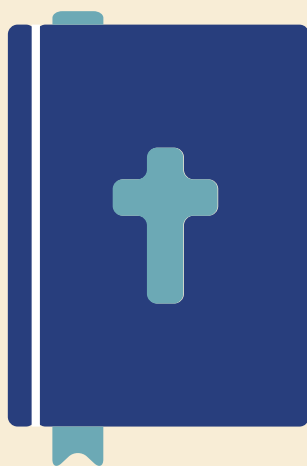
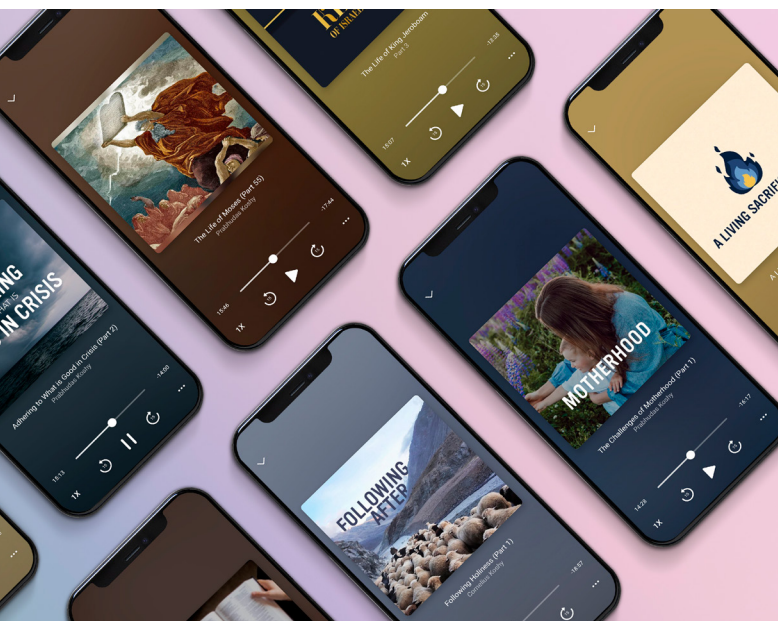


# Bible Witness

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THE  
GREAT COMMISSION



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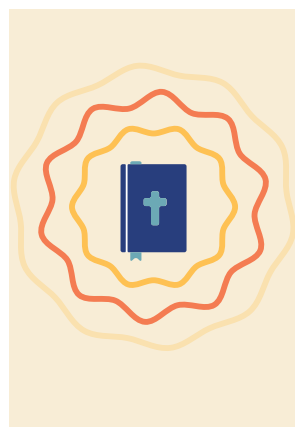
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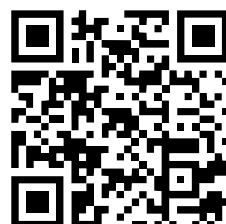
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—Mark 16:15

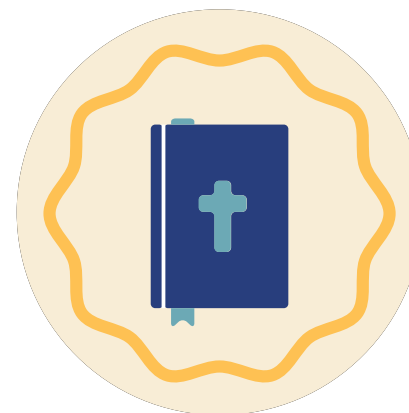


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# ALL POWER of CHRIST

MATTHEW 28:18

JOSHUA YONG



In Matthew 28:18–20, we have what is known as the Great Commission. This was the commission which Christ has given to His disciples, commanding them to go into all the world to preach the Gospel. This commission begins with Christ declaring the authority with which He sent forth His disciples unto the work of the Gospel—“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18).

As to the disciples who were going to establish the New Testament church, they knew they were going not with their own authority, which would have rendered it impossible for them to do the work of God. What authority would

they have in themselves? They could not have gone with the authority of a fisherman or a tax-collector, or as Jews. Why would Gentiles want to listen to them as Jews anyway? Yet the disciples were to go forth with authority. They were to speak with authority; they were to issue commands. They were to give the church direction, telling the people what they ought to do and not to do. They could only do so with Christ’s authority.

When we think of the work of the Gospel entrusted to us today, we too must understand the authority with which we preach the Gospel. It is not upon the authority of a paper degree or vast experience that we preach the Gospel, but upon the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ who has sent us forth, that we may preach. Understanding the authority that has commissioned us is so important and meaningful.

## Nature of Christ’s Authority

The first thing we note from Christ’s declaration in Matthew 28:18, is that “all power” has been given unto Him. The word “power” means “authority”; it describes the absolute authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The nature of Christ’s authority is that it is absolute and complete. This also means that Christ’s authority is the highest authority. Every form of authority on earth will have to account to a higher authority. Authority figures, such as parents and teachers, will still have to submit to the authority of the government in the land. Kings and rulers do not have absolute authority over all things, for

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they still have to account unto God. Christ submits only to God the Father and to no one else. As the only begotten Son of God, and being very God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ possesses the highest authority.

The power of the Lord Jesus Christ is an absolute authority that includes His right to rule, control and command. There are some positions of authority in this world that are not vested with power to rule, but are only a ceremonial authority. In some countries, there still exist kings and queens, though they have no actual power to govern or rule. Their kingship or queenship is an “empty” title. This is not so with the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Bible says that “all power” is given unto Christ, it describes an actual and absolute authority whereby Christ has the right to rule, govern and control all things.

The second thing we note from Matthew 28:18 is that the authority of Christ is over everything “in heaven and in earth”. What this tells us is that Christ has absolute authority over everything that is in heaven and in earth. There is no limit to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing beyond His reach or His right to rule, unlike the ruler of a country, who would have no authority over another country in which he does not sit as king. Such is the limitation of human authority. The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ extends over the whole creation; there is nothing that is outside His rulership. The Bible tells us that Christ has the authority to rule and judge all things (Ephesians 1:21–22a; John 5:27), including even the spiritual realm (cf. Mark 1:27)!.

## Examples of Christ's Authority

Let us explore some examples of the extent of Christ's authority.

### AUTHORITY IN TEACHING

At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, the Bible says in Matthew 7:29, that “he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” The scribes were scholars and had received much education, yet the Bible says that they were not able to teach with authority, for they had no basis for their authority. In contrast, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke and taught with authority. As the Son of God, Christ's words are words of authority; they are words of truth. There is no need to verify what Christ has spoken; nor is there a need to cross-examine Christ's words to see if they are accurate. Christ's words are words spoken in authority.

**As the Son of  
God, Christ's  
words are words  
of authority;  
they are words  
of truth.**

### AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS

As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ could (and did) exercise His authority to forgive sins. In Matthew 9, Christ healed a man who was sick of the palsy and forgave the sins of that man. When the scribes blasphemed against Him, Christ demonstrated His authority by healing that man and in so doing, demonstrated that as the Son of God, He has the power to forgive sins. “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house” (Matthew 9:6). Sin is an offence ultimately committed against God, and only God can forgive sins. As the Son of God, Christ has the authority to forgive sins.

### AUTHORITY TO GIVE LIFE

Moreover, Christ is not only able to forgive sins, He also has the authority to give life, even eternal life. In His High Priestly prayer, Christ declared, “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him” (John 17:2). God the Father has given Christ power (authority) over all mankind, that Christ should give eternal life to those whom God has chosen and given to Him. Christ has the authority to give eternal life because He has laid down His own life in sacrifice for (and thereby has purchased with His precious blood) those whom the Father has chosen (cf. John 10:18).

When the Great Commission is understood in the light of these truths, we see how wonderful and important it is to acknowledge Christ's authority

in our evangelism. We can preach and declare the Gospel because we do so in Christ's authority.

## Source of Christ's Authority

The Lord Jesus Christ has declared that all power “is given” unto Him. Our Lord was not granted authority as a servant or as a prophet, but as the only begotten Son of God. As God the Son, Jesus always does the will of the Father (John 5:19), and is thus to be honoured in the same way in which God the Father is honoured (John 5:23). It is based upon this Sonship, that the Lord Jesus Christ has been granted all power.

Christ's authority is also based on His authority as the Creator. The Lord Jesus Christ was the One who created the whole universe in the first place (Colossians 1:16), and is the One who ever sustains all things (Colossians 1:17). As such, He is to be given the pre-eminence over all things, and has the right to be the Head of the church (Colossians 1:18). Oh, what infinite authority He has!

That's not all. 1 Peter 3:22 says that Christ “is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.” The Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, was buried, and rose again on the third day. In so doing, He has accomplished and fulfilled God's redemptive plan. Having completed His work, Christ is ascended up to heaven. As the risen Lord who has ascended up to heaven, Christ has absolute authority and dominion for



all eternity. There are some whose authority lasts only for a limited period and which can be taken away, like a prime minister who loses his authority once he steps down from his position. But as the ascended Son of God who is seated on the right hand of God, Christ's authority and dominion is for ever!

## Conclusion

The Great Commission is a powerful commission. It is also a commission with a great responsibility involved—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15). As long as Christians go forth in the authority of Christ when they do God's work, they will be able to go in confidence and boldness. We know that when we preach the Gospel, sinners can receive the forgiveness of sins and obtain eternal life because Christ has the authority to fulfil these things. Here we find the source of strength for our evangelism. We do not declare our own words; we know that the Gospel we preach is not a message that is spoken in vain, for what we declare rests on the authority of Christ. ■

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# HOW THEN SHALL WE GO?

EPHREM CHIRACHO

Faithful churches are planted, nurtured and propagated through Christians' commitment to the Great Commission (as given in Matthew 28:18–20). The Great Commission ought to be a life-time duty of every born-again Christian, for Christ has given us the direct and clear divine command: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19a). In this article, we are going to consider the question: "How then shall we go?" To fulfil our duty of preaching the Gospel to all humanity, we can "go" in three different ways.

## Ways of "Going"

First, we can "go" in our day-to-day living. As we live out our Christian convictions in our places of residence, work, study and leisure, we are "holding forth the word of life" (Philippians 2:16) unto people around us. As we walk in the steps of Jesus Christ, and be "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth", we demonstrate God's saving grace and



transforming power to our family members, friends and colleagues (cf. Matthew 5:13–16). When our virtuous conduct concurs with our verbal witness for Christ, we become a powerful message to the sinners around us. In such evangelism strategy, our very walk and talk bear compellingly upon the hearts and minds of our contacts. In this sense, every born-again believer obeys Christ's command to go and preach the Gospel. This approach gives vital opportunity for a one-to-one evangelism, which is a most effective method of drawing sinners unto Christ. When our contacts have questions and need more clarification, we can invite them to attend the church and talk to our leaders.

Second, we can “go” in teams of believers to visit our neighbourhoods and testify God's saving grace through Jesus Christ. This approach corresponds to the “Jerusalem” and “Judea” aspects of Acts 1:8. It is instructive to note Christ's example in sending His disciples, two by two, to preach the Gospel in different localities (Luke 10:1–11). The church has the responsibility to teach and train believers on how they share the Good News with the people living in their vicinities. We can bear witness through distribution of Gospel tracts, in addition to verbal communication of the message to those willing to hear. The mature believers may share the Gospel while others support in silent prayer. In this way, they support one another in the work, and also learn good skills and attitudes of witnessing Christ to non-believers. Such “teamwork” approach produces a sense of duty and shared responsibility for spreading the Good News of salvation.

Finally, the church ought to send spiritually qualified missionaries to “go” for local as well as foreign missions. The church must pray unto God and look out for able and called disciples of Christ who are ready to go for the full-time work of missions (Matthew 9:37–38; cf. Acts 13:1–4). Meanwhile, other believers work with them through prayer and financial support for mission work (cf. Ephesians 6:18–20; Philippians 4:18). In this respect, the sending church must ensure that the would-be missionaries are qualified for this divine work of bringing sinners unto Christ.

## Spiritual Qualities of a Missionary

Obvious as it is, we have to check for the basic Christian virtues which are vital for the success of Christian missions. A potential missionary must be:

### A BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIAN

One of the difficulties that the church faces today is finding a truly born-again Christian for missionary work. If a missionary is not born-again, how can he bring others to believe in Jesus? A natural man cannot understand the mystery of salvation; neither can he exhibit a transformed life to the people whom he evangelises (cf. Romans 2:17–24). This makes the Gospel mission unproductive.

### A CALLED CHRISTIAN

God calls and sends His chosen servants into world missions (John 20:21; cf. Acts 9:15; 13:1–4). Jesus charged His disciples

to pray to God that He may send forth labourers into mission fields (Matthew 9:38). A missionary must be a Christian who is called and sent by “the Lord of the harvest”. When believers have a definite call unto global missions, they will patiently endure every hardship in order to fulfil their duties (cf. Acts 20:19–24). They will also have a strong passion for the salvation of souls, and persistent enthusiasm to evangelise sinners by even forgoing their rights and comforts (cf. John 4:31–34). Thus, a Christian who considers going for missions must ascertain his calling unto this difficult yet vital work.

### A COMMITTED CHRISTIAN

A true missionary is dead to self and worldly passions. Jesus declared, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Unreserved

and unconditional commitment to Jesus Christ is the greatest quality of missionaries. Such commitment helps them to despise worldly gains (cf. Matthew 16:26), and motivates them to forgo comforts of the body as they serve Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:11–12).

A true missionary aims not at pleasing people. Rather, he is committed to glorify Christ at all times (cf. Galatians 1:10). Paul was committed to faithfully preach the message of the Cross, which has the divine power to save sinners (1 Corinthians 1:18–24; cf. Romans 1:16). His fervent love for Christ was the cause and motivation of all his efforts to win people to Christ, and build up believers till they reach the fullness of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:12–13).

### A PRAYERFUL CHRISTIAN

A true missionary is a prayerful Christian. Jesus has shown the inseparable link between prayer and success in Christian missions (Matthew 9:37–38). He commanded the apostles to wait upon God until they would receive divine power for their missions (Luke 24:49). And when the day of Pentecost was come, while they were praying, God poured out His Spirit upon them (Acts 2:1–4). The Holy Spirit's power equipped them to preach the Gospel of the risen Christ to the hostile Jews, and many believed in Jesus and were added unto the church (Acts 2:37–41). And when persecution and opposition increased against their missions, the disciples prayed to God for help and intervention, with the result that they received more strength, wisdom and courage to declare the saving truth of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:18–33). Indeed, without being prayerful,

The church must pray unto God and look out for able and called disciples of Christ who are ready to go for the full-time work of missions.

a missionary can do nothing with lasting spiritual impact.

### **A KNOWLEDGEABLE CHRISTIAN**

A missionary must have profound knowledge of God's Word. This enables him to explain the Gospel message confidently, clearly and logically. A knowledgeable minister will be able to teach and preach God's Word effectively to nurture believers and make disciples of Christ (1 Timothy 4:11–16). Sound biblical knowledge also enables the missionary to defend biblical doctrines against attacks of sceptics and cultists. That is why Christ taught and trained the apostles for three years (cf. Mark 3:13–14).

Needless to say, it certainly helps if Christian missionaries also get to know the culture and language of the people unto whom they would preach the Gospel. This helps them to communicate the message effectively and courteously. When a missionary understands and respects the culture of a people group, it opens their hearts to the saving message of Christ (cf. Acts 17:22–34).

### **A BELIEVING CHRISTIAN**

Saving sinners who are spiritually dead and blind (cf. Ephesians 2:2–3; 2 Corinthians 4:3–4) requires the power of the Holy Spirit, no less. Unless God intervenes supernaturally, sinners cannot understand or believe the message of the Gospel (Titus 3:5–7). Thus, a missionary who desires to win sinners unto Christ must trust completely in God's saving power, because what is impossible with men is possible with God (Matthew 19:26).

Moreover, as missionaries go to hostile communities of people, they must trust God for the safety of their lives and families. Both Scripture and church history have shown that many missionaries were subject to deprivation, torture, imprisonment and even death! Yet, God's work of Gospel missions is continuing in the world—through men and women who trust God for enablement, protection and provision.

## **Conclusion**

The Great Commission is the most holy and urgent work which Christ has committed to His church. God requires His people to go to the world and preach forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ. The church must train believers for evangelism, pray to God, and carefully send would-be missionaries (after examining and ascertaining their spiritual qualification or fitness) for this divine work. May the Almighty God help us as we prepare ourselves to “go” for Gospel missions. Amen. ■

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# MAKING DISCIPLES by TEACHING

**SAMUEL JOSEPH**

The “Great Commission” (given in Matthew 28:18–20), as it is often called, comprises the Lord Jesus’ personal instructions to His church, delivered just before His ascension. It is bracketed by a reminder of His sovereign power and a reassurance of His gracious presence; and it includes a pattern for the missionary activity of the church through all the centuries before His return. The Great Commission is, therefore, nothing less than a statement of the church’s fundamental purpose and duty. Every member of every true church needs to know and understand the Great Commission, for any church neglecting these precepts is guilty of disobedience to the Lord.

The centre of the Great Commission is the command to “teach all nations”, or to “make disciples of all nations”. This implies a faithful declaration of the Gospel, such that sinners are **instructed** as to the



fundamental truths of man's depravity, God's mercy, and Christ's atonement. It implies also an earnest appeal, such that those same sinners are **invited** to repent and obey the Gospel, in order to receive God's gracious salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is in this way—by an appeal to the whole man (both mind and heart)—that disciples may be won for the Lord and His kingdom. Sadly, however, there are those today whose focus has shifted from “making” to “counting”. The growth of the church has for them become a numerical rather than a spiritual endeavour; its success measured by hands raised at an altar call, rather than hearts truly transformed for the glory of God. There is a need for us to return to the biblical teaching on this subject.

## True Disciple-Making Emphasised

Anyone engaged in the mission to “make disciples” would do well to pay heed to the following sober warning of Christ: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21–23).

We ought certainly to examine ourselves, upon hearing these words—

“Will I be one of those ‘many’, whose false profession will be exposed on that day?” But in the light of our present subject, there is another question that ought to be prompted by these same words—a question respecting not just our own claims to know the Lord, but also those souls we claim to have won for Christ. Those accustomed to boast (even inwardly) of the number of people they have led in the so-called “sinner’s prayer”, or the number of people they have baptised, would do well to ask themselves: “How many of these ‘disciples’ whom I have ‘made’ will be among the ‘many’ here condemned by the Lord?” This is a snare into which many have fallen, who mistakenly suppose that the “hard truths” of the Gospel should be “softened”, in order to make God’s offer more palatable to sinful men, and so to persuade more to “believe”.

Dear Christian, let us recognise and acknowledge that when the Lord commands us to “make disciples”, He certainly intends for us to make **true** disciples, not *false* ones! It is precisely for this cause that Gospel invitation must go hand-in-hand with Gospel instruction. We need not fear that God’s elect will be turned away by the truth, for the Lord Himself has promised, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

## True Disciple-Making Exemplified

Thus, we find the Lord Himself far from being quick to acknowledge those who appeared to believe in Him. Early in His ministry, we are told that “many

believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did” (John 2:23). Yet immediately the apostle John adds, “But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man” (John 2:24–25).

On another occasion, we read: “As he spake these words, many believed on him” (John 8:30). Yet here also, the Lord immediately warns them, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32). Jesus did not assume that their “belief” was true, but exhorted them to **continue** in obedience to His Word. Then, and only then, would their faith be demonstrated. Then, and only then, could they be assured of freedom from the bondage of sin. (And indeed, by the end of that chapter, we find these so-called believers attempting to stone the Lord (John 8:59)!)!

To be sure, this importance of **instructing** sinners in the truths of the Gospel, before **inviting** them to believe, was recognised by the apostles from the beginning. As they themselves began to carry out the Great Commission, we find in their Gospel preaching a wealth of biblical doctrine, and a faithful declaration of the very truths that would make many “well-meaning” but ill-instructed Christians today cringe.

When Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost, he declared to the Jews that they had wickedly murdered Jesus (Acts 2:23), who is “both Lord and Christ” (v. 36). He then expounded the truth of the resurrection (vv. 24–32), and

called on those assembled to “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Furthermore, “with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). This was hardly a message calculated to soothe the sinner’s ear! Here was no vain talk of God’s “broken heart”, nor empty promises of health and wealth. Here instead was a full-orbed pronouncement of man’s gross sinfulness and God’s gracious salvation. But praise be to God, there were “about three thousand souls”, who “gladly received his word (and) were baptized” (Acts 2:41)! These showed the fruits of a genuine conversion, in that “they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

## Conclusion

The Lord has commanded His church to teach sinners the truth—the whole truth—of the Gospel, and this is what we must do. We must make true disciples: and true disciples are those who bow the knee in humble acknowledgment that it was all of grace, for they of themselves deserve nothing but condemnation. ■

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# THE GLOBAL OUTLOOK

MATTHEW 28:19a

CORNELIUS KOSHY

In the Great Commission injunction, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations”, what does “all nations” refer to? We, who live in the 21st Century, understand the boundaries of a country to be delineated by national lines, similar to the demarcation lines drawn on a map. In some cases, these national lines fall along natural geographical barriers like rivers, seas or mountains, while in other cases, these lines come in the form of man-made walls or barbed-wire fences. Notwithstanding the difference in the definition of “nations” in biblical times and the modern idea of “nations” today, Jesus was undoubtedly insisting on an **international perspective** when it comes to the Gospel work. There would hardly be a need for Jesus to command, “Go!” if the mission can be accomplished within one’s region. The Gospel work can never stop at being a local work. Christians must go to the regions beyond, and the local work must grow to a global Gospel work!

## “Ethnos” as Used in the New Testament

The Greek word translated as “**nations**” comes from the root word (*ethnos*), from which we get the English word “ethnicity”. Depending on its context, “*ethnos*” can refer to one of four terms: “Gentiles” (as opposed to Jews), “nation”, “heathen”, or simply “people”. These terms often emphasise the *non-Jewish* and unbelieving nature of the people highlighted.

Interestingly, out of its 164 occurrences in the New Testament, Paul uses “*ethnos*” on six occasions to refer to Gentile believers, whereby the word is employed to highlight their non-Jewish heritage (cf. Romans 11:13, 15:27; Galatians 2:12, 14; Ephesians 3:1, 6).<sup>1</sup> On one occasion, Peter uses “*ethnos*” to refer to the body of believers who are called to be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation (*ethnos*), a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Apart from such rare references to believers, the word “*ethnos*” commonly refers to **unbelievers**, and is translated as one of the aforementioned four terms to emphasise their categorisation by race (“**Gentiles**”), or by political entity or language enclave (“**nation**”), or by their religion (“**heathen**”), or indiscriminately as an unbelieving “**people**”. Thus, Jesus was commissioning His disciples to preach the Gospel to all the unbelieving people, regardless of their ethnicity, language or religion. The word “nations” is an all-encompassing term to indicate all tribes and clans, all language and dialect-communities, all colonies and empires, all countries and kingdoms, as target recipients of the Gospel commission.

Now, unlike the modern set-up of nations, the political world of the New Testament, being largely in the hands of the Roman Empire, was divided into provinces, where the respective governors presided over the administrative matters thereof. At its

<sup>1</sup> One clear example is in Galatians 2:12, which records that Peter “did eat with the Gentiles (*ethnos*)”. Because Peter feared the backlash of the Jewish Christians, who insisted on the rite of circumcision, he separated from the Gentile Christians.

peak, the Roman Empire provinces spanned from the English Isles all the way to Northern Africa. These provinces were also referred to as “nations” (*ethnos*), as alluded to by Luke in Acts 2:5—“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation (*ethnos*) under heaven.” Luke then mentioned men hailing from approximately 16 different provinces under the Roman Empire (such as Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia), who had gathered in Jerusalem and had heard the apostles declaring “the wonderful works of God” in their own tongues (Acts 2:6–11).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Israel was also understood to be a “nation” in the land governed by the Roman Empire. This is corroborated by the apostle John when he records the speech of Caiaphas, the high priest, who referred to Israel as a “nation” (*ethnos*) in John 11:48–52.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the idea of “nations” (which, as mentioned, is an all-encompassing term) would include all kinds of communities that are divided according to political, social-cultural, and language lines.

## An International Mission Work

From Pentecost onwards, the movement of the Gospel from the city of Jerusalem (Acts 2:5), which is in the province of Judaea (Acts 2:14), and then to Samaria

(Acts 8:4), which is another region in the nation of Israel, illustrates that the spreading of the Gospel was intra-national before it became international. Only after the Gospel had spread within the nation of Israel, did Paul begin his missionary journeys “unto the uttermost part of the earth”, under the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:4ff). This is explained by Paul as the Gospel being given “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). It therefore stands to reason, biblically speaking, that the Gospel must be taught to all ethnicities and communities within a nation, and also to every nation—especially to the ears of the unbelieving in their own native tongues.

Clearly, the Gospel mission is (as delineated in the Great Commission) an international mission work. This is corroborated by both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God promised Abraham that “in thy seed shall all the **nations** of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). The New Testament further confirms the international outlook of the Gospel: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all **nations** (*ethnos*) be blessed” (Galatians 3:8). Indeed, there is no greater blessing (not even economic prosperity) that can befall a nation than the spiritual blessing of the Gospel when it is preached and received by faith.

## All—To the Exclusion of None

The adjective in the phrase “all nations” needs little explanation. No nation is to be excluded from the Gospel commission. No ethnicity should be deemed inferior or unintelligent for the Word of God. No community of people should be prevented from having access to the Gospel and the Word. In fact, language is not a barrier when it comes to the Gospel work. Preachers and missionaries must believe in the power of God (cf. Acts 1:8) to help them learn a foreign language, for if the native tongue is not learned, how would the Gospel be taught to “all nations” and (by inference) all tongues?

While it is true that English is the lingua franca of our world today, there are still many ethnicities which speak only in their native tongue. Translation efforts of the Bible and biblical literature are much needed endeavours in the mission field. For “how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” (Romans 10:14). “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

As Charles Wesley has famously penned,

O, for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer’s praise!  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of His grace!  
My gracious Master and my God,  
Assist me to proclaim,  
To spread through all the earth abroad  
The honors of Thy name.

No church should be content with a single mission work in a single country, especially since most countries today have a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual society. Indeed, God’s Word must be taught to every nation. Every unbeliever from every ethnicity, culture and language must be given the Gospel, and it is the Christians’ duty to fulfil this global commission! “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.” Amen. ■

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<sup>2</sup> Peter also writes to the Jewish Christians scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1), which are found in modern-day Turkey.

<sup>3</sup> Caiaphas was determined to put Jesus to death, for the Jewish leaders saw Jesus as a political threat. Caiaphas thus desired to protect the “nation” of Israel from perishing under the hands of the Romans. In fact, Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus would not only die for “that nation”, in reference to Israel, but also for all “that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52).

# BAPTIZING THEM

MATTHEW 28:19b

PRABHUDAS KOSHY

## Authority for Baptism

Baptism is one of the evident and emphatic elements of the Great Commission that Christ has given to His church. With the absolute authority He has over everything “in heaven and in earth”, Christ stipulates that all who respond in faith and obedience to the preaching of the Gospel of Christ and become His disciples, ought to be baptized. For He has declared, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...” (Matthew 28:18–19).

By virtue of His shed blood in His death on the cross to redeem His people and His resurrection from the grave, Jesus now wields full authority from the Father to institute baptism as a sign of the new covenant He has made with His redeemed people. With the ushering in of the church age, Christ, via the Great Commission, commanded baptism to be administered “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”.

for the remission of sins, and [they] shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Undoubtedly, baptism not only signifies the remission of sins (through the atoning work of Christ), it also signifies our glad and personal acceptance of the atonement of Christ accomplished on the cross (cf. v. 41a).

## Covenantal Nature of Baptism

It is instructive to note that Peter further went on to affirm that “the promise is **unto you, and to your children**, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). It is thus clear that this new covenantal

## Obligatory Practice of Baptism

All Christians are required to be baptized. While baptism is neither a means of salvation nor a meritorious rite that grants salvation, it is required of every Christian as an outward sign of repentance and faith in Christ. All who belong to Christ must obey the Lord’s command to be baptized. In fact, evidenced by command and example in the New Testament, this ecclesiastically obligatory practice of baptism (as stipulated in the Great Commission) extends to the baptism of the young children of those whom the apostles would disciple.

In the apostolic period, all those who believed in the Gospel preached by the apostolic team were baptized as they joined the church. We read in Scripture that “they that gladly received his (Peter’s) word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). Earlier on that historic day of Gospel-preaching in Jerusalem, Peter had exhorted them to “Repent and be baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ

All who belong  
to Christ must  
obey the Lord’s  
command to be  
baptized.



promise of the Gospel—ratified by its outward sign of baptism—is (as asserted by Peter) offered to believers, including their children. Undeniably, baptism of the believers and their children was practised in the New Testament churches, as evidenced by the household baptisms recorded in Scripture—Cornelius and his family (cf. Acts 10:2, 48), Lydia and her family (cf. Acts 16:15), the Philippi jailor and his family (cf. Acts 16:32–33), Stephanas and his family (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:16).

Just as circumcision is the covenant sign in the Old Testament, so baptism serves as the covenant sign in the New Testament. Both are symbols of God’s gracious gift of faith and salvation, administered under the two covenants respectively. What is noteworthy is that, like circumcision, baptism is

also administered to households of believers, as corroborated by Scriptural evidence. This is a biblical fact not to be overlooked, which is affirmed by the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), stating, “Not only those that do actually profess faith in, and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized” (WCF, chapter 28, paragraph 4). ■

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*(Editor’s note: God willing, a detailed discussion of water baptism and its theological significance, symbolisms, and issues stemming from its mis-notions will be published in a later issue of the Bible Witness Magazine.)*



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# TEACHING THEM to OBSERVE

MATTHEW 28:20a

SUJITH SAMUEL



## True Teaching Entails Believers “To Observe”

The Great Commission includes an injunction to teach believers to observe all things which Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:20a). It goes without saying that a person must put faith in Christ first, in order to meaningfully observe the commandments the Lord has given. As the Word of God says, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). By nature, we don’t choose to observe any commandment of God. Only when we have heard the Gospel and received it, then the Holy Spirit works in us to change “the stony heart” to “an heart of flesh” (cf. Ezekiel 36:26).

Thus, faith is a prerequisite for any person to meaningfully observe Christ’s commandments. If one doesn’t have faith in Christ and tries to observe Christ’s commandments, it will become a burden upon that one. One may show some desire to follow His commandments religiously, but it will not be a joyful experience. As Christ has said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30). Thus, a person must receive Christ and rest upon Him first, before

we can teach him to observe all things Christ has commanded.

Now, such teaching is not merely the teaching of some doctrinal truths. It should equip the followers “to observe” those truths. The Gospel teachers should ensure that the followers can apply the spiritual truths in their lives. Jesus, while teaching His disciples, saw to it that His teachings brought change in their lives. Those who learned under Him were able to see how Jesus Himself observed the commandments of God (cf. Matthew 5:17). Indeed, the apostles had a visible example in Christ Himself on how to observe God’s commandments. They also had the teaching pattern of Jesus to follow. Certainly, they were also keen to see

Faith is a  
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commandments.

believers applying God's Word in their lives. Paul told Barnabas, "Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do" (Acts 15:36). Undeniably, it was the apostle Paul's desire to see those who sat under his preaching ministry do well in their spiritual walk.

## Observe Christ's Commandments

In Matthew 28:20a, Christ obliges the church to teach believers "to observe ... whatsoever I have commanded you". Here Jesus emphasises that we should teach whatsoever He has commanded. Christ came from heaven to reveal God to man. In His public ministry on earth, He fulfilled the role of Prophet by revealing God's Word to His people. His teachings superseded all the teachings of the Old Testament prophets, including Moses. Many questioned Jesus' teachings, accusing Him of changing the laws given by Moses. But Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17).

However, sadly, many Jews were following the teachings of the Pharisees and scribes instead of following Christ and His teachings. They were blindly following the traditions and commandments of men. Any teaching contrary to Christ's teaching should be rejected by God's people. As Paul has exhorted, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be

accursed" (Galatians 1:8). In sending His disciples to preach His Word worldwide, Christ was again reminding them that they should not teach things contrary to what He has taught. Their commission was to make known His commandments throughout the world.

It is the duty of every minister to ensure that he proclaims what Christ has commanded. An ambassador or diplomat serving his nation is sent to speak on behalf of the government or ruler of that particular country. Such officials are expected to speak and act in the interests of the ruler of that sending nation. Likewise, as ambassadors sent by Christ to proclaim His Word, it is our duty to proclaim only what He has taught and commanded. In turn, it is the duty of believers to examine the teachings of the church and her ministers. Like the Berean Christians, we must search the Scriptures daily (cf. Acts 17:11), to ensure that the teaching we receive does not contradict the teachings or commandments of Christ.

## Observe All of Christ's Commandments

In Matthew 28:20a, Christ also told the disciples to equip believers to observe "all things" which He has commanded. While on this earth, Jesus upheld the whole counsel of God. He not only taught the whole law of God (cf. Luke 24:44), He also observed (obeyed) the whole law (cf. Romans 5:19; Galatians 4:4c; Philippians 2:8), for the express purpose of redeeming us. He has said, "For verily I say unto you, Till

heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:18-19).

Indeed, every commandment of Christ should be taught so that people will be equipped to observe all of Christ's commandments. We cannot pick and choose from the commandments of God according to our preferences. A young man once approached Jesus, claiming that he was observing all the commandments of God. Jesus asked him to sell all his possessions, "and give to the poor". But he "went away sorrowful" (cf. Matthew 19:16-22). This man didn't like the commandment which requires him to leave his possessions and follow Christ. Yet he considered himself as one who had been following all of God's commandments. But Christ exposed

his hypocrisy. As followers of Christ, we should take all teachings of Christ seriously and observe all of them.

The standard that the Lord expects from His followers in applying His commandments is nothing short of perfect. It is only by the grace of God that we can observe all things that Jesus has commanded. St Augustine famously said, "O Lord, command what you will and give what you command." The Lord has provided various means of grace to help us in observing all things He has commanded. We can make use of such helps that the Lord offers, like the Bible, prayer, sacraments, etc., to enable us to observe His commandments. He assures us of His help and presence in fulfilling His commandments. Thus, He added "and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:20b). ■

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# I AM WITH YOU ALWAY!

MATTHEW 28:20b

HO KEE HOW

The Great Commission issued by Jesus to His disciples (in Matthew 28:18–20) just before His ascension is literally Jesus’ first commandment to the N.T. church. It is the command to evangelise the unsaved world around us with the Gospel of Christ, with a view to establishing local communities of believers, where God’s Word is continually taught and held forth as “the word of life” (Philippians 2:16a) by God-appointed pastors and teachers in those local churches. The Great Commission is prefaced with Jesus’ promise of divine power (i.e. authority) granted to the church in her evangelistic endeavours—“All power is given unto me” (v. 18b). And it culminates in His assurance of divine presence—“I am with you alway” (v. 20b)—wherever the church is led to in her witness for Christ, both locally and abroad, i.e. “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”, in accordance with the Lord’s “evangelistic blueprint” for the church outlined in Acts 1:8.

Needless to say, without divine power, the local church will have no guarantee that the Gospel of Christ can have free course in this hostile world. Similarly, without divine presence, Christ’s disciples will doubt their prospect of “success” in their evangelistic outreach. Indeed, this assurance of Christ’s unfailing spiritual presence gives the church the undergirding confidence that the Lord will not only **lead and guide** in opening Gospel doors for the preaching of the Gospel to precious souls, but will also **protect and preserve** His messengers in their God-sanctioned evangelistic or missionary pursuits.

## Divine Presence Assures God’s Guidance and Leading

A telling biblical example of God’s guiding presence in the opening of Gospel doors is seen in the episode concerning the apostle Paul’s first Gospel foray into continental Europe. True, God’s wonder-working grace works in the hearts of His elect through “hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Yet, before their hearts can be “opened” by the convicting power of God’s Word, God must first open a door for His messenger to preach the Gospel (cf. Romans 10:14–15). How the Gospel gained a foothold in “Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia” (Acts 16:12) presents stirring evidence of God’s leading of His servants in their carrying out of the Great Commission.

The backdrop is Paul’s second missionary journey, whose purpose was to strengthen the fledgling faith of new believers in those local churches established within the central Asia Minor provinces (of Pamphylia, Phrygia and Galatia) during his first missionary journey—thereby “confirming the churches” (Acts 15:41; cf. 15:36), with great success (Acts 16:5). However, after they had gone throughout Phrygia and Galatia, for some undisclosed reason, Paul and his team were “**forbidden** of the Holy Spirit” to proceed westward into the province of Asia (i.e. the western coast of Asia Minor) “to preach the word” (Acts 16:6). The Greek word used here means they were “hindered” from carrying out their evangelistic



endeavours—possibly due to some political upheaval or tumultuous uproar by the unbelieving masses. Their only option was to continue northward to Mysia, after which they “assayed to go (northeastward) into (the province of) Bithynia” (v. 7a). The Greek word used here indicates that they had “made plans and attempted to explore” the feasibility of a Gospel advance there. Again, “the Spirit suffered them not” (v. 7b), which hinted at inaccessibility to the region—possibly due to travel routes being closed or the forbidding terrain in that region. Consequently, “they passing by Mysia came down to Troas” (v. 8).

Be that as it may, Christ’s assurance—“lo, I am with you alway”—must have been resounding in Paul’s mind. “A

**The Lord will not only lead and guide in opening Gospel doors for the preaching of the Gospel to precious souls, but will also protect and preserve His messengers.**

man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). In all these, God’s providential Hand was at work. When all doors were closed for further Gospel-work in Asia Minor, the stage was set for Paul’s missionary foray into Europe. Upon receiving the “Macedonian call” in a night vision at Troas, Paul and his team “came with a straight (unhindered) course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi (which is in modern Greece)”, having assuredly gathered that the Lord had called them to preach the Gospel there (vv. 9–12). And what fruitful ministry Paul had at Philippi! At least four significant occurrences came to pass through the carrying out of the Great Commission there:

- The conversion of Lydia and her household, and the consequent extending of hospitality to house Paul’s missionary team (vv. 13–15);
- the deliverance of a demon-possessed slave-girl (vv. 16–18);
- Paul’s encounter with the Philippi jailor, resulting in the salvation of him and his entire household (vv. 25–34);
- a flourishing and missions-supportive church (cf. Philippians 4:10, 14–16) being established right in Lydia’s house (v. 40).

Paul’s endeavours in Philippi would in turn serve as a “launching pad” for the Gospel’s forays into Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth (in Greece) and Rome (in Italy). And over the ensuing centuries, the Gospel would continue to spread further inland, through

efforts of succeeding generations of missionaries (in obedience to the Great Commission), into the heart of continental Europe—Germany, France, Spain, England, Scotland—and the rest is (church) history! Truly, in the fulfilling of the Great Commission in their lives, God’s messengers can have this assurance of Christ’s unfailing presence—“lo, I am with you alway”—in leading them to open doors for their Gospel work.

## **Divine Presence Assures God’s Preservation and Protection**

In commanding His disciples to “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel” (Mark 16:15), promising that “I am with you alway”, Jesus is also assuring His disciples that He will be with them in all circumstances, even protecting and preserving their lives when faced with danger or harm in their God-appointed discharge of their evangelistic responsibilities. A stirring biblical example of this can be seen “played out” in the eventful voyage recorded in Paul’s journey towards Rome in Acts 27 (in what is also known as Paul’s fourth missionary journey).

The apostle Paul had been falsely accused by the Jewish leaders of breaking the sacred laws of Judaism, and had appealed to Caesar, being a Roman citizen himself (cf. Acts 25:10–11). Thus, he found himself on board a ship (together with certain other prisoners) sailing towards Rome, under

Roman soldiers’ escort (Acts 27:1). They met a violent storm en route, which lasted for days, causing them to lose “all hope that [they] should be saved” (v. 20). Indeed, they were later shipwrecked off a remote island! Against all odds, all 276 souls on board the doomed ship (cf. v. 37) managed to escape safely to the island called Melita (present-day Malta), without a single casualty, vindicating Paul’s divinely-revealed claim that none of the passengers and crew would perish for Paul’s sake (cf. vv. 22–25). For it was God’s will that Paul should testify before Caesar for the Gospel’s sake.

Humanly speaking, one of several other scenarios could have happened. The crew could have abandoned ship and jumped into the apparently shallow sea, and hence each for his life, had it not been for Paul’s counsel against such dangerous folly (vv. 30–32). The Roman soldiers could have killed all the prisoners before swimming to shore, so as to prevent any prisoner from escaping, if not for the centurion’s merciful command against it (vv. 42–43)—no doubt moved and struck by the stirring, inspiring testimony of Paul. Without a doubt, we see God’s invisible preserving Hand in controlling every minute detail of human intentions, motivations, actions and reactions, as well as the elements of weather and circumstances. In all these, Paul could certainly affirm that God was with him alway, yea, even in the midst of the tempestuous storm!

That’s not all. Though physically safe (having survived the shipwreck), the large group of “refugees” knew that the sheer logistics of housing them temporarily and feeding them (until



they could get another ship to set sail again) would be a great challenge and burden, not to mention the sanitary and hygienic arrangement for this great company. But the sovereign God had already moved the hearts of the island natives to show compassionate hospitality to them, for “the barbarous (native) people shewed [them] no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received [them] every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold” (Acts 28:2). Even when later Paul, in helping to gather sticks to kindle the needful fire, was suddenly bitten by a venomous viper, he somehow remained unharmed (Acts 28:3–6)—a manifestation of God’s protection of His messenger. Surely, throughout all these, Jesus’ assurance that “I am with you always”—through thick and thin—must have reverberated in Paul’s mind all those three months in Melita (cf. Acts 28:11)!

## The Lord Doth Go with Thee

To put things in spiritual perspective, it has consistently been God’s will for Paul to testify before Caesar (cf. Acts 23:11; 27:23–24). As long as God’s time for His servant is not yet up, His spiritual presence will assure His preservation and protection of His messenger in fulfilling the Great Commission. In fact, while awaiting trial before Caesar, God gave the apostle Paul a most fruitful and fulfilling Gospel ministry. While being confined in the city of Rome under house arrest, “Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of

God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:30–31)!

Dear church, like Paul, we can be sure of the Lord’s presence when we “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5c). God, in opening Gospel doors for His church, will not only enable and sustain His messengers, He will also protect and preserve them as well (if He so wills). We should neither fear nor doubt—“for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Deuteronomy 31:6). This echoes Jesus’ assurance, “lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Greek: *aiōnos*)” (Matthew 28:20b), meaning to say, till the consummation of the (church) age! Amen. ■

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### Answers to Bible Trivia —Deuteronomy 4 (Vol. 22, Iss. 5, p. 31)

**Part A:** v. 1—statutes, judgments, harken; v. 2—commandments, add, diminish; v. 6—wisdom, understanding, keep, do; vv. 8–9—law, forget, depart, teach; v. 13—covenant, perform

**Part B:** v. 24—consuming, jealous; v. 31—merciful; v. 35—none, beside; v. 39—heaven, earth

## BIBLE TRIVIA DEUTERONOMY 5 & 6

SARAH YONG

As Moses continued to exhort the Israelites before entering the Promised Land, he took pains to remind them of the commandments that the LORD had previously given them in Horeb, that is, Mt Sinai (Deuteronomy 5:1–6). He went on to reiterate the Ten Commandments.

**A. The Ten Commandments are listed below, though not in their order. Rearrange them by writing the numerals, 1 to 10, in the blanks before each statement (Deuteronomy 5:7–21).**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Thou shalt not kill.
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee.
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Neither shalt thou commit adultery.
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Honour thy father and thy mother.
- \_\_\_\_\_ e. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image... thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ f. Neither shalt thou steal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ g. Thou shalt have none other gods before me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ h. Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour.
- \_\_\_\_\_ i. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.
- \_\_\_\_\_ j. Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's.

**B. The first four Commandments can be summarised by Deuteronomy 6:5. Complete the verse by filling in the missing words.**

And \_\_\_\_\_ shalt \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ thy \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ thine \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
and with \_\_\_\_\_ thy \_\_\_\_\_ , and with \_\_\_\_\_ thy \_\_\_\_\_ .

**C. Verses similar to Deuteronomy 6:5 appear 3 times in the New Testament. Their Bible references (indicating only the books and chapters) are given below. Find out and complete them by filling in the verse.**

Matthew 22: \_\_\_\_\_ Mark 12: \_\_\_\_\_ Luke 10: \_\_\_\_\_



# Katharina von Bora

(1499–1552)

## Part I

Retold by Jenny Lok  
Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

It was Easter eve in 1523.  
Katharina, dressed in black from head to toe,  
stood in a dark corner of the convent at  
Marienthron in Nimbschen, Germany.

Next to her was a grand old tree with its huge branches  
swaying in the breeze. Katharina shivered slightly,  
partly from fear and partly due to the cold night air.

However, she was not alone. Together with  
her were 11 other nuns who were in similar  
attire, each with her bag of belongings  
clutched tightly to her chest.

They kept staring at the side gate to their right, seemingly  
waiting for something or someone to appear.

Katharina turned around to take a final look at  
the imposing ancient convent, where she had  
spent 14 years of her life. This was, in fact,  
not the first convent she had lived in.

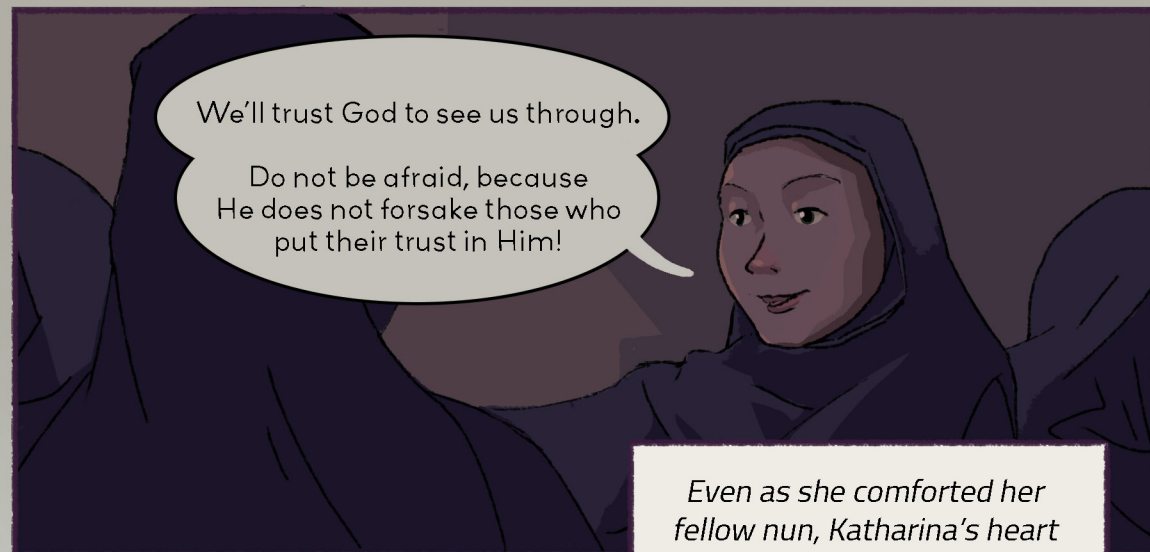
In 1504, at the age of five, Katharina's father sent her to the Benedictine  
convent school at Brehna after her mother's death. Though their family  
belonged to the nobility, they were, in reality, rather poor and therefore,  
Katharina's father struggled to provide for his family. Like many parents in  
those days, he saw the convent life as a way to provide both education and  
a home for his daughter, especially so after his remarriage.

About four years later, Katharina was transferred to the present convent at  
Marienthron, where two of her aunts (who were nuns) were residing.  
There, she was taught reading, writing and some Latin.

When she turned 16, she had no choice but to take the vows of a nun, for she  
had no home to go back to because her father had "abandoned" her.  
Through her many years of convent life, she had learned to perform many  
tasks, such as "routine prayers, services, tending gardens, domestic chores",  
as well as needlework and attending to the sick and needy.



Katharina was so deep in thought that she did not realise that someone was trying to get her attention. Her fellow nun leaned over and whispered in her ear. Katharina smiled and patted her on the shoulder,



We'll trust God to see us through.

Do not be afraid, because He does not forsake those who put their trust in Him!

Even as she comforted her fellow nun, Katharina's heart was beating fast as the minutes ticked away.

This was the day they had been waiting for! Thank God for Martin Luther, the great Reformer! At the thought of Martin Luther, memories of the Reformation movement came flooding back – news of the Reformation movement had spread like wild fire in Germany and throughout Europe when Martin Luther, a former monk and university professor, nailed his 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church on 31 October 1517 to protest against the sale of indulgences (letters issued by the pope as pardons for sins) and the authority of the pope.

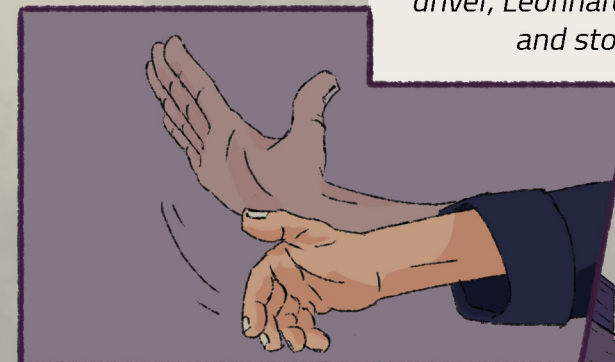


Luther's fame grew, and his teachings found their way into the Marienthron convent, possibly in their "small pocket-editions", which were said to have been smuggled into the convent.

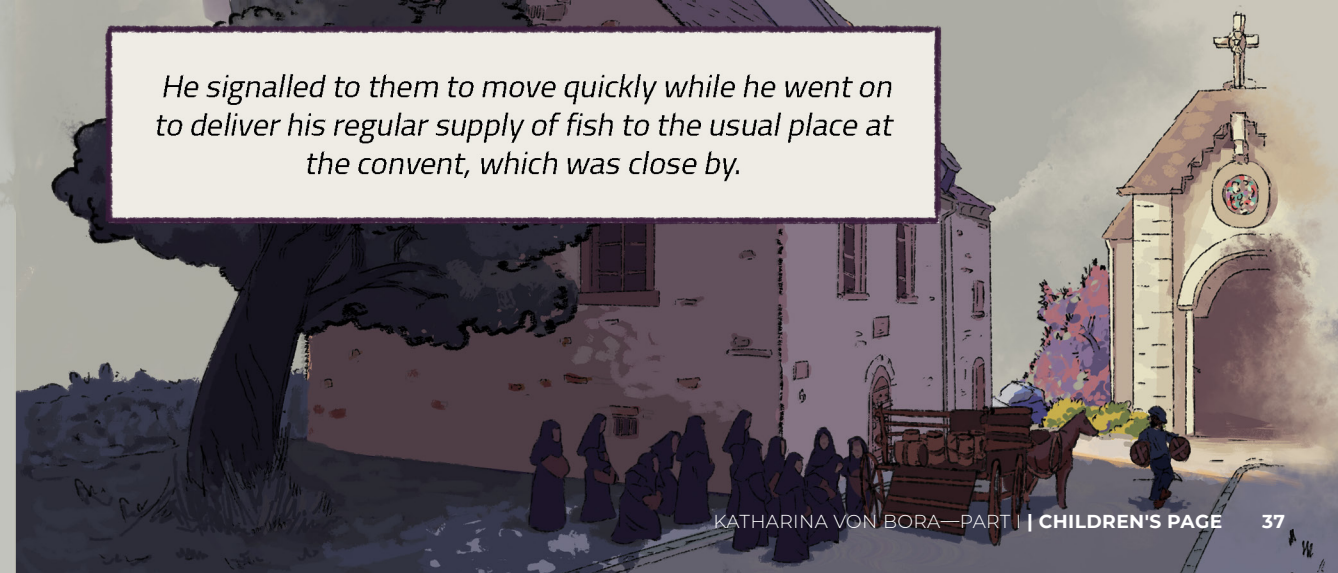
Katharina's mind drifted to the time when she and her fellow nuns were fascinated by what they had heard and read about Luther's teachings on salvation. All of a sudden, their eyes were opened to the truth: salvation comes from God; it is a gift from Him and cannot be obtained by good works, but only through faith in Christ alone, for "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17)! The nuns realised that they must renounce their vows and be obedient to God's Word.



The familiar "clip-clop" of a horse and the accompanying creaking sound of wagon wheels became louder as the driver, Leonhard Koppe, entered through the side gate and stopped where they were waiting.

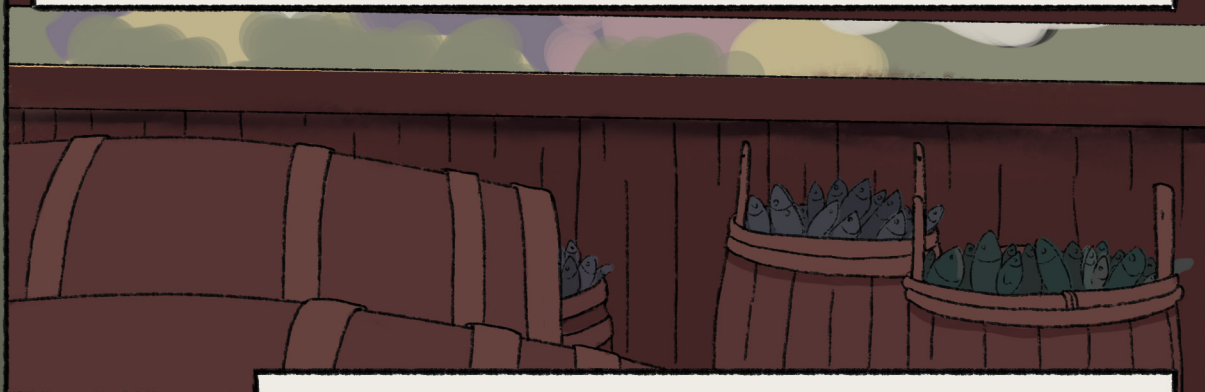


He signalled to them to move quickly while he went on to deliver his regular supply of fish to the usual place at the convent, which was close by.





*Quick as a flash, the nuns helped one another up the fish wagon as though they were racing against time. What a task it was to find a place to sit among the many fish barrels in the wagon!*



*Just when they had settled down, Leonhard Koppe came back.*



*Without a word, he took a huge piece of black cloth and covered the entire wagon. The nuns were instantly left in pitch darkness!*

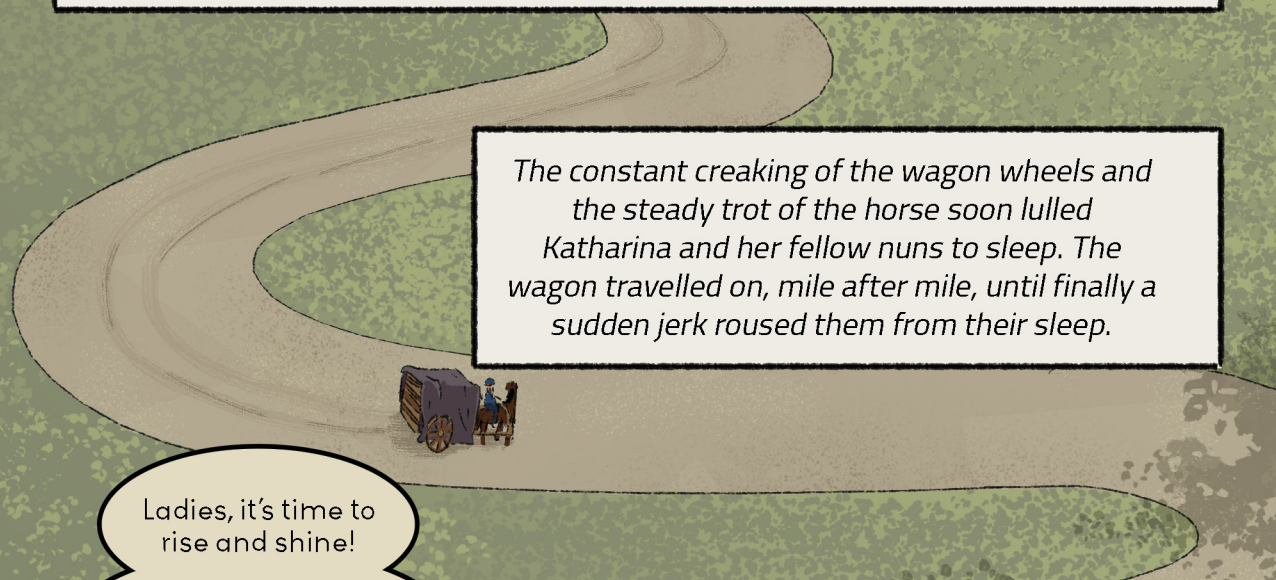
*A few seconds later, the nuns could sense that the wagon was moving forward. Katharina instinctively uttered a prayer to the Lord:*

*Oh, Lord, may thou be gracious to grant us a speedy and safe ride to Wittenberg to meet the Honourable Martin Luther who has agreed to help us escape from the convent.*

*Thank Thee for his kindness in responding to our desperate plea for help through our letter to him. Please keep our great Reformer from being arrested by the authorities for his part in this whole escape plan.*

*Have mercy on us, we pray.  
In Jesus' name, Amen!*

*By the time Katharina finished her prayer, the wagon was already out of the gate.*



*The constant creaking of the wagon wheels and the steady trot of the horse soon lulled Katharina and her fellow nuns to sleep. The wagon travelled on, mile after mile, until finally a sudden jerk roused them from their sleep.*

*Ladies, it's time to rise and shine!*

*Be ready to meet the renowned Martin Luther!*

*Leonhard Koppe's voice boomed out from the front of the wagon. Katharina rubbed her eyes. She could not believe that she was really in Wittenberg, about to meet their rescuer, Martin Luther! "Thank you, Lord! You have indeed answered our prayers!" Tears of joy and relief began to flow.*

*Leonhard Koppe, the driver came round to speak with them. With a solemn yet happy face, he told them, "Three of your companions have left you earlier to return home to their families. That leaves 9 of you. I wish you the very best. Now, I shall leave you with my dear friend, Martin Luther."*

*Martin Luther was truly glad to receive Katharina and her fellow nuns. He took it upon himself to have the nuns temporarily taken care of in the family homes of fellow Reformers.*

*To fully resolve the situation, he had three options for them: the first was to persuade their families to take them back; the second would be to find suitable employment for them; and the third was to have them married to respectable and godly men.*

*Unfortunately, none of the nuns could return to their families or relatives, who were simply too afraid of being punished by the authorities for harbouring the runaway nuns. For Katharina in particular, her relationship with her family had remained strained ever since she was sent to the convents at a young age. Moreover, her father was not willing to take her back after having started a new family...*





# HOW GREAT THOU ART!

## Bible Witness Desk and Wall Calendars 2023

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Have God’s Word at your desk, or hang the calendar on your wall. May the calendars bring to mind our mighty and wondrous God. Do purchase your calendars at [biblewitness.com/calendar-2023](http://biblewitness.com/calendar-2023).