship requires complete obedience. Nothing less.”¹¹

The first word in the Greek text of verse 19, *πορευθέντες*, is translated in the NIV as “go.” Most English versions translate this aorist participle as an attendant circumstance with the main verb (disciple, *μαθητεύσατε*) so that the participle communicates action that coordinates and remains contemporaneous with the finite verb.¹² Thus, the outcome is two imperatives: “go” and “disciple.” With equal urgency, Jesus’ disciples are to simultaneously go and disciple the nations. The remaining two present participles of the commission, baptizing (*βαπτίζοντες*) and teaching (*διδάσκοντες*), are handled as adverbial participles of means describing the steps by which discipleship is accomplished: one disciples others by baptizing and by teaching.

The equal urgency interpretation, go and disciple, is the translation advanced by Daniel B. Wallace and others.¹³ While the text includes one aorist¹⁴ imperative, disciple (*μαθητεύσατε*), and three participles, the first an aorist (*πορευθέντες*, having gone, after going)¹⁵ and the remaining two present tense (*βαπτίζοντες*, *διδάσκοντες*; baptizing, teaching), the text is translated as two aorist imperatives with the two present participles functioning adverbially modifying the original, with the single imperative explaining the means whereby the command to disciple is to be accomplished. Thus, the interpretation becomes: Go and disciple by baptizing and teaching.¹⁶

Wallace claims that “the context plays a major role in determining the force of the Greek participle.”¹⁷ “The context has more influence on participles than on any other area of Greek grammar. In other words, for most participles, one cannot simply look at the structure to determine what kind of participle it is.”¹⁸ He notes that aorist participles usually denote action at an antecedent time to that of the controlling verb.¹⁹ If these rules were applied to the Great Commission, it would be translated, “Having gone (action prior to the main verb), disciple the nations.” But Wallace adds, “If the main verb is also aorist, this participle may indicate contemporaneous time.”²⁰ In this case if the meaning of the participle had a temporal meaning, the statement would read, “As you go (action contemporaneous), disciple the nations.”²¹

However, Wallace asserts that “if a participle makes good sense when treated as an adverbial participle, we should not seek to treat it as attendant circumstance.”²² And concerning attendant circumstance participles, there are no absolutes, and this structure must follow a “90% rule” in translating the aorist participle as an aorist imperative. Based on his guidelines, one must be cautious in determining how to interpret the participle especially if structural patterns imply an antecedent circumstance approach. While Wallace acknowledges that Matthew 28:19-20 is an example of a “disputed” text, he settles on the attendant circumstance participle meaning (“go” as an aorist imperative) which he believes fits better here than an adverbial interpretation.²³

Returning to the issue of the context of this final statement found in Matthew’s Gospel, one must question if the attendant circumstance interpretation is truly the best way to handle Jesus’ intention for the commission as inscribed in Matthew’s gospel. The text could have a temporal adverbial meaning with the stress on *when*. Jesus’ eleven Jewish disciples were to first go, leave behind the familiar and culturally comfortable, in order to adapt to a new contexts and cultures, and there make disciples of nations far different from that of their Jewish people and heritage. Their going was to be the norm, a foregone conclusion, for those who would heed Christ’s missional command.

The temporal interpretation follows the life example established by Jesus. Having gone from heaven, abandoning His exalted state as One with God the Father, leaving behind his position of honor as the “Son of God,” he became the “Son of Man.” He lived an earthly existence for almost 30 years before beginning His ministry which commenced with the making of disciples (Matt. 4:18-22; Luke 3:23). For the next three-plus years, much of His attention was given to the training of these men who were called to continue the proclamation and expansion of His spiritual kingdom and the discipling of the nations after his ascension and until His final return.

Initially, the disciples’ going to the nations ran contrary to their understanding of the mission of the Messiah. Accepting the inclusive nature of God’s mission that welcomed all nations around one table at the future messianic banquet (Matt. 8:11), provided salvation and deliverance for ancient enemies of Israel (Matt. 15:21-28), and redirected their ministry away from an exclusive focus on “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” to all nations (Matt. 10:5-6; 24:14) was extremely difficult for these ethnocentric, biased Jewish men. The idea of *going* clashed with their worldview, which in light of commission from the one with all authority in

Heaven and earth, had to be surrendered and transformed. Jesus was well aware of their racial prejudice and had previously restricted their evangelistic efforts among non-Jews knowing such ethnocentrism would negate any effective discipleship (Matt. 10:5-6). But Jesus patiently set the example of how they were to go and what they were to preach.

A temporal interpretation of the aorist participle also stresses the prerequisite of antecedent action in order to fulfill the priority of the commission. If disciples are to be made of the nations, those commissioned by Jesus must have already made the commitment to go geographically and culturally.²⁴ This understanding of a prior commitment to go and become culturally relevant to other people groups aligns with Paul's missiology: "I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. . . . To those not having the law I became like one not having the law . . . so as to win those not having the law. . . . I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:19-22). Obedience to the commission required leaving behind the culturally and spiritually familiar in order to present the core of the gospel in ways that could be understood by other peoples. The discipling of a nation demanded long-term presence and commitment to help people of a different culture become true disciples of their Lord. Going needed to precede discipling.

This interpretation seems extremely relevant for the current culture where "tourist" missions has become popular. One might suggest that Jesus knew of the inclination of His people to make brief forays into foreign regions and cultures of the world convinced that cross-cultural discipleship can happen instantly while failing to recognize that discipleship requires cultural adaptation, proximity, and time. "Having gone" stands as a prerequisite to making disciples and planting the indigenous church.

While the temporal interpretation seems to fit the historical context of Jesus' final words to the eleven standing on a hill in Galilee (one should recall Matthew's previous reference to "Galilee of the nations"; Matt. 28:16; 4:15-16; Isaiah 9:1-2), the literary context suggests interpreting the aorist participle adverbially as means—the process whereby disciples are made. If the first participle is translated as the initial step needed to make disciples, it stands in parallel syntactically with the remaining two participles that likewise describe means whereby disciples are made: by baptizing and by teaching. If the three participles are understood as means for

making disciples among the nations,²⁵ it seems obvious that the first step must already be taken: a disciple of Jesus has already gone to people groups where no disciples are present. All of the implications of “having gone” are brought to bear with the first participle. The work of discipling requires arrival, cultural adaptation, language learning, and commitment to reach the local people, followed by baptizing and teaching as new converts are brought into the kingdom of God and incorporated into the community of faith. Conformity to the person of Jesus requires the continuous teaching of all that Jesus commanded.

The interpretation of the three participles as adverbial participles of means supports a singular emphasis on the one imperative—disciple—which seems to best fit the context of the first readers, the church of Antioch. If Matthew wrote to this church in the mid- to late-60s or later, the church at Antioch had already participated in the three missional journeys of Paul. Others may have gone from Antioch and seen the church planted in strategic centers such as Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. Perhaps the close of Matthew’s Gospel was intended to provide encouragement to continue the process of making disciples among people groups not yet reached. The need to go was a foregone conclusion. Going was the precursor to discipleship. Evangelism alone was inadequate. Discipleship had to be accomplished by people on the ground who had adjusted to new cultures. Having become embedded in the culture followed by evangelism, new converts were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and taught all that Jesus had commanded. The missional ministry of discipling the nations was to be normative.

In the West, there is a tendency to be reductionistic in the translation process and settle on one option when it comes to the primary elements or focus of a text. While it seems the historical and literary contexts of Matthew 28:18-20 support the view that emphasizes the single imperative—disciple —brought about by the means of having gone, baptizing, and teaching, there is a sense that the interpretation of the Great Commission could view the imperative and the three participles as commands: go, disciple, baptize, and teach.²⁶ It is clear that Jesus commands his followers to disciple every nation, and this duty requires those who have gone to continue welcoming new believers into the community of faith through the rite of water baptism, and providing relevant, culturally contextual instruction to equip the saints.

Commission

The intended meaning of Jesus' words, as penned by Matthew, emphasizes the process or means necessary for His followers to fulfill the heart of the commission which is to disciple all the nations.²⁷ What were the actions required to disciple the nations so that they would become committed followers of Jesus? There were three steps to fulfilling the commission. Firstly, the prerequisite was to go from the familiar, reside among those who were foreign, and adapt to a new people group and a new way of life. Secondly, they were to baptize those who made a commitment to become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ incorporating them into the community of faith. And thirdly, they were to continue teaching them all the words of Jesus. If Matthew's church and any church from that time forward were to make disciples among the diverse people groups of the earth, their first action would require a willingness to move from the geographical location and culture where they were settled and comfortable before they could begin the disciple-making process.²⁸

Jesus was calling His Jewish disciples and ensuing generations of believers to bold, committed, long-term actions rather than brief forays into foreign regions. The discipling of the nations required decisive, persistent commitment by Jesus' apostles to go from the familiar and become geographically and culturally resident among new people groups. Today, with growing affluence and ease of travel, people from both the majority and minority worlds pursue personal experiences of going to a distant land for a brief evangelistic experience with no intention of going and remaining to make disciples. In light of missionary tourists jetting around the globe, do we need to revisit the meaning of "having gone"?

For Jesus' Jewish disciples standing on a mountain somewhere in Galilee, who were "the nations"? They represented the socio-cultural-linguistic units of society beyond "the house of Israel," whether geographically or culturally near or far. This final command from the resurrected Lord to his Jewish followers was to leave the country of their birth, move centrifugally, and settle among the distinct ethnic people groups of the world until each one had indigenous communities of believers vibrantly expressing praise to their Creator and Savior,²⁹ and sharing the good news with their families and neighbors. For Matthew's readers in Antioch,

the command was to move out from Asia Minor to Africa, Asia, and Europe and become resident among those tribes and nations with no living witness.

The phrase, “all the nations,” is critically important.³⁰ The commission stands in stark contrast to Jesus’ earlier instructions to His disciples about where to go. Jesus previously told them not to go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans but concentrate on the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5-6). During several trips the disciples made with Jesus among non-Jews, the biblical text reports that they were extremely uncomfortable living in different socio-cultural settings even for a short time (see Matt. 15:23; John 4:27; Luke 9:52-56). Could it be that at this earlier phase in their ministry and character development, the Twelve were too spiritually and culturally intolerant to have effective ministry among the ethnically diverse peoples of the world? They needed to understand the full scope of God’s eternal intention which was to provide salvation for every person and distinct people group of the world (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:18; Isaiah 49:6; Matt. 24:14; John 3:16; Rev. 5:9; 7:9). With these final words from Jesus, it was clear that their responsibility was to disciple every nation, every distinct cultural-linguistic group under heaven, including all Gentiles and Jews.³¹ D. Edmond Hiebert observes, “While ‘all nations’ should not be taken as excluding the Jewish people, the phrase does emphasize that the Gentile world will be the chief scene of the missionary efforts of the church.”³² Discipling all nations would require them to deconstruct their ethnocentrism, their judgmental and arrogant attitudes towards other people groups, and their nationalistic pride that skewed their understanding of God’s kingdom and agenda (see Acts 1:6-8).

Today the mission of God requires Jesus’ disciples following His example in leaving their home culture and mother tongue, moving from the place where the gospel has already taken root, and going to and embracing a new people, culture, and language so that the gospel is incarnated—becoming comprehensible to the receiving ethno-linguistic people group. This action embodies the sense of apostolic function³³—sent out by the Spirit with the endorsement, support, and prayers of the church, to officially represent the one sending them, the Lord of heaven and earth, with one goal: make disciples among a “nation” (*ethnos*, a unique culture and ethnolinguistic people group) who has never heard the gospel.

The main verb of the sentence is the imperative “make disciples” or literally “disciple.”³⁴ Their commission demanded all the time, effort, sacrifice, and cultural adaptation necessary to help people from another culture become followers and students of their Master, Jesus Christ.

The goal of the commission was to develop continuous learners who were being conformed to Christ in all dimensions of life.³⁵ The commission called for the building and grounding of new believers within their own indigenous culture.³⁶

To help people become loyal followers of Jesus, it was necessary to baptize new converts. Baptism had a spiritual and social dimension. The act of water baptism using the trinitarian formula was a public declaration of a new loyalty to love and serve Jesus Christ with all the devotion of a new-born child of God. And baptism was a rite of passage into the life and community of local Christians. Baptism welcomed the new believer into a new social home where nurture, teaching, accountability, discipline, and service would enable them to grow and become more like Christ.

Baptism implies the necessity of forming a body of believers, a local, indigenous church into which new converts can be integrated and edified. The indigenous church was to fully identify with the local people and culture through the establishing of their own leaders and leadership systems; promote gospel outreaches to their own community; provide support for those who worked hard at preaching and teaching; develop their own contextual theologies and expressions of worship; demonstrate compassion for the poor and vulnerable in their own communities; and send their own sons and daughters as apostles to their unreached neighbors near and far.

After baptizing new believers into a local community of faith, the next step was teaching the new believers to continuously keep all that Jesus commanded his followers. This dimension of disciple-making inferred the need for training that encompassed everything Jesus taught and modeled including doctrine, attitude, moral and ethical behavior, the necessity of Spirit anointing, service, witness, and sacrifice. On one hand teaching all that Jesus commanded could be condensed into: “Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22:37-40). On the other hand, Matthew recorded five major blocks of Jesus’ teaching (chapters 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25) which addressed many aspects of the Christian living.³⁷ Teaching was to take place as people walked along the roads or gathered in local synagogues, the Temple, in newly planted churches, public buildings, or private homes in order to train up followers of Jesus

Today 40 percent of the world lives in geographic and cultural locations where there is little or no witness of the gospel.³⁸ Spirit-filled believers have not gone. Discipleship has not taken place. From our Pentecostal theological institutions, gifted graduates, pastors, and professors have stayed in already established churches, ministries, and familiar cultures. The challenge of the command to disciple the nations continues to resound in the hearing of God's people.

*Charisma*³⁹

This commission in the canon of Scripture, inspired by and interpreted with the assistance of charismatic insights from the Spirit,⁴⁰ who at times challenges readers to question traditional interpretations and activities of the established church, may create spiritual discomfort for those who ignore its full ramifications. The Holy Spirit can guide the focus of one's Scripture reading to particular words, phrases, or nuances of grammar to highlight aspects of the Christian life deserving greater attention. The same Spirit, who participated in the conception of the Messiah (Matt. 1:18, 20) bringing the Savior of all people into the world, desires to guide the church in fulfilling the mission of the Christ. The Spirit still anoints, calls, and sends Christ's disciples into the world to establish spiritual beachheads in the midst of darkness from which discipleship processes may be launched to reach the nations. Perhaps the mission to which the church is called has underemphasized the need for committed believers to abandon all and go for a lifetime. Possibly the making of disciples has been replaced by evangelism and ministries of compassion. Some churches in the majority world prefer to pass off this responsibility to more affluent churches in the minority world.

The Spirit comes to gift and empower the global church to engage in Christ's redemptive mission. To be Pentecostal is to be missional. The Spirit has been outpoured to empower his disciples to move from where the gospel is present to the geographical and cultural regions where there is no access to the message. Perhaps we need to reexamine the writings of Ralph Winter,⁴¹ Donald McGavran,⁴² Charles Kraft,⁴³ Paul Hiebert,⁴⁴ Alan Johnson,⁴⁵ Tite Tienou,⁴⁶ Christopher J.H. Wright,⁴⁷ Timothy C. Tennent,⁴⁸ and Ogbu Kalu⁴⁹ who call the church to the clarity and radicalness of Jesus' commission. Winter's understanding of the evolution of modern Protestant missions, initiated by William Carey in England, 1792, clarified our own current missiological context. Laborers were sent from the West first to foreign coastal regions, later to

the vast interior expanses, and most recently to the ethno-linguistically diverse peoples.⁵⁰ Now God has raised up the Pentecostal church in the majority world to take the lead in *missio Dei*. But no matter who we are or where we start, the going and discipling comes with great cost and requires lasting commitment. There is great disparity in the distribution of the laborers making disciples among the unreached peoples. Does the inequity of workers among the unreached indicate that Christ's church and our Pentecostal training institutions have minimized the necessity of "having gone"?

In our schools, we must be clear with our definitions. What is missions? Who are missionaries? Who and where are the unreached? It has become very common for "missions" to describe any Christian activity beyond the walls of the church. But to fulfill the Great Commission, the church, supported by our training institutions, must be intentional in equipping and sending her members across cultural barriers to evangelize, disciple, and plant the indigenous church where it does not exist.

If every Christian is a missionary, no one is truly a missionary. A missionary is one called and sent by the Holy Spirit as an apostle to cross linguistic and cultural barriers and make disciples of Jesus. Going across town or across a border to bring good news to a cluster of your own people using your own language is valuable and may have eternal dividends, but it is better classified as evangelism. Geographical distance is not the critical factor. A missionary is a person heeding Christ's commission to go for the long haul, penetrate cultural and spiritual barriers that keep people in bondage and isolation from Christ, for the expressed purpose of making disciples of Jesus. All who confess to be followers of Jesus must heed the commission: having gone, disciple all the nations. Not every child of God will go to another culture, learn another language, and disciple people among that ethno-linguistic group. But every Spirit-filled Christian must embrace the task and obey what the Lord of the harvest is asking them to do. Some must go; others must send through prayer and financial support. Every follower of Jesus must obediently sacrifice whatever the Lord asks: life, career, talents, finances, and prayer, to enable Christ's church to engage in the mission of discipling all the nations.

Application

Our first term of missionary service was in Burkina Faso, in the mid-1980s, with the goal of learning the Mooré language and culture to evangelize and disciple Muslims. We discovered a powerful indigenous, Pentecostal church consisting mostly of Mossi believers while other tribes and language groups remained unevangelized. Mossi church planters aggressively established Mossi cultural churches using Mooré across the country and beyond, but other ethnic groups were not attracted by the foreignness of what they saw and heard. As far as a burden for reaching Muslims, many Christians viewed them as existing outside the realm of Christ's grace. We noted barriers unintentionally erected by a church culturally monopolized by one ethnic group overlaid with religious prejudice and indifference towards Muslims and other ethnic groups.⁵¹ Our missiological lens shaped by Winter and others helped us identify the challenges that needed to be addressed if disciples were to be made of every nation living in the country.

In the late 1990s, we became directors of Addis Ababa Bible College in Ethiopia. The mission statement crafted for the school reflected our missiology: "Making disciples of Jesus to reach the nations as people of the Spirit and people of the Book."⁵² Reading Scripture through a missiological, Pentecostal lens in a training context helped us determine what levels of instruction were needed (diploma, bachelors, masters) and what the curricula needed to include in order to equip students with the ability, vision, and commitment to go and then disciple the nations of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.⁵³

Training harvest workers in our Pentecostal Theological institutions and local churches is a key instrument for completing the Great Commission. Students can be trained to cross linguistic, cultural, and tribal barriers with a gospel message made relevant and understandable to the receptor audience.⁵⁴ They can discern the key factors that function to establish a homogenous people group, whether ethnicity, language, culture, location, education, or economic realities become most needed. The locations where Bible schools are established should be determined strategically with some established where revival has already exploded—to conserve the harvest. Others should be started on the edge of regions where people live without a witness.⁵⁵ Spirit-empowered, biblically trained, missiologically committed workers can function as catalysts for revival and church planting. Materials translated into major local

languages can enhance training and place tools in the hands of students who penetrate people groups where written resources are lacking.⁵⁶

Through the years, our work with Bible school training has been closely linked with our national churches (NC) recognizing that the school must be closely aligned with the missional vision of the NC. Mission vision must be part of the DNA of the national office, the local church, and the Bible school. We have tried to navigate the dynamic relationships between indigenous church principles and missional partnerships—supportive and equipping without being controlling. By ensuring that leadership, vision, and financial support are provided by local churches and the NC denomination, the necessity of accountability between indigenous missionaries and their NC is maintained and the work remains sustainable. Indigenous missional initiatives must safeguard themselves from well-intentioned, foreign donors who create crippling dependency on external support that stifles long-term, indigenous church growth, impedes proper accountable relationships, and misdirects faith from looking to God for supply to a foreign, human source. The Great Commission addresses every NC calling them to send their people across cultural barriers to disciple every nation. NCs should be suspect of tourist missionaries who come from other cultures without making long-term commitments to truly leave behind their indigenous culture and settle in a new cultural context.

To fulfill the Great Commission, there must be a simultaneous commitment to indigenous church planting among the unreached and the training of national workers in a Bible school context. This dual approach corresponds with Paul's apostolic model. In Ephesus he founded the church and then established a training school where he taught for more than two years. As a result of Paul serving as a church planter and a missionary trainer, the entire region was evangelized by his students (Acts 19:9-10).

In conclusion, to fulfill Christ's Great Commission, the mandate must be clearly understood and implemented. Completing the task begins with an understanding of the objective (to disciple the nations), grasping the means whereby the objective can be accomplished (going as an accomplished feat, followed by baptizing and teaching), and seeking the guidance and empowerment of the abiding Holy Spirit until the assignment is accomplished. Disciples from every people group must be raised up, indigenous churches planted, and local ministers trained and sent. The church of every ethnicity must send their own sons and daughters as near-neighbor

missionaries and disciple-makers reaching the next people group. While discipling those who are near, others must be sent to those who are culturally distant. There will never be enough workers from the West to accomplish the Great Commission. Every NC in the majority and minority world has received the mandate from Christ to send her members over cultural-linguistic hurdles to proclaim the gospel and make disciples. All must obey the Lord of the harvest.

We live in an amazing context of redemptive history where God has turned the attention of his church to the unreached peoples especially those without access to any form of witness. All believers must heed the commission of our Lord inscribed in the canon of Scripture, live in the charisma of the Spirit, and go where others have not yet gone—to disciple the nations.

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¹ For discussion on the location where Matthew's Gospel was first read and from where it was disseminated, see R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 15-19; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 51-52; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (2d. ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 45; Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 174. France posits that the location of writing could be somewhere in Syria or Palestine but the exact location is unimportant. Meanwhile, Tenney concludes, "While absolute proof that the Gospel originated at Antioch is lacking, no other place is more suitable for it" (*New Testament Survey*; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 151.

² D. A. Carson, *Matthew 1-12* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 21-11.

³ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 24-25.

⁴ Hill comments that many scholars argue that "Matthew's Gospel is written from a Jewish-Christian standpoint, in order to defend Christianity, to make it acceptable to Jewish-Christian readers, and to prove that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews" (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 40).

⁵ Keener, *Matthew*, 33.

⁶ Ralph P. Martin, *The Four Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 232.

⁷ Martin, *The Four Gospels*, 228.

⁸ The implication of Gentile women in the lineage of the Messiah supports the perspective that God's redemptive plan always included the nations. Matthew lists Tamar (Gen. 38:18), Rahab (Josh. 2:1), Ruth (Ruth 1:3), and Uriah's wife (2 Sam. 11:3). While Uriah was a Hittite (2 Sam. 11:3, 6), it is unclear if his wife had the same ethnic background. Possibly to emphasize her marriage to a non-Jew, Matthew does not record her given name. For further Old Testament examples of the people of God consisting of more than the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, note that a mixed multitude were part of the Exodus (Exodus 12:38) and that Rahab and her entire family were incorporated into the Israelite community (Josh. 6:25).

⁹ According to various Church Traditions, Matthew in his later life traveled to Ethiopia or Persia making disciples of those nations. See "St. Matthew: Apostle," [cited 1 December 2020]; online: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Matthew>.

¹⁰ Edgar Krentz notes that "this authority is total, extending throughout Heaven and earth, that is, the universe." See "Missionary Matthew: Matthew 28:16-20 as Summary of the Gospel," *Currents in Theology and Missions* 31.1 (2004): 27.

¹¹ Randy Hurst, "Our Mission: Reaching, Planting, Training, and Serving," in *Mission, Vision, and Core Values* (ed. John L. Easter et al.; vol. 1 of RPTS Missiological Series; Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God World Mission, 2016), 31.

¹² This approach is taken by Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 640-642, 645. According to Wallace, when an aorist participle precedes an aorist imperative, 90% of the time the participle should be translated as a verb without dependence on the main verb in terms of meaning. Wallace concludes that in this passage, it makes no good sense to translate the participle as an adverbial participle with a sense of the temporal (when) or means (how) (622).

¹³ Cleon L. Rogers Jr., *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 66; also Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (WBC 33B; Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 882.

¹⁴ Aorist can describe action as a whole, a snapshot view, the unchanging nature or state of an action. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, 554, 557.

¹⁵ πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε can be translated as "Therefore, go and disciple" or "Therefore, having gone, disciple." The aorist participle serves as a verbal adjective. The verbal component has two aspects: time of action and kind of action. As an adjective, it modifies the subject of the sentence, Christ's disciples. Aorist verbs express undefined action (neither progressive or complete) in the present or past. But the aorist participle typically indicates action antecedent to or prior to the action of the main verb of the sentence (see R. Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek*; rev. Thomas Sawyer; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995; 11, 97, 103). Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (trans. and rev. R. W. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 174, explain that a participle expresses the notion of completion often preceding the finite verb: "the completion of the action denoted by the participle, then the action of the finite verb." The word πορευθέντες could be translated: You all [plural for the disciples] having gone. Applying these guidelines, Jesus commanded them to disciple the nations, but prior to the making of disciples, they had to go. This view finds support in Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997), 400.

¹⁶ Krentz takes an opposing position claiming that the double imperative is “deceptive” in converting the participle into a command and thereby weakening the thrust of the command: disciple the nations. See “Missionary Matthew: Matthew 28:16-20 as Summary of the Gospel,” 28fn21.

¹⁷ Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, 623.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 613.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 614.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 614.

²¹ Mary H. Shore translates the participle, “As you go.” See “Preaching Mission: Call and Promise in Matthew 28:16-20,” *Word and World* 26.3 (2006): 325. The weakness of this translation is that it seems to ignore the aorist aspect of the participle and treats it as a present tense participle.

²² Wallace, 640

²³ *Ibid.*, 641, 644-645.

²⁴ D. Edmond Hiebert presents a similar interpretation: “The aorist participle rendered ‘go’ (πορευθέντες), more literally, ‘having gone,’ shows that this missionary outreach is necessary before the central task of making disciples is realized. See “An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* July-Sept (1992): 348.

²⁵ This view of one imperative carried out in three ways is supported by Craig Keener: “The one command is to make disciples of the nations, and this command is implemented by going, baptizing, and teaching.” See Craig S. Keener, “Matthew’s Missiology: Make Disciples of the Nations (Matthew 28:19-20),” *AJPS* 12.1 (2009), 3.

²⁶ Wallace states that some adverbial participles have both the notion of temporal and means. One must attempt to determine which element is being stressed. *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*. 624.

²⁷ For further discussions on the relationship between the leading verb, disciple, and the three participles, having gone, baptizing, and teaching, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew 1-12* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 597; and Keener, *Matthew*, 402.

²⁸ Matthew uses this same word order in Matthew 2:8; 9:13; and 11:4 where go, an aorist participle, is followed by a command. “Go and inquire,” (2:8 πορευθέντες ἐξετάσατε) could read, “Having gone [to Bethlehem], inquire where” The magi needed to get to Bethlehem, an example of an antecedent action, before they could begin their investigation about the birth location of the Messiah. “Go and learn,” (9:13 πορευθέντες δὲ μάθετε) could read “Having gone, learn” where Jesus instructed Pharisees to turn to Scripture, away from their judgmental attitudes towards Him and His companions, then learn what JHWH meant with His words, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” To John the Baptist’s disciples, Jesus said, “Go and report,” (11:4 πορευθέντες ἀπαγγείλατε) which could read, Having gone [back to John], report.” However, in each of these cases, Wallace interprets the combination of the aorist participle and the aorist imperative as attendant circumstance, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, 641-645.

²⁹ See John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

³⁰ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, all the nations, represented the Gentiles, the many unique ethnic groups outside of the people of Israel. Keener, *Matthew*, 401, comments that all nations could signify distinct groups of people rather than the modern concept of nation-states; Jesus’ command was an appeal for his followers to bring the good news to each culture with sensitivity and clarity. Some hold the opinion that ἔθνη (nations, plural; ἔθνος, singular) refers to the Gentiles as one blended mass of humanity distinguished from the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, there is strong scriptural evidence that God both created and endorses the cultural-linguistic uniquenesses

of every people group on earth. Genesis 10 lists the table of nations. Deuteronomy 32:8 refers to the division of the world into nations. John's vision of Heavenly worshipers (Rev. 5:9; 7:9) acknowledges the distinct groupings of humankind formed around various affinities: tribes (φυλή, people as a national unity with common descent), languages (γλῶσσα, tongues, a group of people with linguistic unity), people (λαός, people as a political unity with common history and law), and nations (ἔθνος, people with ethnic cohesion) exalting Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain to provide salvation for all (see K. L. Schmidt, "ἔθνος in the NT," *TDNT* 2:369-372).

³¹ While some scholars believe Jesus' mandate redirected his disciples to the Gentile nations exclusively, this perspective contradicts the example of the church as described in Acts and Paul's epistles. Walter Klaiber rightly stated, "Surely for Matthew, Jews are included in the mission to all nations." See Klaiber, "The Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20," *American Baptist Historical Society* 37.2 (2018): 113.

³² D. E. Hiebert, "An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20," 350.

³³ For a thorough discussion on the meaning of apostolic function, see Alan R. Johnson, *Apostolic Function in 21st Century Missions* (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2009).

³⁴ μαθητεύσατε is an aorist active imperative second person plural translated: (you all) disciple or make disciples. The aorist tense, as an undefined kind of action, emphasizes discipling in the sense of point action; just do it, once and for all—make disciples.

³⁵ Dan Day comments, "Because the eleven are themselves termed disciples, the import is that they are to replicate themselves, to introduce others to the Teacher (23:8,10), and as fellow learners, to become mentors in the Christ-life," "A Fresh Reading of Jesus' Last Words: Matthew 28:16-20," *Review and Expositor* 104 (2007): 379.

³⁶ This kind of discipleship that transforms beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyle demands much more than evangelistic crusades, medical outreaches, elementary schools, and tabernacle construction. Christ commands His church to equip and send disciple-makers who commit to going, staying, learning, loving, and serving—"boots on the ground."

³⁷ Krentz claims that "Matthew envisages the use of his Gospel as a manual for teaching Christian life." See "Missionary Matthew: Matthew 28:16-20 as Summary of the Gospel," 30.

³⁸ Johnson, *Apostolic Function*, 4.

³⁹ The word charisma, χάρισμα, is used here to emphasize the role of the Spirit in the thinking of the interpreter. The Spirit supplements one's scholarship and understanding of the text to guide the reader to note aspects and nuances of the text that may have been overlooked or misinterpreted. For a given situation or critical situation being faced, the Spirit can draw one's attention to a statement in Scripture for the purpose of giving guidance to how the issue should be addressed.

⁴⁰ John Wesley aptly states, "Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given" (*Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, vol. 1; Bristol: William Pine, 1765), viii. Rickie D. Moore, having studied God's self-revelation in Deuteronomy, observes that God makes Himself and His will known through Written Word, the Ten Commandments and other forms of canon, and through charismatic revelation in terms of His abiding presence, the Spirit poured out on Israel's leaders, and theophanic manifestations. Moore proffers, "Deuteronomy remembers the paradigmatic revelatory moment of Horeb where God both wrote and spoke his word, in order for this same revelatory synergism to be manifest in the present and carried forward into the future" ("Canon and Charisma in the Book of Deuteronomy," in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*; ed. Lee Roy Martin; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 28.

⁴¹ For numerous works by Ralph Winter, see the lead article in this edition.

⁴² Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, rev. ed. (New York: Friendship Press, 1981).

⁴³ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979).

⁴⁴ Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology* 10 (1982): 35-47; *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976).

⁴⁵ Alan R. Johnson, *Apostolic Function in 21st Century Missions*. J. Philip Hogan World Missions Series 2 (Springfield, MO: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2009).

⁴⁶ Tite Tienou and Allan Yeh, *Majority World Theologies: Theologizing from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Ends of the Earth* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2018).

⁴⁷ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP Academic, 2006).

⁴⁸ Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010).

⁴⁹ Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁰ Ralph D. Winter, "Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions: Modern Mission," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (3d. ed.; ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne; Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1999), 253-261.

⁵¹ The spiritual and cultural development of the Burkina Faso Assemblies of God has continued to the present. Over the last few decades the church has leaped over ethnocentric bounds and religious prejudices to plant indigenous churches among every people group in the country. Many Muslims have come to saving faith in Jesus Christ and are pastoring and planting churches among their own and other tribal units.

⁵² Through the influence of training, we believe we can equip men and women with skills, commitment, and vision to become more like Jesus in word, deed, and attitude, and encourage them to go beyond the current scope of the church to the peoples and regions of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Training with the goal of earning diplomas and degrees has never been the ultimate purpose for establishing Bible schools, but rather the increased capacity and commitment of national workers to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission (see Mark 3:14).

⁵³ According to the Joshua Project, there are 123 people groups in Ethiopia, 34 considered unreached. Of 110 million Ethiopians, 18% are classified as Evangelical. "Ethiopia: Joshua Project," [cited 1 November 2019]; online: <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/ET>.

⁵⁴ Bible schools must equip students with a sound hermeneutic, such as the grammatical-historical approach, that enables them to discover the intended meaning of the canon while integrating a Pentecostal hermeneutic that recognizes the necessity for Holy Spirit's discernment (charisma) to identify what the Spirit is speaking through the text to address the needs of the contemporary context.

⁵⁵ We have located some of our extension Bible schools in centers where tremendous revival is occurring. At the same time, we started a school in Djibouti, our Muslim neighbors to the east, to train both Ethiopians, Djiboutians, and Somalis in Bible and missions, and to catalyze and sensitize them to disciple their neighbors. In the future, we plan on establishing schools near the borders of Sudan and Eritrea from which trained emissaries can cross porous borders.

⁵⁶ In Ethiopia, with the help of Africa's Hope, we are translating Discovery Series materials into Amharic (the official language), Afan Oromo (the largest spoken language), Somali (one of the largest UPGs in Ethiopia), and Tigrinya (the language of Eritrea, a closed country on the northern border) and using these training materials as the curriculum to prepare missionaries and pastors to expand God's kingdom.