

# Matthew, Paul and the origin and nature of the gentile mission: The great commission in Matthew 28:16-20 as an anti-Pauline tradition

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## Abstract

*The Great Commission at the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel is one of its key texts. In this tradition the risen Christ overturns the previous restriction of the mission to Israel alone and demands that the disciples evangelise all the nations. The gospel they were to proclaim included observance of the Torah by Jew and Gentile alike. Matthew's account of the origin and nature of the Gentile mission differs from Paul's view as it is found in the epistle to the Galatians. Paul maintains that he had been commissioned by the resurrected Lord to evangelise the Gentiles and that the gospel he was to preach did not involve obedience to the Torah. The later and alternative version of Matthew can be understood as an attempt by the evangelist to undermine these claims by Paul. Such an interpretation is consistent with Matthew's anti-Pauline polemic that emerges elsewhere in the Gospel.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is no denying that the Great Commission described by Matthew at the conclusion of his Gospel (Mt 28:16-20) is a scene of great power and majesty, and constitutes a fitting climax to his narrative (Davies & Allison 1997:687-689). Here the risen Christ appears to his disciples on a mountain in Galilee and solemnly proclaims that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. He then charges his followers to make disciples of all the nations

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(πάντα τὰ ἔθνη), instructing them to baptise new converts in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and to teach them to observe all that Jesus has commanded. The risen Lord sends them on this mission with the comforting words that he is with them always to the end of the age.

Given the complexity and theological richness of the Great Commission, it is only to be expected that it has attracted the keen attention of Matthean exegetes. Some scholars contend that Matthew has used the final pericope to emphasise some significant themes and to resolve certain tensions in his narrative (Davies & Allison 1997:687-688; Luz 2005:616), while others argue that these five concluding verses provide the key to the interpretation of the whole Gospel (Ellis 1968:22; Michel 1983:35). In terms of the origin of this passage, the large number of Mattheanisms it contains has led many to attribute it to the hand of the evangelist himself (e.g. Lange 1973:488-491; Kingsbury 1974:573-579; Gundry 1994:593-597). Not all scholars are convinced that this was the case, and they propose that Matthew 28:16-20 is a mixture of traditional material and Matthean redaction (e.g. Hubbard 1974:101-136; Meier 1977a:407-416; Schaberg 1982:313-335). The genre of the pericope too has long occupied the attention of scholars. While it has been argued that Matthew 28:16-20 conforms to the genre of Old Testament commissioning narratives (Hubbard 1974:1-136), other exegetes maintain that this passage defies simple categorisation (Meier 1977a:424; Luz 2005:618-619).

Apart from the questions of redaction and genre, certain motifs in this material have been at the forefront of discussion. Verse 18b has clear verbal contacts with the tradition of the Son of Man's empowerment in the Greek text of Daniel 7:13-14. There is some dispute, however, over the significance of this observation. Some scholars contend that the evangelist intended to depict the risen Christ as the empowered Son of Man (so Michel 1983:36-37; Schaberg 1982:111-141; Davies & Allison 1997:682-683), while others are not convinced (so Vögtle 1971:253-255; Luz 2005:619). A similar debate surrounds the influence of Mosaic typologies on this passage. Scholars such as D C Allison argue that the commissioning of the disciples in Matthew's final pericope recalls the Old Testament traditions describing Moses' commissioning of Joshua (Allison 1993:262-266; Davies & Allison 1997:679-680; cf Hubbard 1974:92-94). Ulrich Luz, however, has recently raised objections to this hypothesis (Luz 2005:619-620). Another important motif in this Matthean pericope is the triadic formula to baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Despite the witness of Eusebius who constantly quoted a shorter non-triadic form of this text ("Go and make disciples of all nations in my name"), it is generally accepted today that the longer triadic version, which is unanimously attested in all manuscripts, traces

back to the original Gospel (Hubbard 1973:151-175; Schaberg 1982:27-29; Davies & Allison 1997:684).

Of most relevance for the present study is the theme of the commissioning of the disciples to a universal mission. As Luz (2005:626-628) has noted the understanding of this tradition has changed dramatically over the centuries. In the early period it was considered that the command of the risen Christ was confined to the disciples alone, and legends arose in the church that they divided the world amongst themselves to conduct this mission. This view largely held sway until the late eighteenth century. From that time Matthew 28:16-20 was interpreted as a timeless command that was used to justify the expansion of Christian missionary activity in both Protestant and Catholic circles.

In Matthean scholarship this text is usually cited as the definitive evidence that the evangelist's community, despite its Jewish origins and orientation, was either engaged or beginning to engage in a concerted mission to the Gentiles. The Great Commission justifies this particular activity (Brown 1980:193-221; Meier 1983:60-63; Foster 2004:218-252). I have raised doubts previously about this interpretation which I will not repeat here (Sim 1998:236-246), but I will make a further point. By examining Matthew 28:16-20 only as a window into the missionary activity of the evangelist's church, scholars have ignored the possibility that Matthew was presenting his own view about the true origins of the Gentile mission. When we take seriously what he says about this issue, then new interpretative opportunities arise. Why does Matthew present the risen Christ charging the disciples with the responsibility for this mission? If the disciples are given exclusive charge of the Christian mission to all the nations, then what might the evangelist be saying about others who claimed to have some responsibility for and some authority over such a mission? Paul, to select an obvious example, also claimed to have been visited by the risen Christ and asserted that the responsibility for the Gentile mission was given exclusively to him. Could Matthew perhaps be responding to these Pauline claims? I have previously suggested that such might be the case (Sim 1998:247), but it is the purpose of the present study to provide more concrete evidence for this understanding of Matthew's intentions in the Great Commission.

## **2. MATTHEW AND PAUL**

The relationship between Matthew and Paul has never been at the forefront of Matthean studies. For the most part scholars have been content simply to ignore this question. This situation is rather striking in the light of the indisputable facts that Paul's controversial career must have made him universally known in the early church, and that Matthew wrote many decades after the time of Paul. We would expect that the evangelist would have known

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a good deal about the apostle and would have formed certain views about Paul and his theology. It is of course another question as to whether Matthew included his opinions about Paul in his narrative about Jesus of Nazareth, but it is one that scholars need to explore rather than ignore.

Not all scholars of course have overlooked this issue, and it is an interesting exercise to plot the course of this discussion over the last few decades (see Sim 2002:767-783). Over half a century ago, S G F Brandon argued that the evangelist was intensely anti-Pauline (Brandon 1957:232-237). Brandon's arguments were not altogether convincing (Sim 2002:769), and the many scholars who criticised it put forward their own view that Matthew and Paul, despite their differences, were actually quite close theologically (e.g. Davies 1966:325-366; Goulder 1974:154-170; Meier 1983:62-63). This viewpoint, however, tended to minimise the serious differences between these early Christians, and it was soon replaced by the alternative view that Matthew and Paul were theologically different but complementary (Marguerat 1981:212-235; Mohrlang 1984:126-132; France 1989:110-111; Sand 1991:159-160; Luz 1993:147-152). Yet this view also suffers from a fundamental flaw. By focusing on what modern Christian readers can extrapolate from the Pauline epistles and the Matthean Gospel, the emphasis on grace in the former and the emphasis on demand in the latter, it completely overlooks the intentions of Matthew himself (Sim 2002:772-774). Other recent scholars have opted for an alternative interpretation, which considers Matthew as neither pro-Pauline nor anti-Pauline. He is simply un-Pauline and represents an independent version of the Christian tradition (Stanton 1992:314).

In a number of different studies, I have attempted to resurrect the thesis of Brandon by refining and expanding his arguments. To this end I have contended that Matthew's major emphasis on the Torah sets him at odds with the Law-free position of Paul (Sim 1998:123-139), and that a number of Matthean texts (Mt 5:17-19; 7:13-27; 13:36-43; 16:17-19) were included and/or redacted in order to counter either the person or the theology of the apostle (Sim 1998:188-211; Sim 2002:774-781; Sim 2007:325-343). The Great Commission that concludes the Gospel can be added to the growing list of anti-Pauline Matthean texts.

### **3. PAUL AND THE GENTILE MISSION**

In order to do this, it is essential that the position of Paul be set out clearly. Paul provides clear testimony in Galatians as to his views concerning the origins of the Gentile mission and the specific nature of this mission. In this letter Paul is defending both his apostleship and his version of the Christian gospel against Christian Jewish missionaries who have infiltrated his churches

in Galatia. He does so by tracing his call to be an apostle as well as his particular gospel to his initial and dramatic encounter with the risen Christ (Dunn 1993:67-68; Martyn 1997:141-142, 149-150). Paul begins this epistle by establishing his credentials as an apostle; his apostolic status was conferred through Jesus Christ and God the Father, and was not derived from men or through any human agency (Gl 1:1). Paul expands upon this in Galatians 1:16-17 where he describes his call to apostleship. As an act of grace, God revealed his Son to Paul in order that he might preach Jesus among the Gentiles. In accordance with his initial claim that no humans were involved in this event, Paul states explicitly that he did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did he immediately visit the apostles in Jerusalem.

The apostle also makes it clear that the message he was to preach to the Gentiles was revealed to him at the same time. In Galatians 1:11-12 he contends that the gospel he preached in Galatia has no human origin; he did not receive it from any human nor was he taught it by any human. On the contrary, it was delivered to Paul through a revelation of Jesus Christ. The gospel to which Paul refers here is markedly different from that proclaimed by his Christian Jewish opponents in Galatia, and can be conveniently referred to as the “Law-free gospel” (Sim 1998:21-24). As the letter unfolds, the substance of this gospel is made clear. It is a message about Jesus the Christ which does not force the Gentiles to live like Jews (Gl 2:14) because justification comes from faith in Christ alone and not through works of the Law (2:15-3:17; cf Rm 3:20-30). The Torah is not against the promises of God and it was a legitimate custodian until the revelation of faith (Gl 3:21-24), but now that faith has been revealed with the coming of Christ the role of the Law as a custodian has come to an end (Gl 3:25; cf Rm 10:4). In Christ there is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile (Gl 3:28; cf Rm 10:12; 1 Cor 12:13). Consequently, the ritual practice of circumcision, the definitive sign of (male) Jewish identity, has no place at all in Paul’s version of the gospel (Gl 5:2-6; 6:12-15; cf Rm 2:28-29; Phlp 3:2-3).

Paul makes further points about the missionary activity of the Christian movement in his later description of the so-called apostolic council (Gl 2:1-10). Here Paul travels to Jerusalem to explain and defend the (Law-free) gospel that he preached to the Gentiles. He then recounts that after much disputation he convinced the three pillar apostles (James, Peter and John) that he had been entrusted with the gospel to the Gentiles just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the Jews. This led in turn to an agreed demarcation of the Christian mission. Paul and his co-workers in Antioch would conduct the Law-free mission to the Gentiles, while Peter (and others in the Jerusalem church) would continue to conduct the Jewish mission. There

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are solid grounds for not taking Paul's account of this meeting in Jerusalem at face value (Sim 1998:82-88), but this is of no consequence for our purposes. What is of importance are the claims Paul makes with respect to this meeting in Jerusalem.

If we take all the information Paul provides in the first two chapters of Galatians, then we can see that he makes five significant points. These can be set out as in the following manner:

- There were two separate and independent missions in the early Christian movement, a mission to the Gentiles (the uncircumcised) and a mission to the Jews (the circumcised).
- These missions conveyed different gospels to their respective missionary targets. The gospel for the Gentiles was the good news about Jesus in which the Torah, especially its ritual requirements, played no role. This was the gospel Paul preached in Galatia and elsewhere, and which he had to defend in Jerusalem. By contrast, the gospel preached to the Jews by the Jerusalem church obviously entailed observance of the Torah.
- These two independent missions came under the authority of different people, namely Paul and Peter. Paul himself was entrusted with the mission to the Gentiles, while Peter was entrusted with the mission to the Jews. The implication of this point is that Paul had no responsibility for or authority over the Jewish mission headed by Peter. Conversely, and more importantly, Peter and the others in the Jerusalem church were to have no involvement in the Gentile mission and certainly no authority over it.
- Paul and Peter were commissioned by the risen Christ to be the leaders of these two missions. Paul explicitly makes this point in his own case, and it is implicit in the case of Peter, since Paul concedes that Peter had been visited by the risen Jesus (1 Cor 15:5).
- Peter and the other pillar apostles agreed to the independence of the two missions, to Paul's complete authority over the Gentile mission on the basis of his commission by the risen Christ, and to the validity of the Law-free gospel to the Gentiles.

Having spelt out briefly but in sufficient detail Paul's claims about the origin and nature of the Gentile mission, we may now turn to Matthew's Great Commission.

#### **4. MATTHEW AND THE GENTILE MISSION**

The first thing to note in relation to this subject is that Matthew's views on the origin of the Gentile mission are quite different from Mark's. In Mark it is Jesus himself who initiates the Gentile mission. Scholars have long acknowledged that the Marcan Jesus conducts parallel missions to the Jews and the Gentiles (Malbon 1991:40-43; Wefald 1995:9-13; Iverson 2007:15-19), and that the centrepiece of each mission is the miraculous feedings of the crowds (Wefald 1995:16-25; Svartvik 2000:295-301; Iverson 2007:67-69). Since in Mark these feeding narratives have Eucharistic overtones, it is clear that the evangelist wants his readers to understand that both Jews and Gentiles shared in the ministry of Jesus and that both ethnic groups can participate equally in the life of the church (Marcus 2000:403, 409-410, 419-420, 434-435, 448, 497, 509-510).

As is well known, the situation in Matthew is quite different. During his earthly activity, the Matthean Jesus restricts his own mission and that of his disciples to the people of Israel alone. The evangelist introduces this motif with two redactional insertions. First, in the mission charge of chapter 10, Jesus sends the disciples to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' and specifically precludes them from engaging with Gentiles or Samaritans (Mt 10:5-6). That this restriction of the mission applies to Jesus himself is evident in the story of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28//Mk 7:24-30) where Jesus tells the woman that he was sent only to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Mt 15:24). While the Matthean Jesus certainly has contact with Gentiles in the course of the narrative (e.g. Mt 8:5-13, 28-34; 15:21-28), the evangelist takes care to depict these as incidental events rather than as a concerted mission on the part of Jesus. In line with his restriction of the mission of Jesus, he edits his Marcan source so that the second miraculous feeding occurs on Jewish territory and, like the first, involves only Jews (Cousland 1999:1-23). The restriction of the mission to Israel is lifted after the resurrection when the risen Christ commissions the disciples to evangelise all the nations. For Matthew, unlike Mark, the Gentile mission has its origin not in the ministry of the pre-Easter Jesus, but in the explicit command of the resurrected Christ. To this extent there is agreement between Matthew and Paul against Mark.

But recognition of this point leads to other questions. Precisely who are to be targets of this mission that the risen Lord initiates? The mission to all the nations must refer to the Gentiles, but does it include or exclude the Jews? If

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the Jews are included, then are we dealing with a single mission with a single message to both ethnic groups, or is there a demarcation of the mission and an appropriate gospel for each? Finally, what role does the Law play in this mission to be conducted by the disciples? Let us consider each of these questions in turn.

A few scholars have claimed that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in 28:19 refers only to the Gentiles and excludes the Jews, in which case the risen Jesus rescinds the earlier mission of the disciples to the Jews alone (Mt 10:5-6) and replaces it with a mission solely to the Gentiles (Lange 1973:300-305; Hare & Harrington 1975:359-369; Harrington 1991:414-415). The problems with this understanding are well known (see Meier 1977b:94-102), and the great majority of scholars correctly opt for a truly universal interpretation of the phrase; the mission is to both the Jews and the Gentiles (Hagner 1995:887; Davies & Allison 1997:684; Keener 1999:719; Nolland 2005:1265-1266; Luz 2005:628-631; France 2007:1114-1115). On this understanding of the text, the original Jewish mission continues and the earlier restriction of the Gentile mission is lifted. There is no replacement of one mission by another, but rather an expansion of the Jewish mission to include the Gentiles (Keener 1999:719; Luz 2005:628). As we shall see shortly, this important insight has significant consequences.

We may now turn to the next question. If the mission initiated by the risen Christ involves both the Jews and the Gentiles, how would this be conducted in practical terms? Would there be two separate and independent missions, a mission to the Jews with a particular gospel and a different Gentile mission with an alternative message? There is no indication in the text that Matthew believed this to be the case. Having commissioned his followers to make disciples of all the nations, the risen Lord conveys a single message that was to be passed on to all recipients of the mission, Jew and Gentile alike. All are to be baptised and all are to be taught to observe the commandments of Jesus. For Matthew there is a single mission with a single message. Matthean scholars have generally overlooked this point, but it has far-reaching implications in terms of the nature of this single mission. Did this one mission to all nations demand observance of the Torah for new converts, or did the new order that was ushered in by the resurrection of Jesus waive this requirement? It is precisely on this point that we enter a minefield in Matthean studies.

It is the consensus of scholarly opinion that this mission for Matthew did not involve circumcision or any other ritual requirement of the Torah. This view is based upon the fact that the risen Lord refers only to baptism as the rite of initiation into the Christian movement. Consequently, it is argued that in



the post-resurrection period baptism effectively replaces circumcision (so Meier 1983:62; France 1989:234-235; Saldarini 1994:156-160; Davies & Allison 1997:685; Riches 2000:220-222).

This common scholarly view, however, suffers from a number of serious problems. The first is that scholars have not really followed to its logical conclusion their contention that the Great Commission involves an expansion of the original Jewish mission rather than its replacement. They have focused too much on the single issue of ethnicity; the Jewish mission is widened to include the Gentiles. Yet, while this conclusion is correct, scholars need to ask as well what the widening of the Jewish mission meant in practical terms. Very few scholars would dispute that the original mission to the Jews in Matthew's narrative was Law-observant, so the expansion of this mission to include the Gentiles, which is all the evangelist suggests, implies that the universal mission is to be conducted on the same terms. Gentiles now just as Jews originally are expected to observe the Mosaic Law as a component of their Christian commitment. To argue to the contrary is to claim that the original Law-observant mission has been replaced by an entirely new Law-free mission. This point leads on directly to a second and more important problem.

Scholarly discussions of the Great Commission tend to focus almost exclusively on the Gentile component of the universal mission and the terms of the mission only from that perspective (e.g. Keener 1999:719-720). It is therefore uncontroversial to contend that the evangelist is referring to a Law-free Gentile mission because we know that such a mission had been conducted for decades by Paul and others. Matthew's proposed stance is plausible and reasonable within the context of early church missionary activity. But if we attend to what Matthew actually says, then the situation changes considerably. For Matthew there is a single universal mission with a single message which applies to both Jew and Gentile alike. If, as most scholars argue, the mission to the Gentiles is to be conducted without the Torah, then so too must be the mission to the Jews. And it is precisely on this point that the consensus view, which too often ignores the Jewish dimension of the universal mission, begins to look implausible.

A Matthew who advocated a Law-free Jewish mission would have been much more liberal than Paul. While Paul was adamant that Gentile Christians need not observe the ritual requirements of the Torah, he was more ambivalent in the case of Jewish Christians. The Christian Paul himself appears not to have kept the demands of the Law because it had been rendered irrelevant by the Christ event (Sanders 1983:185-186; Räisänen 1987:75-77; Sim 1998:21-23), but he knew that not all of his fellow Jews could

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dispense with their traditional practices so easily. He therefore accepts that it is legitimate for Christians of Jewish origin to maintain Law-observance and, on his own admission, he agrees to the validity of the Law-observant Jewish mission that was conducted by the Jerusalem church (Gl 2:7-9). Paul almost certainly thought such Jewish Christians were weak in faith (cf Rm 14:1-15:13), but he did not argue that they should be required to reject the Torah as he himself had done.

The Matthew that emerges from the consensus view of the Great Commission is much more liberal than this. Because there is only a single mission, this Matthew must be promoting a Law-free mission for both Jew and Gentile. While such a view is not impossible, it is inherently improbable. A Matthean community that pursued a Law-free mission to the Jews presupposes a community that no longer observed the Torah. But such a proposition, as most scholars would concede, does not sit comfortably with the Gospel's emphasis on the Torah (cf Mt 5:17-19) and with the disputes between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees over the correct understanding of the Law. The manner in which the Torah was understood and observed was obviously a live issue in the evangelist's group and underpinned its conflict with its Jewish opponents (Overman 1990; Saldarini 1994; Repschinski 2000). Since Matthew was obviously not more liberal than Paul on the issue of Jewish Law-observance, there is a major problem for the consensus view.

The third difficulty is that the consensus position focuses too much on the directive to baptise and overlooks the other command of the risen Christ. In addition to the ritual of baptism, the disciples are also to teach these new converts all that he has commanded them. What Jesus has commanded can only apply to his teachings earlier in the Gospel (Nolland 2005:1270-1271). While the Matthean Jesus teaches on a wide range of subjects, an integral part of his message concerns the Torah. Of particular importance is the triad of sayings in Matthew 5:17-19. In this material Jesus proclaims that he has not come to abolish the Torah, and he specifies with crystal clarity that all of the Torah, even the least of its commandments, are to be obeyed until the *parousia* and are to be taught to others (Mohrlang 1984:7-26; Overman 1990:72-90; Sim 1998:123-139). These three sayings must be taken literally and seriously. When we do so, it becomes almost inconceivable that risen Jesus at the end of the Gospel simply dismissed the necessity for circumcision (or any other ritual requirement of the Torah) and replaced this rite with baptism. If Matthew was consistent on the fundamental subject of the Torah, then we have to conclude that the universal mission enjoined by the risen Lord, which was to be conducted prior to the *parousia*, must have

proclaimed a Law-observant gospel. Circumcision as well as baptism must have been required of Gentile converts.

But if that is the case, why does the evangelist mention only baptism and not circumcision? The simple answer is that Matthew can assume the necessity for circumcision and not state it explicitly because it has already been covered previously in the Gospel. The material in Matthew 5:17-19, which demands obedience to all of the Torah, obviously includes circumcision (so Mohrlang 1984:44-45; Levine 1988:183-185; Sim 1996:192-193; Senior 1999:20; Slee 2003:140-142). While Matthew can assume the necessity of circumcision on the basis of 5:17-19, the same does not apply to the specifically Christian rite of baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This initiation ritual is never mentioned in the ministry of the pre-Easter Jesus, but is depicted as an innovation of the risen Christ. It therefore requires attention and specific mention in the Great Commission. But baptism in no way replaces circumcision. Jewish converts need only submit to baptism to enter the Christian community, but for Gentile converts both rituals are necessary.

That Matthew would refer here to baptism, which was applicable to both Jewish and Gentile converts, while remaining silent about the prior circumcision of Gentiles is not so surprising. We find a ready parallel with the contemporary Qumran community (Sim 1996:193-194). This sectarian group counted Gentile converts amongst its members (CD 14:4-6), but in the rules governing the complex and lengthy initiation process (1QS 6:13-23) there is not a single mention of circumcision. The reason is that it is taken for granted. Gentile converts were expected to be circumcised and join the people of Israel as a preliminary step before being initiated like other Jews into the Qumran community. The same applies to the Great Commission. Christian Gentile converts would be expected to undergo circumcision in accordance with the Torah (Mt 5:17-19) before submitting to baptism like any other potential Jewish convert. Despite attempts to downplay the significance of the Qumran parallel (Riches 2000:221), it remains a valid comparison (Slee 2003:142).

We may draw some provisional conclusions. Matthew traces the origin of the Gentile mission back to the appearance of the risen Jesus. He lifts the earlier restriction of a mission only to the Jews (cf Mt 10:5-6), and now commands that the disciples evangelise all the nations, which includes both the Jews and the Gentiles. The terms of the mission are that converts are to be baptised according to the triadic formula and that they are to be taught all that Jesus commanded at the time of his historical mission. This teaching of Jesus included the continuing validity of all the Torah up to the time of the *parousia* (5:17-19), so the universal mission initiated by the risen Lord

demanded observance of the Mosaic Law in full. While this was not a major issue for potential Jewish converts, Gentile converts were expected to be circumcised and fully Law-observant prior to their baptism into the sectarian Christian movement.

## **5. THE ANTI-PAULINE NATURE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION IN MATTHEW 28:16-20**

Having reconstructed Matthew's intentions in the Great Commission, we are now in a position to identify the anti-Pauline elements in this final pericope. It was noted above that in the first two chapters of Galatians Paul makes a number of significant claims. In what follows I will repeat these briefly and then discuss how Matthew, either explicitly or implicitly, offers a refutation of these points.

First, Paul claims that there were two independent missions, one to the Jews and one to the Gentiles. Matthew categorically denies this point. His risen Jesus does not initiate two independent missions. On the contrary, there is a single mission to all the nations. This universal mission is an expansion of the original Jewish mission which now includes the Gentiles as well.

Secondly, Paul asserts that the two missions preached different gospels, a Law-free gospel for the Gentiles and a Law-observant gospel for the Jews. Again Matthew challenges this view. Since there is only a single mission, there is only a single message. There is no indication whatsoever in Matthew 28:16-20 that there is any distinction between the gospel transmitted to the Jews and the one communicated to the Gentiles. This mission involves baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as the initiation rite into the Christian messianic community, while the gospel message itself is focused on the commandments of Jesus as they are given in the Gospel. Since those commandments specify the continuing observance of the Torah, the missionaries are instructed to preach the Law-observant gospel to Jew and Gentile alike. The Great Commission thus dismisses completely the claim of Paul that there were two legitimate gospels, one of which was Law-free.

Thirdly, Paul argued that these missions were to be led by different people. Paul himself had authority over the Gentile mission, while Peter was responsible for its Jewish counterpart. For Matthew the responsibility for the leadership of the universal mission falls to the disciples as a whole. No one disciple is singled out as having responsibility for either the Jewish or the Gentile areas of the mission. However, although Peter receives no special mention in Matthew 28:16-20, it is likely that as the one appointed as the head of the church (16:17-19) he is authorised to oversee the new mission as demanded by the risen Christ. In any event the point made by the evangelist

that the disciples have authority over the mission to both the Jews and the Gentiles is an explicit denial of Paul's claim of authority over the Gentile mission. In Matthew's scheme, Paul and any other missionary would necessarily be answerable to the disciples, and this can be seen as a clear response to Paul's insistence that he was independent of Jerusalem.

Fourthly, Paul maintained that both he and Peter were called to these leadership roles and given their respective gospels by the risen Christ. Certainly Matthew would agree that Peter was called by the risen Lord and provided with the message to proclaim, but the Matthean narrative leaves no room for the later call and commissioning of Paul. Why would the resurrected Jesus commission Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles when he had already organised the disciples to do so? And why would he provide Paul with a different gospel to preach?

Fifthly, Paul is adamant that Peter and the others in the Jerusalem church acknowledged the independence of the two missions, the validity of Paul's authority over the Gentile mission and the legitimacy of his Law-free gospel to the Gentiles. The Great Commission dismisses all of these claims implicitly. In Matthew's version of events, there was a single mission with a single gospel and the disciples had sole authority over it. One cannot read Matthew 28:16-20 and then give credence to Paul's statements.

There is one further point to consider. It is certainly plausible that in this pericope Matthew went as far as to deny Paul's testimony that he had had a visitation from the risen Christ. This is suggested by the words of comfort at the end of Jesus' commission. Having communicated his message to the disciples, Jesus assures them that he will be with them always until the end of the age. These words seem out of place if Jesus expected to appear again to his disciples; they rather imply that there will be no further direct communication between them. But Jesus assures them that, even though he will not be there "in person", they should embark on the task firm in the knowledge that he will be with them until the *parousia*. If this was indeed Matthew's intention, then it denies that there were any further revelations of the risen Christ to the disciples or to anybody else. The text therefore amounts to a rejection of Paul's fundamental claim that he too, just like Peter and the disciples, received revelations from the risen Lord (1 Cor 15:3-8). Having made this point, Matthew's anti-Pauline polemic is complete.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This study has attempted to discern the intentions of Matthew in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20. Rather than focusing on what the evangelist might have been relating about the missionary activity of his own

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church, it examined what Matthew was actually saying about the origin and the nature of the Gentile mission. He makes the point that the Gentile mission has its origin in the commissioning of the disciples by the risen Christ, and he further stipulates that the mission to which they were called was fully Law-observant for both Jew and Gentile. This material runs directly contrary to the claims of Paul, who attested that he was given responsibility by the risen Jesus to conduct a Law-free Gentile mission independently of the Law-observant mission to the Jews. The Great Commission can therefore be added to the list of Matthean passages that were specifically designed by the evangelist to counter the person, the theology and the mission of Paul.

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