

# Echoes of Scripture

## Trinity ~ Matthew 28:16-20

### Summary of Matthew 28:16-20

Called the Great Commission, these words of Jesus are the final words of Matthew's gospel. As he has promised, Jesus meets his disciples on a mountain in Galilee. They worship him, though some doubt. Jesus claims all authority in heaven and on earth and then commissions his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them all he has commanded. In his last words in the Gospel he promises to be with them to the end of the age.

### Suggested Course of Study

- Read Daniel 7 (Vision of the transfer of power and authority to one like a son of man; human being)
- Read Matthew 28:16-20 (The Great Commission)
- Read the article called [The Rabbi and His Talmidim](http://Followtherabbi.com) from Followtherabbi.com

### Immediate Context

Matthew 26:1-5 The Plot to Kill Jesus  
Matthew 26:6-13 The Anointing at Bethany  
Matthew 26:14-16 Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus  
Matthew 26:17-25 The Passover with the Disciples  
Matthew 26:26-30 Institution of the Lord's Supper  
Matthew 26:31-35 Peter's Denial Foretold  
Matthew 26:36-46 Jesus Prays in Gethsemane  
Matthew 26:47-56 Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus  
Matthew 26:57-68 Jesus Before the High Priest

Matthew 26:69-75 Peter's Denial of Jesus  
Matthew 27:1-2 Jesus Brought before Pilate  
Matthew 27:3-10 The Suicide of Judas  
Matthew 27:11-14 Pilate Questions Jesus  
Matthew 27:15-23 Barabbas or Jesus?  
Matthew 28:1-10 The Resurrection of Jesus  
Matthew 28:11-15 The Report of the Guard  
**Matthew 28:16-20 Commissioning the Disciples**

### The Text<sup>i</sup>

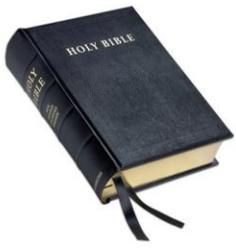
#### MATTHEW 28:16-20 (NRSV)

<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."<sup>d</sup>

### Key Words

**THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES WENT TO GALILEE** – Going to Galilee. The women are told by the angel and then by Jesus himself to tell "my brothers" to go to Galilee where Jesus will meet them. This is a returning home for the disciples. Jesus had made his home in Capernaum (see Matthew 4). Going to Galilee and to the mountain is an act of faith (or some might be tempted to say, simply a returning home). Regardless, this gathering of the eleven is the first time they have gathered together since Jesus was arrested and they had deserted him.

<sup>d</sup> Other ancient authorities add *Amen*



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Notice that there are only eleven disciples at this moment. Judas had committed suicide by hanging himself at the beginning of chapter 27 after betraying Jesus and seeing that he had been condemned. It is interesting that in Matthew's gospel, it says that Judas repented and gave back the thirty pieces of silver.

In Acts 1:18-19, it says that Judas had purchased a field with the money and falling headlong (or "swelling up"), he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus only appears in Jerusalem after the resurrection.

In the gospel of John, Jesus appears to the disciples in Judea and in Galilee; though the appearance stories in Galilee in chapter 21 are considered to be later additions added to the original ending at the end of chapter 20.

The shorter ending of the gospel of Mark ends with an angel telling the women at the tomb that to go *"tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."* So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

The longer ending of Mark says that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, two while walking in the country, and then to the eleven themselves. When he appeared to the eleven, the text says:

Mark 16:14–18 (NRSV) <sup>14</sup> *Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.* <sup>c 15</sup> *And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news<sup>d</sup> to the whole creation.* <sup>16</sup> *The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.* <sup>17</sup> *And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will pick up snakes in their hands,<sup>e</sup> and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."*

**TO THE MOUNTAIN TO WHICH JESUS HAD DIRECTED THEM** – At the beginning of chapter 28, an angel rolls away the stone, sits on it and talks to the women, telling them *"Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.'* This is my message for you" (vs 7). As they are running to tell the disciples, Jesus appears to them and says *"Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me"* (vs 10).

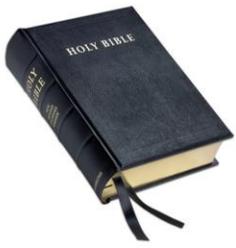
The story of Jesus directing the disciples to return to a specific mountain never appears in Matthew's gospel. Instead, Jesus tells the disciples that he will go ahead of them to Galilee. In Matthew 26, just after Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper we find this exchange between Jesus and the disciples: Matthew 26:30–35 (NRSV) <sup>30</sup> *When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.* <sup>31</sup> *Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'* <sup>32</sup> *But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."* <sup>33</sup> *Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you."* <sup>34</sup> *Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell*

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<sup>c</sup> Other ancient authorities add, in whole or in part, *And they excused themselves, saying, "This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who does not allow the truth and power of God to prevail over the unclean things of the spirits. Therefore reveal your righteousness now"—thus they spoke to Christ. And Christ replied to them, "The term of years of Satan's power has been fulfilled, but other terrible things draw near. And for those who have sinned I was handed over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more, that they may inherit the spiritual and imperishable glory of righteousness that is in heaven."*

<sup>d</sup> Or gospel

<sup>e</sup> Other ancient authorities lack *in their hands*



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*you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”<sup>35</sup> Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.*

In the gospel of Matthew, a mountain or mountains are mentioned in the following places (excluding parables): Matthew 4:8 (during the temptation); 5:1 (the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee); 8:1 (Jesus comes down from the mountain where he gave the Sermon on the Mount); 14:23 (after dismissing the crowds from the feeding of the 5000 and before he walks on water); 15:29 (the mountain near the Sea of Galilee); 17:1, 9 (the high mountain of the Transfiguration). The most common mountain is near the shore of the Sea of Galilee. There is also mention of a “high mountain” in the story of the transfiguration. Many important events happen on a mountain.

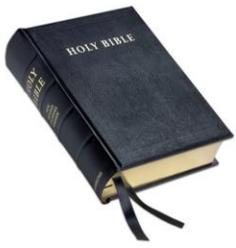
When we hear that Jesus met with his disciples on a mountain, it reminds us of all the times God’s people have gathered on a mountain to meet with God. We are reminded of the story of Noah and the ark at Mount Ararat (Genesis 8), Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22), Moses and the burning bush at the mountain of God (Exodus 3), Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-20, 24), Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18), Elijah fleeing from Jezebel ends up at Horeb (1 Kings 19). See also Deuteronomy 33 and Habakkuk 3 for references to Mount Paran.

**THEY WORSHIPED HIM; BUT SOME DOUBTED** – The response of the disciples to Jesus appearing to them on the mountain is to worship him. However, I love the addition of the next phrase; “but some doubted”. *ἐδίστασαν*, third person plural, aorist active indicative of *διστάζω*, meaning “to doubt, waver, hesitate, or be of two minds”. The initial response of the disciples is a mixture of worship and doubt. The only other time this word appears in the New Testament is at Matthew 14:31 where Jesus tells a wet Peter “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” And it is interesting the same words “doubt” and “worship” occur in this passage too.

I love that the gospel writer was honest enough to write that some of the disciples doubted even as they worshiped the resurrected Jesus. Their doubt is understandable. They never could have expected to see Jesus again. Their dreams had been shattered by his arrest and crucifixion. They had scattered just as Jesus had predicted. And they knew that people don’t just come back to life after a horrific death like that. So their doubt (or hesitation) was understandable even in the midst of Jesus being there among them.

We could ask questions about their doubt. What did they doubt? Did they doubt that he was alive? Did they doubt that he was the Messiah? Did they doubt whether it was appropriate to worship him? Notice that it says that some doubted *as* they were worshipping Jesus. What does this say to us about our own worship of God? What does this say about our own doubts?

**ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME**– To understand Jesus claim here we need to read Daniel 7 paying particular attention to verses 9-14. Daniel 7:9-14 (NRSV) <sup>9</sup> *As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire.* <sup>10</sup> *A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.* <sup>11</sup> *I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.* <sup>12</sup> *As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.* <sup>13</sup> *As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.* <sup>14</sup> *To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should*



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*serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.*

Throughout the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is lifted up as King of the Jews; beginning with his genealogy in the line of David (see Matthew 1:6), the comments of the wise men (see Matthew 2:2), his entry into Jerusalem which quotes Zechariah (see Matthew 21:5), the question asked by Pilate (see Matthew 27:11), the mocking of the soldiers (see Matthew 27:29), the charge against him (see Matthew 27:37), the people mocking him on the cross (see Matthew 27:42).

For times when Jesus' authority is mentioned in Matthew's gospel, see the following:

Jesus is described as teaching as "one having authority, and not as their scribes" in Matthew 7:29.

In the story of the healing of the paralytic Jesus talks about authority: Matthew 9:6–8 (NRSV) <sup>6</sup> *But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins*—he then said to the paralytic—*"Stand up, take your bed and go to your home."* <sup>7</sup> *And he stood up and went to his home.* <sup>8</sup> *When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.*

In Matthew 10:1, it says "Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness."

This passage is crucial. In Matthew 11:25–27 it says "At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'"

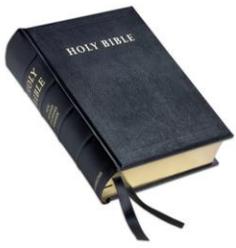
In Matthew 21:23 Jesus had recently driven out of the temple those who were selling and buying. After spending the night in Bethany, he returns to the temple to teach and the chief priests and the elders come and question him "By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?" Jesus refuses to answer because the leaders refuse to answer his question about the baptism of John.

**ALL** – Like a resounding gong, the word "all" appears four times in this passage: "All (πᾶσα) authority", "all (πάντα) nations", "everything [or all] (πάντα) that I have commanded you", and "with you always (πάσας)". In English this isn't clear. In Greek, all of these are a form of the root word πᾶς meaning "all".

**THE GREAT COMMISSION** – It is interesting that in the Great Commission, that only the verb "make disciples" is an imperative. The verbals "Go", "baptizing", and "teaching" are all participles that make them subordinate to the verb "make disciples". "Baptizing" and "teaching" are participles of means that are dependent upon the verb "make disciples". They describe things we do in the process of making disciples. First, we baptize. Then, we teach people to obey everything that Jesus had commanded them.

**GO THEREFORE** – πορευθέντες aorist passive deponent nominative masculine 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural from πορεύομαι meaning "go, proceed, travel; conduct oneself, live, walk." From this same root we get the words porous and port (each of which are "passageways"). Jesus sends the disciples out. He tells them to "Go" among the nations. Yet we in the church usually prefer to invite people to "come" to us. We seem to prefer inviting people to come to where we are rather than to go to where the people are.

**AND MAKE DISCIPLES** – μαθητεύσατε imperative aorist active 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural from μαθητεύω meaning "to be a disciple or make a disciple." This phrase occurs only here and at the end of the parables of the kingdom (See Matthew 13:52 where it is translated as "trained").



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Jesus is speaking in rabbinical terms here. Rabbis would invest their lives in the lives of their disciples, teaching them and preparing them for the day when their students would one day become rabbis themselves. When the time came and the rabbis knew that their students were ready, they would give them the authority to take on students of their own. Jesus is giving this authority to his disciples. They themselves are to take on disciples of their own who will learn not what the disciples think and believe, but rather what the disciples had learned from Jesus (how Jesus interpreted and lived the scriptures).

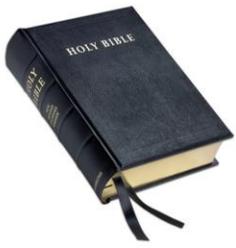
**OF ALL NATIONS** – “All nations” πάντα τὰ ἔθνη the root of this word is the same root from which we get the word ethnic and ethnicity; it’s a word used for nations, peoples, and (most prominently in Matthew) to refer to the Gentiles (see Matthew 4:15; 5:47; 6:7, 32; 10:5, 18; 12:18, 21; 18:17; 20:19, 25). It is only translated as nations here and in Matthew 24:7-14 and Matthew 25:32.

In Matthew 10, Jesus sends the twelve out with the following instructions: *“Go nowhere among the Gentiles ἐθνῶν, and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ <sup>8</sup> Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. <sup>9</sup> Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, <sup>10</sup> no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. <sup>11</sup> Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. <sup>12</sup> As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup> If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup> If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. <sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.*

Now Jesus is sending the disciples into all nations; this is a reversal of what we see in Matthew 10. Jesus has gathered his disciples back in Gentile territory; the place where Jesus chose to make his home. See Matthew 4:12-17: *<sup>12</sup> Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. <sup>13</sup> He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup> so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: <sup>15</sup> “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles (ἐθνῶν)— <sup>16</sup> the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” <sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

**BAPTIZING THEM** – βαπτίζοντες present active nominative masculine 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural from βαπτίζω meaning “to dip, sink, baptize”. The gospel of Matthew doesn’t include stories of Jesus baptizing people. References to baptism can be found in Matthew 3:1-16, Matthew 21:25 in an argument with the religious leaders about the baptism of John, and here in the Great Commission. The only mention of Jesus actually baptizing people in the gospel occurs in John 3:22 which says “After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized.” Otherwise, it is John the Baptist who baptizes people in the gospels or Jesus’ disciples. It is interesting that in Luke 4 that when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John” he left Judea and started back to Galilee and the narrator interjects that “it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized”. (Luke 4:1-3). When John the Baptist talks about the baptism that Jesus will perform, he talks about it being different than the baptism he is doing. John’s is a baptism with water, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:16). Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11; Mark 3:8; Luke 3:16).

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** – What does it mean to baptize “in the name of” the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? To do something “in the name of” someone is to do it under their authority; representing them.



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**AND TEACHING THEM TO OBEY EVERYTHING THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU** – διδάσκοντες present active nominative masculine nominative 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural from διδάσκω meaning “to teach”. The process of making disciples involves much more than simply sharing the “four spiritual laws” or “how to have peace with God”. It involves teaching, not just information, but obedience, a way of living. Jesus insists that we are to obey all that he has commanded us. What did Jesus command us to do? A great place to begin looking is with the five teaching discourses in the gospel of Matthew: the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7); the Missionary discourse (Matthew 10); the Parable discourse (Matthew 13); the Church discourse (Matthew 18) and the Eschatological discourse (Matthew 24-25).

**AND REMEMBER, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS** – The gospel begins with the same promise spoken to Joseph, as there is a quote from Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23 that says<sup>23</sup> *“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”*

What a wonderful promise that we do not do it alone. We do not do it on our own power. But we have Christ with us; the Spirit of God in us and among us and around us.

**TO THE END OF THE AGE** – For more times when Jesus talks about this age, the age to come, the end, or the end of the age, see Matthew 10:22; 12:22-32; 13:36-49; and 24:3-14.

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