

REV Commentary

Matthew Chapter 28

Mat 28:1

“as it began to dusk *and come toward the first day of the week.*” This event, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary coming to view the tomb, is not recorded in any Gospel but Matthew.

The translations differ about this verse, so to properly understand it we must pay strict attention to the Greek text, the Jewish customs, and the event itself. This event occurs on Saturday the 17th of Nisan, in the late evening, just as the Jewish day Sunday was “dawning,” i.e., starting, that is just before the Saturday Sabbath ended at sunset and Sunday, the first day of the week, began. The fact that Matthew records that that Sabbath was just ending at sunset tells us that Matthew is written from the point of view of Jewish timing, not Roman timing. The Jews began their new day at sunset, while the Romans began their new day at midnight (like we Westerners still do). This verse is not speaking about Sunday morning when the sun came up, as many people believe.

Although many translations have the word “dawn,” in this verse we must not confuse that with our Western view of “dawn,” i.e., when the sun comes up. To the Jews, a new day “dawned,” or started, at sunset. The Greek text reads in a way that seems very difficult when translated literally, which is due to the idioms involved. A very literal rendering of the Greek text is: “Now late of the [on the] Sabbaths, at the dawn toward the first of the Sabbaths.” This is a very difficult sentence, and to understand it we need to know two things: the first thing is that “Sabbaths” (the plural of Sabbath) was the regular Jewish idiom for a week. The second thing is that the word “dawned” is the Greek word *epiphōskō* (#2020 ἐπιφώσκω; pronounced eh-pee-phōs'-kō), which literally means, “to grow light,” and it was used of the “dawn” or “beginning” of something. In the United States we have the same basic idiom and use “dawn” for the beginning of something. When something brand new is coming that will make significant changes, someone might say, “A new day is dawning,” even though it is technically not either a new “day,” nor is it “dawn.” [For more on *epiphōskō*, see commentary on Luke 23:54].

According to Jewish reckoning of time, the new day was beginning, or “dawning,” at sunset on the weekly Sabbath. Thus, sunset on Saturday started Sunday and the new week. Many

English versions read “dawn” in this verse, but to understand the verse, we must realize that the sun is going down and the new day is starting; the verse is not saying that the sun is coming up. About this verse, Robertson (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*) writes: “This careful chronological statement according to Jewish days clearly means that before the Sabbath was over, that is before six PM, this visit by the women was made ‘to see the sepulcher.’” Robertson is correct that this is a “careful chronological statement,” and not paying attention to it is one of the reasons people wrongly think the Bible contradicts itself in the timing of some the events that occurred after the death of Jesus.

If we read the verse in an amplified form with notes included, we get: “Now late of the [on the] Sabbaths [the week, i.e., as the week was ending on Saturday night], at the dawn [the ‘beginning’] toward the first of the Sabbaths [i.e., at the beginning of the next week, which started at sunset Saturday night when Sunday, the next week began].”

There are an impressive number of versions that translate this verse so that it can be correctly understood if the reader knows the Jewish customs. Furthermore, there are a number of scholars and commentators who understand it properly, such as A. T. Robertson, Heinrich Meyer, and Robert Gundry. However, there are also translations and commentators who think the verse is referring to Sunday morning, not Saturday night. What we must remember, however, is that very few translators and commentators understand the correct chronology of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection, which means they interpret the text in light of their erroneous understanding. They try to squeeze all the biblical events in between Friday afternoon and Sunday at daybreak while it is still dark, and to do that, records that are separate events need to be melded together as single events. Lenski, for example, equates this visit of the two Mary’s to be the same as the visit of the women on Sunday morning despite the fact that on Sunday morning Mary Magdalene went alone to the tomb, met Jesus alone (Mark 16:9), never saw an angel, and quickly went and told the disciples that the tomb was empty and Jesus’ body gone (John 20:2), whereas when the group of women came to the tomb on Sunday morning they met the angel, then Jesus, and went to tell the disciples Jesus was alive (Matt. 28:5-10). Blending records such as these together creates insurmountable apparent contradictions that there is simply no need to create if we allow for more time in the record and correctly interpret the chronology. Even the simple reading of Matthew 28:1-2 has the earthquake happening after the two Marys come to see the tomb, but if their visit is Sunday morning, as commentators like Lenski propose, then the earthquake had to come before they came to the tomb.

Many versions that translate the verse in a way that shows that the women came to the tomb on Saturday evening as the Saturday Sabbath was ending the new day, Sunday, was beginning. As we said above, to properly understand some of these versions, we must keep in mind that “late on the Sabbath,” or, “at the close of the Sabbath,” or “in the end of the Sabbath” was always Saturday evening before sunset, never Sunday morning. Sunday began at sunset on Saturday; that was when the new day, Sunday, “dawned,” or “began.”

ASV and ERV: “Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week....”

William Barclay: “Late on the Sabbath, just as the day was breaking on the Sunday....”

BBE: “Now late on the Sabbath, when the dawn of the first day of the week was near....”

Darby: “Now late on sabbath, as it was the dusk....”

Douay-Rheims: “And in the end of the sabbath, when it began to dawn towards the first day of the week....”

Geneva Bible: “Now in the end of the Sabbath, when the first day of ye weeke began to dawne....”

KJV: “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week....”

Moffatt Bible: “At the close of the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning....”

The Scriptures: “But late in the Sabbath, as it was dawning into day *one* of the week....”

Translations from the Aramaic also read that the women came on Saturday evening.

Murdock: “And in the close of the sabbath, as the first [day] of the week began to dawn....”

Magiera: “Now in the evening of the Sabbath, as it was twilight [on] the first of the week....”

Another important fact we must pay attention to if we are going to properly understand this event is that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to “see the tomb.” This is very important and ignored by most commentators. This is not the trip the women made on Sunday morning when they came with spices. They did not have any spices with them. The text specifically says they came to see the tomb, not to anoint Jesus’ body. One reason they likely did not have any spices with them is that it would have been breaking the Mosaic Law for them to carry a load of spices on the Sabbath day—that would have been considered “work” (cp. Jer. 17:22). But the women could walk to see the tomb because walking on the Sabbath was allowed as long as one did not walk too far or carry anything heavy. Thus, this verse does not contradict the verse that says the women “rested” on the Sabbath (Luke 23:56).

We also must realize that this trip to the tomb is not the one that Mary Magdalene made alone on Sunday morning. On the trip Mary Magdalene made on Sunday morning, she was alone, and when she saw the tomb was open she ran and got Peter and John who then went to the tomb with her following. Then, after they left, she met the “gardener” who was actually the Lord (John 20:1-18).

On this trip that Matthew 28:1 speaks of, as the Sabbath was coming to an end on Saturday evening, the women came to “look at” the tomb. The Greek word *theoreō*, “to look at,” usually refers to viewing something from a distance, which would have been the case since the guards would have kept the women from getting too close to the tomb. At this time on Saturday evening the stone would have been still in place in front of the tomb. Since the women came Saturday night just to see the tomb, it is very possible that they were checking to see if the Roman guard was gone yet. The third day of Christ’s “three days and three nights” ended just about sunset Saturday evening, so if the guards had already left, then the way was clear to bring the spices Sunday morning. However, the guards were still there and so was the stone that was covering the tomb door. Due to the time of day, it is possible that Jesus was already up from the dead and out of the tomb—he did not have to move the stone to get out in his newly resurrected body. If not, his resurrection would have occurred very shortly after they saw the tomb and left.

There is a time break between Matthew 28:1 and Matthew 28:2. The events of 28:2 occurred around dawn Sunday morning, because when the angel opened the tomb, some of the guards went and reported to the chief priests what had happened. One of the astounding things about the four Gospels is that there is no explicit description of Jesus getting up from the dead, an event that would have happened around the time Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb. There is no description such as, “Then the life of God entered Jesus and he woke up from the dead and passed effortlessly through the stone wall of the tomb.” No amount of guesswork will tell us for certain, but it is possible that any description of the resurrection cannot come close to describing it as it would need to be described. After all, it involved changing Jesus’ dead human body into the living spirit-powered body of the one who is second in command to God in all the universe.

Mat 28:2

“**Look!**” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“**there was a great earthquake.**” On the 18th of Nisan, Sunday morning, while it was still very dark, but getting close to early dawn, there was an earthquake and an angel rolled the stone away from the tomb door. We know this occurred close to dawn because the guards would have gone back into the city and told the chief priests what had happened shortly after they had been frightened by the angel (Matt. 28:4, 11). However, the Scripture says that the guards were still talking to the chief priests when the women, who had come to the tomb at dawn just after the sun rose, had already seen both the angels and Jesus, and were on their way to tell the disciples what they had seen (Matt. 28:5-11). Thus, the angel rolling back the stone and scaring the guards could not have been too long before daybreak. However, it was early enough that the guards had left by the time Mary Magdalene arrived, and she had come alone to the tomb before the sun rose and thus before the group of women who came with the spices, who arrived after the sun had risen. The guards coming to their senses, discussing what to do, and then going to the chief priests and reporting to them what happened, would have likely taken no more than an hour, two at the most.

It is often taught that the resurrection occurred simultaneously with this earthquake. However, Scripture never says this. The actual event of the resurrection is not portrayed in Scripture. Furthermore, this was now Sunday, the first day of the week, which would have been the fourth day since Jesus was buried. But Jesus was only in the grave 3 days and 3 nights (Matt. 12:40). Christ’s resurrection was “three days and three nights” after his burial,

so it would have been on Saturday just before sunset.

If Jesus got up from the dead Saturday night around sunset, why would the angel wait until just before dawn to open the grave? The most likely reason is that God knew the disciples would start coming to the tomb Sunday morning, and did not want to have the tomb open all night without a guard lest people think that the most likely explanation for the missing body of Jesus was that people stole it (which is what people believed anyway; cp. Matt. 28:15). So likely not too long before sunrise Sunday morning (an hour or so would be enough), there was an earthquake. The earthquake and angel were not needed for Jesus to rise from the dead and leave the tomb, they were for a witness of the resurrection to people, and to clear the way for the disciples to get to the tomb without Roman interference. The angel rolled the stone away, doing it without human involvement, proving the tomb was empty. Then, when Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb before sunrise, the guard was already gone, and by the time the women who brought the spices to the tomb were going to tell the disciples what had happened to them, the guard was in the city reporting the event to the priests.

“Yahweh.” “Yahweh” is the personal name of God, and a rabbinic abbreviation for it appears in the Hebrew manuscript of Matthew as well as in the verses of the Old Testament that Matthew quoted. There is evidence that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew and used the name Yahweh, so we have put it in the REV (see commentary on Matthew 3:3).

“rolled away the stone.” The Greek is *apokuliō* (#617 ἀποκυλίω), to roll away. In this context it seems that the stone was more than simply rolled back away from the entrance of the tomb, but rather rolled away from the tomb entirely. It would have been lying flat on the ground some distance from the grave to mark that fact that the grave was empty for all to see, and could not be closed again without a major effort requiring many men. The flat stone also provided a good seat for the angel, who sat on it in triumph of the resurrection.

Mat 28:6

“Come, see the place where he was lying.” Since the women were already in the tomb, this is a clear indication that there was more than one room in the tomb, and the women were standing in the weeping chamber, the large room just inside the door of many tombs. The angel invited the woman to step into the room that had held the dead body of Jesus (See commentary on Mark 16:5).

Mat 28:7

“go.” The Greek verb is *poreuomai* (#4198 πορεύομαι), and is an aorist participle, literally, “having gone.” This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect, when a past tense is put for something that is actually future to express the certainty of it or emphasize it [For more information of the prophetic perfect, see commentary on Ephesians 2:6].

“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἴδου), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“Galilee.” One of the interesting details in the record of the death and resurrection of Christ is the fact that it took so long for the disciples to obey the command to go to Galilee. The chronology of the trip to Galilee is: On the night of his arrest Jesus told the disciples that he would meet them in Galilee after his resurrection; so obviously they were supposed to go there (Matt. 26:32). However, they were all denying that they would forsake him, and his statement about Galilee seemed to go unnoticed. It would have been a great act of trust for them to have gone to Galilee and waited for him to meet them, just as he said. It seems certain, however, that he knew they did not believe he would be raised from the dead, and just as certain that he would have to tell them a few times to go to Galilee, which is what he ended up doing.

The Sunday after he was resurrected, angels, then Jesus himself, told the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee (Matt. 28:7, 10), but they still did not go. Then, when Jesus appeared to the disciples behind closed doors that evening (Luke 24:36-46; John 20:19-24), the Bible does not say he told them to go to Galilee, but at that point they should have believed the women (and what Jesus said in Matt. 26:32) and left for Galilee. Instead, they were still in Jerusalem, still behind locked doors, a week later when Jesus appeared to them again (John 20:26-29).

The Bible does not say if Jesus told the disciples to go to Galilee in this second behind-locked-doors meeting with his disciples. However, it seems that he did, because the next thing the Bible says after the second meeting is that the disciples went to Galilee (Matt. 28:16 a), and Jesus met them at the Sea of Galilee (which John 21:1 calls the Sea of Tiberias, because Tiberias was the most influential city on the lake).

A major reason for the disciples to go to Galilee was it was the base of Jesus’ operation and where he had the most disciples. In the days before his ascension, in Jerusalem there were

only 120 disciples (Acts 2:15). In contrast, he met with more than 500 people at one time (1 Cor. 15:6), which is likely the meeting on a mountain in Galilee, mentioned in Matthew 28:16-20.

The Bible does not record the consequences of the disciples not obeying Jesus and going to Galilee. However, we know that Jesus would not say to do it if there was not some good reason, so we can be sure that there were some consequences. There was almost certainly two important consequences: for one thing, if all the Apostles had returned to Galilee right after his death, the rumor that they had taken Jesus' body from the tomb would have been difficult to perpetrate, because if his leaders had all left the area, what disciple would steal the body? The lie that the disciple's had stolen Jesus' body only made sense because the Apostles were still in town, and in hiding.

Even on Sunday morning, however, Jesus was still directing the Apostles to go to Galilee. He still wanted the witness of his resurrection to reach the people of Galilee, and there may have been another reason as well. It is likely that the disciples were being sought out by the religious leaders and painfully interrogated. The situation was dangerous enough that a week after the resurrection the disciples were still hiding behind locked doors. It is typical that the Bible would not focus on any hardship to the disciples at this time, focusing instead on the resurrection of Christ and events involving his appearances to people, so the fact that the Bible does not mention any specific persecution does not mean it did not happen. By the time Jesus and the Apostles showed back up in town, likely almost a full month later, Jesus apparently did not publicly show himself, and the religious leaders apparently thought the crisis was over and left them alone.

“See!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοῦ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

Mat 28:9

“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοῦ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Jesus met them.” The first person that Jesus met after his resurrection was Mary Magdalene. The next people Jesus appeared to was this group of women that had come to the tomb to properly bury his body but were met by angels and now were on their way to the disciples to tell them that Jesus had been raised from the dead. How much more

convincing their testimony should have been now that they could all say in unison that they had actually seen the living Christ. No matter; the Eleven and the disciples did not believe them any more than they had believed Mary Magdalene. By evening, however, when Cleopas and the other disciple return from the road to Emmaus, where they had seen the Lord, Jesus had already appeared to Peter, and at last the disciples (most of them, anyway), believed he was raised from the dead (Luke 24:34).

“Greetings.” The Greek reads *chairō* (#5463 χαίρω; pronounced kī-rō). It means “be well,” or “rejoice,” and was a standard greeting like our “Hi.” The Hebrew text of Matthew (see commentary on 3:3) has, “May the Name deliver you.” In this case, “the Name” in full is used instead of the rabbinic abbreviation for Yahweh, which is apparently an abbreviation of the Hebrew for “the Name.”

“paid homage.” The act of grabbing the feet was an act of homage. See commentary on Matthew 2:2.

Mat 28:11

“Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοῦ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“some of the guard.” At the same time that the women were traveling to tell the disciples, some of the guards arrived at Jerusalem and gave their report to the Jews. The Bible does not say how many guards watched the tomb, but only “some” of the guards reported what they saw, the rest were apparently so terrified they ran off and stayed hidden.

The religious leaders bribed the guards with a large amount of money to say the disciples stole the body while they were asleep, a report that is still often believed. Also, the Jews told the guards that if Pilate heard they had fallen asleep, a capital offense, the Jews would take care of that also. That fact confirms that the guards were Roman soldiers and not Temple police, because if Jewish police had fallen asleep on the job and the body of Jesus been stolen, Pilate would have not cared at all about it. But if Roman soldiers on duty had fallen asleep and botched their assignment, they could have been executed.

God sent an angel to roll back the stone in sight of the guards (Matt. 28:2-4). This was grace upon grace to them. He did not have to do that. He could have just rolled the stone back by invisible power. God gave the guards a wonderful opportunity to believe in, and testify to, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was not something they expected when they got “tomb

guard duty,” but it is what happened. We never know when God is going to move powerfully in the world. If we happen to be fortunate enough to be part of a move of God, we need to be prepared to believe and testify. These guards showed that they were more interested in money than the truth.

Mat 28:16

“The eleven disciples.” The “eleven disciples” are the apostles minus Judas, who has committed suicide (Matt. 27:5). In Greek, the sentence has a *de*, which is usually a break or a change of subject. It seemed the best way to represent that break here was simply to start the new sentence without any connective particle in English.

“went to Galilee.” The “eleven disciples” go to Galilee, and the Eleven are the apostles minus Judas, who has committed suicide (Matt. 27:5). There is a long time break between Matthew 28:9-10, when Jesus met with the women, and the first half of Matt. 28:16 when the Eleven go to Galilee. It would have been ten days or more.

Jesus had met the women on Resurrection Sunday, the 18th of Nisan and spoken with them about the disciples going to Galilee. But they were still in Jerusalem on Sunday the 25th of Nisan when he appeared to them a second time behind closed doors. Even if the disciples left that day for Galilee, it was usually a trip of three days.

Then between the first half and second half of Matthew 28:16 there is another time break. After the Apostles go to Galilee, Jesus meets them on the Sea of Galilee, which is the third time he appeared to all of them together (John 21:14). Sometime after that meeting we know that Jesus met with the Apostles and a large group of disciples on a mountain (Matt. 28:16 b).

Mat 28:17

“they.” This refers to all the disciples together. This is almost certainly the event recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:6 when he was seen by more than 500 believers at one time. There were not 500 disciples in Jerusalem, which is clear from the fact that there were only about 120 there around the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15). However, Jesus’ headquarters through most of his ministry had been Galilee, and thus the account of the more than 500 people who saw him at one time would have occurred there. The fact that he got with so many disciples at least partially explains why he would go to Galilee at all. There were many like Thomas who needed to see proof to be sure, and Jesus’ appearing in person in Galilee was surely a

boost to the believers.

Although all the disciples “worshipped” Jesus, which in that culture meant to bow down before him or prostrate oneself before him, some of them “doubted.” This is understandable. Jesus told the Apostles over and over he was going to be killed and then raised from the dead, and it was such a foreign concept to them they did not understand the plain words he was speaking. The death and resurrection of the Messiah was a new concept to these Jews, and so it was natural that, even when they were faced with the living Christ, some of them “doubted;” they were not 100% sure of what they were seeing.

“bowed before *him*.” See commentary on Matthew 2:2. Most versions translated *proskuneō* as “worship” here, but that is an unclear translation. The act of “worship” in that biblical culture was to fall down before someone, which is what these disciples did. That does not mean that they did not doubt at the same time. They bowed (or fell down) before him, but even in doing that act of showing respect, some were doubting.

Mat 28:18

“all authority in heaven and on earth.” God has set Jesus Christ as His second-in-command, his under-ruler, and given him all authority to administer His creation (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:18-22). He has made Jesus, “Lord” (Acts 2:22). Given that, what are some of the things that Jesus is doing now? Jesus is the head of the body of Christ, directing and guiding it (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Jesus gives the gift of holy spirit to people when they get saved, and thus he adds to his body (Acts 2:32-33; 2:47; Matt. 16:18). He supports his body, the Church, and causes it to grow (Eph. 5:15-16; Col. 2:18-19), and he organizes it, for example, by creating leadership positions (Col. 1:15-19). Jesus sets people in their personal ministries (Eph. 4:7-8, 11). He gives revelation to people (Gal. 1:11-12; Acts 9:10-17; 16:7; 18:9). He is a wonderful counselor (Isa. 9:6).

Jesus also ministers through his angels (Rev. 1:1). He prays and intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26-27, 34; Heb. 7:25). He protects us from evil (2 Thess. 3:3). Jesus heals people (Acts 9:32-34). He gives grace and peace to us (1 Cor. 16:23; Eph. 1:2; 1 Thess. 5:28). He is with us in our trials and suffering (Acts 9:4; Rom. 8:26). We can fellowship with Jesus (1 John 1:3), and we can pray to him for support (John 14:12-14; Acts 7:59; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 12:8-9). Jesus will raise us from the dead (1 Thess. 4:15), transform our bodies when we are raised at the Rapture (Phil. 3:21), and be our judge on our Day of Judgment (John 5:21-29; 2 Cor. 5:10).

“has been given to me.” This is one of the many verses that make it clear that Jesus Christ is not God. If Christ were really God, and co-equal and co-eternal with the Father as the Trinitarians teach, then it is illogical to say Christ was *given* authority. God, by definition, *has* authority.

Jesus is a man, and the authority he has was given to him by God and is not a function of his “divine nature.” The wording of Matthew 28:18 is, in actuality, a refutation of the Trinity. Jesus is that man to whom God gave “all authority.” In contrast to Christ, there is no verse anywhere that says “God” was given authority. God has all authority, and delegates it to others. Although there are some Trinitarians who teach that Jesus divested himself of his authority when he was incarnated as a human, this verse is after Jesus’ resurrection, and all Trinitarians affirm Jesus had his full position as God after he was raised from the dead, which was the case in this verse.

The Trinitarian refutation to the Scripture saying that “God” gave Jesus his position and authority, such as in Acts 2:36, which says, “God has *made* Jesus both Lord and Christ,” is to say that “God” means the Father. But there is no evidence for that; it is an assumption to support the doctrine and not what the Bible actually says. If we simply read the Bible as we would normally understand it, then “God” does not have to be constantly redefined. Jesus is the man, Jesus, and “God” is God.

There are many verses that say Jesus was given what he had from “God.” These include that he was “given” all authority (Matt. 28:18), “made Lord and Christ” by God (Acts 2:36); and that God “placed” everything under his feet and “appointed” him to be Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22). The most natural reading of the Bible is that “God” is the Father, and Jesus is the human Messiah, and “God” does things for Jesus, but “God” never does things for “the Father” because He is the Father.

Another reason that Matt. 28:18 disproves the Trinity is that if “God” is made up of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, then by definition Jesus cannot have “all authority.” By virtue of being “God,” the Father and Holy Spirit would both have equal authority with Jesus. In fact, it is part of the standard definition of the Trinity that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are “co-equal.” The only way Jesus could be given all authority would be if he were not God, but the Messiah, God’s chosen ruler, and the Father had entrusted him with all authority, just as God gave Jesus the authority to judge on the Day of Judgment (John 5:22).

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 10, “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 11, “What is the Holy Spirit?”].

Mat 28:19

“Go and make disciples of all the nations.” The phrase, “of all the nations” reads as if it was a genitive when in fact “nations” is in the accusative case (direct object), not the genitive case. Thus, in one sense, a more proper translation is “go disciple all the nations.” Normally we would want to avoid the genitive in this case because it can be limiting and mean “out of,” thus referring to make some of the people disciples, whereas the accusative is a clearly broad goal, “disciple all the nations.” The reason that most versions read, “make disciples of all the nations” rather than “disciple all nations” is that the Greek word *mathēteuō* (#3100 μαθητεύω) more naturally refers to both the making and training of disciples. Thus, if we say, “go and make disciples of all the nations,” we clearly understand that they were not disciples before, and we have to get them saved and then disciple them, whereas if we say, “go disciple all nations,” they may already be disciples and we are going to give them further instruction. Translators differ as to which translation is closer to representing what Christ said, and so both translations exist among the English versions.

It seems clear that after his resurrection Jesus expanded the missionary work of his disciples. Whereas before his resurrection he clearly said, “Do not go on *any* road of the Gentiles, and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans, but go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6), now he says to go to the nations and disciple them.

“in my name.” We have translated the text according to the evidence we have that there were early Greek texts that read that way, and also according to what the Apostles did in Acts. They made disciples in the name of Jesus. We admit that there is no extant Greek text that says “go and make disciples of all the nations in my name,” they all read “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the holy spirit.” Nevertheless, we believe that the historical evidence, as well as the evidence in the Bible itself, supports the conclusion that the common rendering is a very early addition to the text, and the original reading was “in my name.” We give the following evidence to support our conclusion:

1). There is not a single occurrence of the disciples baptizing anyone in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Every single record in the New Testament show that people

were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'" (Acts 2:38). "They had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16). "So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:48). "On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5).

It is inconceivable to us that Jesus would command his Apostles to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit just before he ascended, and yet about a month later, on the Day of Pentecost, they completely ignored what he said and baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ." To us, it seems clear that Christ told the Apostles to make disciples in his name, so that is what they did, baptizing in Jesus' name.

2). Based on the biblical and historic evidence, it is the consensus of many scholars that the Trinitarian formula that appears in Matthew 28:19 was a later addition to the text. For example, the conservative Christian publication, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, states ("Baptism," Vol. 1, p. 465):

It appears from Biblical records that the earliest Christians baptized with the formula 'in the name of Jesus Christ' (Acts 2:38). The Trinitarian formula ascribed to Jesus in his final commission (Matt. 28:19) is generally regarded to have been shaped at a later date through the liturgical usage of the community of Christians.

3). Eusebius (c. 260--c. 340) was the Bishop of Caesarea and is known as "the Father of Church History." Although he wrote prolifically, his most celebrated work is his *Ecclesiastical History*, a history of the Church from the Apostolic period until his own time. Today it is still the principle work on the history of the church at that time. Eusebius quotes many verses in his writings, and Matthew 28:19 is one of them. Fredrick Conybeare studied the works of Eusebius and documented that on 17 different occasions he quoted Matthew 28:19 without the Trinitarian formula, but instead with "in my name" (see Fredrick C. Conybeare in *Zeitschrift fur Neutestamentlich Wissenschaft*, "The Eusebian Form of the Text of Matthew 28:19," 1901, pp. 275-288). For example, in Book III of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Chapter 5, Section 2, which is about the Jewish persecution of early Christians, we read,

But the rest of the apostles, who had been incessantly plotted against with a view to

their destruction, and had been driven out of the land of Judea, went unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of Christ, who had said to them, ‘Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name.’

We read the same thing in his *Oration in Praise of Emperor Constantine*, Chapter 16, Section 8, which says:

What king or prince in any age of the world, what philosopher, legislator or prophet, in civilized or barbarous lands, has attained so great a height of excellence, I say not after death, but while living still, and full of mighty power, as to fill the ears and tongues of all mankind with the praises of his name? Surely none save our only Savior has done this, when, after his victory over death, he spoke the word to his followers, and fulfilled it by the event, saying to them, ‘Go ye and make disciples of all nations in my name.’

The Greek text that Eusebius was using read, quoted by Conybeare, is, πορευθέντες μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν. This translates to “Go, disciple all the nations in my name, teaching them to keep all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.”

Eusebius was present at the council of Nicaea, and involved in the debates about Arian teaching and whether Christ was God or a creation of God. We feel confident that if the manuscripts he had in front of him read “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” he would never have quoted it as “in my name.” Interestingly, however, after (and only after) the Counsel of Nicaea, when there was great pressure from the Emperor and other bishops to conform to a Trinitarian belief, Eusebius quoted Matthew 28:19 with the Trinitarian formula on three different occasions. We believe that the earliest manuscripts read “in my name,” and that the phrase was enlarged to reflect the orthodox position as Trinitarian influence spread.

4). Although Eusebius is the only Church Father that directly quotes a shorter version of Matthew 28:19, Conybeare (cited above), notes that there are “echoes” from two other pieces of pre-Nicene literature, both earlier than Eusebius, that indicate they were referencing a version of Matthew without the Trinitarian baptismal formula. Those two

sources are Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) in his dialogue with Trypho, and the early Christian work called “The Shepherd of Hermas.” While not strong evidence of a shorter version of Matthew 28:19, the evidence of these Church Fathers does add some support to our conclusion.

5). The reading “go and make disciples of all the nations in my name” creates internal agreement with what we see in Luke and in the Epistles of Paul. In the last chapter of Luke, when Jesus was talking to his disciples, he said, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise out from among *the* dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46, 47). It fits the scope of Scripture that both Matthew and Luke would end with Jesus speaking to his followers about making disciples in his name in all of the nations, and not that Jesus would command baptism in Matthew but leave it out in Luke. Furthermore, Paul wrote, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to tell the Good News” (1 Cor. 1:17). It hardly seems correct that Paul could say that Jesus did not send him to baptize if in fact one of the very last commands of Jesus to his disciples was to go and baptize people.

6). That the command to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit would have been added to the text of Matthew fits the scribal tendency to add the practices of the Church at a later time back into the text. For example, when it comes to baptism, textual research shows that there is little doubt that the closing verses of Mark were added to Mark and were not part of the original text, and they too include the command to baptize (cp. Mark 16:16, and see commentary on Mark 16:9). Another example of adding a practice of the Church back into the text involves fasting. Fasting was important to the developing Church, and the word “fasting” became inserted into the Greek manuscripts in several places, and from there even got into some of the early versions such as the King James Version (cp. Matt. 17:21; Mark 9:29; Acts 10:30; 1 Cor. 7:5). Thankfully, the number of Greek texts and early manuscripts we have today and our ability to compare them has allowed us to ferret out most of the later additions, but there are still some problem verses, such as Matthew 28:19.

7). The traditional reading of Matthew 28:19 has long been noted to have some problems. In the words of Hans Kosmala, “The traditional conclusion is, even as a prose text, comparatively ‘heavy;’ its syntax is awkward and, as Otto Michael has remarked, we miss some logical order.” The logical order that Michael, Kosmala, and other scholars have referred to is that making a disciple in the early Church involved teaching them to obey and

then baptizing them when they made a commitment to Christ. Yet in the closing verses of Matthew 28, the disciples are first baptized, then taught to obey. While this is not conclusive in and of itself, it is evidence to the fact that the phrase “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit” seems to be put in the text out of order, rather than just being a part of the original text.

8). The short reading has a balance and elegance that the longer reading lacks. Kosmala writes:

“The older Eusebian version enables us to divide the conclusion of Matthew into four natural lines... We see the passage is no longer a prose text like the traditional text, but a hymnic piece. The Eusebian conclusion has a definitely poetical and almost elegant form. It is a self-contained unit of four lines. It is well balanced in its structure and the lines follow one after the other in a logical sequence;.... The poem is not a Greek poem... It is Semitic in the structure of its contents. In its Greek garb it is most likely a translation from Hebrew. ...the interrelation between the four lines is obvious. It is the same as in all well-constructed Hebrew poetry” (Hans Kosmala, “The Conclusion of Matthew;” *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 4 (ASTI 4), 1965, pp. 132-147).

9). The short reading fits with the scope of Scripture regarding the importance of the name of Jesus. It makes perfect sense that before leaving earth, Jesus would instruct his followers to make disciples in his name (Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47) and be witnesses for him (Acts 1:8). From the book of Acts alone, we learn that the name of Jesus was central to Christian life. The disciples baptized in his name (Acts 2:38; 8:12; 10:48; 19:5); healed in his name (Acts 3:6, 16; 4:10;); taught that salvation came by his name (Acts 4:12); taught and preached in his name (Acts 5:28; 9:27); suffered for his name (Acts 5:41; 9:16), called on his name (Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16); received forgiveness through his name (Acts 10:43); were called by his name (Acts 15:17); risked their lives for his name (Acts 15:26); cast out demons by his name (Acts 16:18); and were willing to die for his name (Acts 21:13). The Bible even tells us that there was opposition to the name of Jesus (Acts 4:17, 18; 5:26; 26:9).

From what we can see in the New Testament, it completely fits with the scope of Scripture that shortly before leaving earth, Jesus would tell his disciples, “Go and make disciples of

all the nations in my name, teaching them to obey all that I commanded you.” Then, from what we know about the developing church, it makes sense that likely sometime in the middle of the second century someone would add the phrase about baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

10). Another “interesting” piece of information about Matthew 28:19 is that it seems to be missing in some places where it seems logically it would have been. Conybeare (cited above) points out some of the places in ancient writings where we would have expected Matthew 28:19 to be, but it is not copied, or only partially copied. While it is true that there is no way to prove that an original was somehow expunged, or even if the text would have supported the Trinitarian formula if we had the text, it is well known that, particularly after the time of the Emperor Theodosius (346-395), writings that did not agree with the official position of the Church were sought out and destroyed. Origen, for example, is cited as quoting the first part of Matthew 28:19 three times, but each time stopping with “nations.” Conybeare also points out that in the fourth century, the group called the “Pneumatomacki,” those people who resisted recognizing “the Holy Spirit” as the third person of the Trinity, apparently used a text of Matthew that did not have the Trinitarian formula, something that can be inferred from the things written by and against them.

11). The Trinitarian formula does not appear in the Shem-Tob Hebrew manuscript of Matthew. In the fourteenth century a complete Hebrew text of Matthew appeared in the body of a Jewish polemical treatise entitled *Even Bohan*, “The Touchstone.” The author was Shem-Tob ben Isaac ben-Shaprut (sometimes called Ibn Shaprut; because his name was actually Shem-Tov, sometimes the manuscript is referred to as the Shem-Tov manuscript). This Hebrew manuscript does not seem to be copied from the Greek or Latin, as was thought by earlier scholars, but clearly seems to be a copy from a Hebrew manuscript tradition, which is very important because some of the Church Fathers testified that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew. [For more on the Shem-Tob Hebrew manuscript of Matthew, see commentary on Matthew 3:3].

In contrast to the common reading found in the Greek manuscripts, the Shem-Tob Hebrew manuscript reads:

¹⁹Go, ²⁰and (teach) them to carry out all the things which I have commanded you forever.”

The omission of the command to baptize and the Trinitarian formula in the Shem-Tob manuscript contributes to our conclusion that the Trinitarian formula did not exist in the original manuscript of Matthew, but was a later addition.

12). The book of Matthew has no presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Some prominent Trinitarians doubt that the apostles were even introduced to the doctrine until after they received holy spirit. It seems strange that there would be an inclusion of the doctrine of the Trinity at the very end of Matthew when it had not been a subject of discussion earlier in the book, and it seems even stranger that Jesus would introduce a new baptismal formula that had the name of the Father, Son, and holy spirit without some teaching as to what that meant or why it needed to be there.

13). There are good reasons why the Trinitarian baptismal formula would have been added in Matthew 28:19. As the Church developed, both the ceremony of baptism and the doctrine of the Trinity became more central to the Faith, and so verses that dealt with those subjects were sometimes altered or added. In fact, many passages of the Bible were altered by scribes to fit their theology (see Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*). The Gospel of Matthew became the favorite Gospel in the Greek Church, so it was important that doctrines central to the Faith could be found in it. As Kosmala points out: “It [Matthew] was put to an extensive liturgical use, as research of the past few decades has shown. No gospel lent itself so readily for any additions which the Church felt obliged to make than the Gospel of Matthew.”

We must keep in mind that today if people disagree on an issue of the Faith, about the worst thing that happens is that they refuse to speak to each other. But in the centuries after Christ, theology was hotly debated and “losers” could be beaten or killed by angry mobs, imprisoned, banished or even executed. So there was a lot of pressure on bishops to have verses that supported one’s particular position to be able to “win” any debate.

Although the ancient manuscripts often differ, thankfully, that does not mean we cannot trust the Bible. Today we have some 5700 Greek manuscripts, plus manuscripts in Latin, Georgian, Coptic, Syriac, etc., plus quotations that exist in the Church Fathers, and furthermore today we are aided by computers that can compare and contrast all these manuscripts. So given today’s situation, scholars are usually able to determine the original reading of the text. Nevertheless, there are a few verses such as this one, Matthew 28:19, which are still hotly debated.

Scholars have proposed different possibilities as to when the Trinitarian baptismal formula would have been added to the text, and how it came to be so widely dispersed. Conybeare suggested that the reading was created sometime around 130-140 AD and first appeared in the Old Latin texts and texts from Africa [Alexandria], and then got copied into the Greek texts in Rome and then, during the Nicene time got established enough to get into the Greek texts that have survived until today.

14). We have dealt above with reasons why the REV translation reads, “go and make disciples of all the nations in my name, teaching them to obey all that I commanded you,” and leaves out the phrase about baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We now turn to a different side of the argument. What if we are wrong and the common text is correct. Does that mean there is a Trinity? No, it does not. There is no “proof” of the Trinity in the common reading of Matthew 28:19. If the Father, Son and holy spirit are mentioned in the original text of this verse, it would only affirm that those three exist, something we do not contest. But the doctrine of the Trinity states that the Father, Son and “Holy Spirit” together make “one God,” and that doctrine is never stated in this verse. This verse refers to three, but never says they are “one.” If the phrase about the Father, Son, and holy spirit is original, then the three things this verse refers to are: God the Father; His Son the Lord Jesus Christ; and the power of holy spirit. (We say “holy spirit” instead of “Holy Spirit” because we believe that if the commonly received text of this verse is original, then it is referring to God’s gift of holy spirit that is born inside each believer. It is lower case because it refers to the gift of God, and not God. For more on this, see Graeser, Lynn, Schoenheit, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be like Christ*. [For more on why the holy spirit should be understood as an “it,” not a “he,” see commentary on John 14:17 and John 16:13].

15). It is sometimes stated that in order to be baptized into something, that something has to be God, but that reasoning is false, because Scripture states that the Israelites were “baptized into Moses” (1 Cor. 10:2).

16). It is important to understand why the word “name” is used and why it is singular. A study of the culture and language shows that in this context the word “name” primarily stood for “authority.” Examples are very numerous, but space allows only a small selection. Deuteronomy 18:5-7 speak of serving in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. Deuteronomy 18:22 speaks of prophesying in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 17:45, David attacked Goliath in the “name” (authority) of the Lord, and he blessed the people in

the “name” (authority) of the Lord. In 2 Kings 2:24, Elisha cursed troublemakers in the “name” (authority) of the Lord.

The Apostles baptized in the “name” of Jesus Christ because it meant all his authority. Similarly, Paul rhetorically asked the Corinthians if they were baptized “in the name of Paul” (1 Cor. 1:13), which of course they were not because Paul had no power or authority to save anyone. These scriptures are only a small sample, but they make the point well. Also, we should know that there are other customs involving the word “name,” but authority is a major one we need to be aware of. Some versions occasionally translate “name” as “reputation” (cp. NET; Josh. 7:9; Ps. 8:1), and in the biblical world a person’s reputation and authority were intertwined. If a person had a good reputation then his name had authority.

It was part of the customary use of the word “name” that it was often used in the singular even when there was more than one person involved. Trinitarians sometimes assert that because the common Greek text of Matthew 28:19 says the “name” (singular) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that the three must be one God, but that is not true, as a study of the word “name” in the Bible and biblical culture shows. The word “name” in the singular was often used of two or more. For example, Genesis 48:16 (KJV) says, “. . .the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac.” Some modern versions read, “and the names of my fathers,” but the Hebrew text uses the singular, “name.”

The word “name” is also used in the singular when speaking of more than one god. Exodus 23:13 (KJV) says, “make no mention of the name of other gods” (see also Deut. 18:20; Josh. 23:7). We should note that although the Hebrew text uses the singular, “name,” some modern versions ignore that fact and translate the Hebrew word as “names” (cp. HCSB; ESV; NET; NIV), but other modern versions leave “name” singular (cp. NAB; NASB; NLT; JPS; NJB). 1 Kings 18:24-25 also say the “name” of other gods, but it may also be in that verse that Elohim (god or gods) may indeed refer to a singular “god,” Baal, and should be translated “god;” the commentators and translators are not in agreement about this (cp. ESV vs. NAB). In Exodus 23:13, as in Matthew 28:19, the word “name” includes the name, authority, and reputation of the gods.

2 Samuel 7:9 is another place where “name” is used as a collective singular and refers to a group of people. The King James Version reads, “And I [God]was with thee [David] . . .and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great *men* that *are* in the earth” (most modern versions have translated the second “name” in the verse as “names,” but the

Hebrew text is singular; “name,” and the same is true in 1 Chron. 17:8).

We also see the singular word “name” used to refer to a group of people in Proverbs 10:7. The NASB reads, “. . .the name of the wicked will rot.” In this verse, the Hebrew word “name” is singular while “wicked” is plural, referring to the group of wicked people. The verse could rightly be translated, “the name of the wicked people will rot.” The “God’s Word to the Nations” version changes “name” to “names” and says, “the names of the wicked will rot,” which shows more clearly in English that “the wicked” are a group of people, not just one wicked person, but it loses the grammatical fact that “name” can refer to a group, not just an individual. The NET version and the Complete Jewish Bible translate the word “name” as “reputation” in Proverbs 10:7, and although in this verse, as in many others, the word “name” does include the meaning “reputation,” we feel it is better to leave “name” in the text and explain the meaning in a footnote or text note. In concluding this discussion on “name,” we should see that “name” referred to the name and the authority and reputation of the one or ones whose name was being used, and also that a common custom was to use the word “name” in the singular even when it referred to a group.

In conclusion. In deciding how to translate the REV and omitting the Trinitarian formula from Matthew 28:19, we carefully considered the points above and concluded that the Eusebian version of the Greek text was most likely the original. Hans Kosmala asks the following important question: Would the Gospel suffer any loss by the substitution of the shorter conclusion, or would this conclusion perhaps bring out the Gospel’s message even more clearly? We assert that the shorter version quoted by Eusebius explains why the Apostles never baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; fits with the conclusion of Luke and the words of Paul, and magnifies the name of the Lord Jesus, in keeping with the rest of the message of the New Testament.

[For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 10, “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 11, “What is the Holy Spirit?”].

Mat 28:20

“Remember.” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”). This could have been translated “Pay attention,” because Jesus was trying to make sure he had the attention of those he was speaking to, but

given the circumstances, “remember,” is a good way to translate the word *idou* here (cp. HCSB).

“I am with you always.” This is a wonderful promise to believers, especially when we feel that Jesus is not with us. Life is difficult, and there is a universal spiritual war going on between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. God cannot “just make things better.” He will one day, but not right now. Furthermore, we must remember that God has to be righteous and also follow His own promises. For example, He says that as we sow we reap. So if we sow into our lives in such a way as to cause trouble for ourselves, God just cannot step in and override His own law so things will be better for us here on earth. That does not mean that Jesus is not with us, watching us and helping as best he can: he always does that, and we need to trust that he is [For more on God’s help in troubled times, see commentary on Romans 8:28].

Occasionally this verse is used to prove the Trinity because it is said that the only way that Jesus could always be with his Church is if he were God. However, that is an unproven assumption, and is not stated in Scripture. Furthermore, there are different ways of being “with” someone. For example, Scripture shows us that there is a use of “with us” that is spiritual in nature, not physical. Also, we must be careful not to underestimate the power and authority God gave Christ when He set him at His own right hand and gave him a name that is above every name. Just two verses before this one, Christ said he had been given “all authority.” God gave Christ all authority, and made Christ Head of the Church, so it is only logical to conclude that God also gave Christ the power to stay in communion with his Church.
