

Textual Evidence and the Great Commission

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Introduction

This paper is actually part of a longer work, entitled *Repent and Be Baptized*. One of the arguments used by some to prove that baptism is an “optional extra” is that there is no record of Jesus actually commanding it. The two references to baptism as part of the “Great Commission” are in passages of scripture which are considered to be of doubtful validity. This paper will examine the authenticity of these passages.

The “Great Commission” for the Church, the “marching orders” from our Lord, is summed up in two passages of Scripture. Both contain commands for baptism.

Matthew 28:

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Mark 16:

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

There is some question among Biblical scholars concerning the validity of these verses, which I would like to examine in detail.

Part 1: Matthew 28:19

Conybeare’s Claims

The words in question in this passage are, “...baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” They appear in EVERY Greek manuscript that is known to be in existence. However, some scholars question their validity based on two factors: they are not quoted by some early Church Fathers (notably Eusebius), and they seem to contradict other sections of Scripture, when not properly understood. This argument was first put forth by the nineteenth century Biblical scholar, F. C. Conybeare (1856-1924). There is a well known and often-quoted writing dealing with this subject, written in 1962 by Pastor A. Ploughman of Birmingham, England. In it, Pastor Ploughman quotes extensively from Conybeare’s writings. For example:

“In the course of my reading I have been able to substantiate these doubts of the authenticity of the text of Matthew 28:19 by adducing patristic evidence against it, so weighty that in the future the most conservative of divines will shrink from resting on it any dogmatic fabric at

all, while the more enlightened will discard it as completely as they have its fellow-text of the 'Three Witnesses'." (F. C. Conybeare in Hibbert Journal)¹

Despite the fact that all extant manuscripts contain the words in question, Conybeare pointed out that Eusebius quotes the command as "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations in my name." This is considered to be evidence that he quoted from an earlier manuscript than what is in existence today. Pastor Ploughman admits that the evidence of the manuscripts supports the traditional reading.

For the threefold name:

The two earliest MSS. extant (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus), written in the 4th century, both include the end of Matthew also contain the threefold name. "In all extant MSS, ...the text is found in the traditional form (Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics)."

Against the threefold name:

There is no evidence in the MSS discovered to date.

BUT--

It must be remembered that we have no manuscript that was written in the first, second, or third centuries. There is a gap of the three whole centuries between the writing of Matthew and the MSS that contain the threefold name.²

The absence of any manuscript that contains the wording that Eusebius quoted is explained by the fact that the emperor Diocletian in his persecution of the Christian Church ordered all sacred books to be burned, in 303 AD. The only surviving manuscripts were those that had been altered to what is now the traditional reading.

In the case just examined (Matthew 28:19), it is to be noticed that not a single manuscript or ancient version has preserved to us the true reading. But that is not surprising for as Dr. C. R. Gregory, one of the greatest of our textual critics, reminds us, 'the Greek MSS of the text of the New Testament were often altered by scribes, who put into them the readings which were familiar to them,' and which they held to be the right readings. *Canon and Text of the N T*, 1907, page 424.³

While this is undoubtedly true in some cases, it only proves that the text in question **could** have been corrupted, not that it **was**. And it seems improbable that **every single manuscript** in the known world prior to 303 AD was destroyed under Diocletian. Jules Lebreton in his history of the Trinity, states, "That a reading which appeared in all manuscripts of Caesarea at the beginning of the fourth century was the only one known to Eusebius, and disappeared without a single trace in any manuscript or version, is an impossible suggestion."⁴ Although he concludes that the verse supports the Trinity, his point about the disappearance of so many manuscripts is nevertheless well taken.

¹ Quoted in A. Ploughman, *A Collection of the Evidence For and Against the Traditional Wording of the Baptismal Phrase in Matthew 28:19*, Copyright assigned to Apostolic Theological Bible College, posted by permission on Jesus Messiah Fellowship site, <http://www.jesus-messiah.com/apologetics/catholic/matthew2819.html>.

² *A Collection of the Evidence*.

³ Conybeare, quoted in *A Collection of the Evidence*.

⁴ Jules Lebreton, *History and Dogma of the Trinity from its Origins to the Council of Nicea* (London: Burns, Oates & Washburne, Ltd., 1939), p. 437.

There was claimed to be a document in which Eusebius specifically identified Matthew 28:19 as a spurious addition, but there is no evidence of this. Pastor Ploughman wrote,

According to the editor of the Christadelphian Monatshefte, Eusebius among his many other writings compiled a collection of the corrupted texts of the Holy Scriptures, and “the most serious of all the falsifications denounced by him, is without doubt the traditional reading of Matthew 28:19.”

Persistent inquiry has failed to trace the compilation referred to, and Knupfer, the Editor, has left his last Canadian address without a trace. But various authorities mention “a work entitled DISCREPANCIES IN THE GOSPELS or QUESTIONS AND SOLUTIONS ON SOME POINTS IN THE GOSPEL HISTORY” and another work on THE CONCLUDING SECTIONS OF THE GOSPELS.⁵

The Shem Tov Text of Matthew

Another proponent of the theory that the text was corrupted, Pastor G. Reckart, writes on his web page, “We now have absolute proof the Catholic Church fathers perverted the text in Matthew 28:19. We now have the Hebrew Matthew Gospel, a manuscript that was preserved by the Jews from the first century. In this Shem Tov MS, the text at Matthew 28:19 does not contain the Trinitarian statement.”⁶ However, Shem Tov’s Hebrew Gospel of Matthew is in no way proof that the original had the shorter reading of 28:19 quoted by Eusebius. According to George Howard, who translated and edited the manuscript, it is from the 14th or 15th century, and was contained in the twelfth (in some manuscripts, the thirteenth) book of the *Even Bohan (The Touchstone)*, a Jewish polemical treatise directed against Christians.⁷ There are a number of variant readings in this text which differ from all Greek manuscripts in extant. The Great Commission of 28:19 reads, “Go and teach them to carry out all the things which I have commanded you forever.” While it does not contain the baptismal reference, it also makes no mention at all of “making disciples of all nations,” nor does it include Jesus’ promise, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Such a late document that has as many variant readings as Shem Tov’s Hebrew Matthew can in no way support any claim to be more accurate than the older Greek manuscripts in existence. So there is actually no textual evidence to prove that the traditional reading of 28:19 was a later addition and not in the original. Nevertheless, some scholars consider it to be a later addition, based on the quotations from early Church writers, and from internal proof.

The Witness of Eusebius

Regarding Eusebius, it must be pointed out that he quotes this verse in several places, and actually uses **three** different forms. The first, “Go and make disciples of all the nations,” appears three times in *Demonstratio Evangelica (The Proof of the Gospel)*, as well as twice in his *Commentary on Psalms*, and once each in *The Theophania* and *The Theology of the Church*. The following is from Book I, chapter 3, of *The Proof of the Gospel*. (This form also occurs in chapters 4 and 6 of Book I of that work.)

⁵ *A Collection of the Evidence*.

⁶ G. Reckart, “Matthew 28:29”, Jesus Messiah Fellowship, <http://jesus-messiah.com/apologetics/catholic/mat2819.html>

⁷ George Howard, *Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995).

Hence, of course, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Son of God, said to His disciples after His Resurrection: **“Go and make disciples of all the nations,”** and added: “Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.”⁸

The second form, which occurs five times in the same writing (Book III, chapters 6 & 7; Book 9, chapter 11), has the words, “Make disciples of all the nations **in my Name...**” In one of those, he notes that the one phrase, “In My Name” is what defined the charge to make disciples. He did not, however, say that no other phrase was in any of the manuscripts of Matthew 28:19 that he had, as some have claimed. The passage is as follows:

Whereas He, who conceived nothing human or mortal, see how truly he speaks with the voice of God, saying in these very words to those disciples of His, the poorest of the poor: **‘Go forth, and make disciples of all the nations.’** ‘But how,’ the disciples might reasonably have answered the Master, ‘can we do it?’... But while the disciples of Jesus were most likely either saying thus, or thinking thus, the Master solved their difficulties, by the addition of one phrase, saying they should triumph **‘IN MY NAME.’** For He did not bid them simply and indefinitely **‘make disciples of all nations,’** but with the necessary addition **‘In My Name.’** And the power of His Name being so great, that the Apostle says: ‘God has given him a name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.’ He shewed the virtue of the power in His Name concealed from the crowd, when He said to His Disciples: **‘Go, and make disciples of all nations in my name.’**⁹

One can see by the wording that it does not necessarily prove that the MSS from which he quoted had the words “in my name” **rather than** the traditional wording, especially when the same work quotes the verse in two different forms. The second form, with the words “in my name” occurs four times in *The Theophania*, and four times in *Commentary on Psalms*, both of which also contain references using the first form. (The second form also occurs twice in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, and once each in *History of the Church*, and *In Praise of Constantine*.)

Besides those two forms, there are also instances in which he quotes the verse in the traditional form, including a passage in the previously mentioned *Theophania*.

He drew near to them, spoke with them, and said: “All power (both) in heaven and earth, is given to me of my Father. **Go ye and make Disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.** And teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. And, behold! I am with you always even to the end of the world.” [...] He commanded his Disciples,--not from ancient times--but now, that they should make the circuit, and make Disciples, of all nations. And He necessarily added the mystery of cleansing.¹⁰

Eusebius also quotes the verse in the traditional form in *The Theology of the Church*, in *The Letter To Caesaria*, and twice in *Contra Marcellum*. So throughout his writings, Eusebius quoted the verse in

⁸ Eusebius of Caesarea, “Demonstratio Evangelica,” Book I, Chapter 3, Early Church Fathers, http://www.ccel.org/p/pearse/morefathers/eusebius_de_03_book1.htm (accessed May 4, 2006)

⁹ Eusebius of Caesarea, “Demonstratio Evangelica,” Book III, Chapter 7, Early Church Fathers, http://www.ccel.org/p/pearse/morefathers/eusebius_de_05_book3.htm (accessed May 3, 2006)

¹⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, “Theophania,” Book IV, Paragraph 8, Early Church Fathers, http://www.ccel.org/p/pearse/morefathers/eusebius_theophania_05book4.htm (accessed May 3, 2006)

three different forms (with all three occurring in *The Theophania*). Thus his quotations cannot be proof that the “original text” read one way or the other. Those that he wrote in the latter part of his life, at and after the Council of Nicea, are sometimes said to have been written under pressure because of the council, but there is no proof or basis for that conclusion, and is merely conjecture.

Other Church Writers

It should also be noted that there are other early Church writings that quote Matthew 28:19 and use the words found in the traditional rendering.

The Letter from Dionysius of Alexandria to Xystus (257-8 AD), chief bishop of Rome includes the following:

Inasmuch as you have written thus, setting forth the pious legislation, which we continually read and now have in remembrance—namely that it shall suffice only to lay hands on those who shall have made profession in baptism, whether in pretence or in truth, of God Almighty and of Christ and of the Holy Spirit; but those over whom there has not been invoked the name either of Father or of Son or of the Holy Spirit, these we must baptise, but not rebaptise. This is the sure and immovable teaching and tradition, begun by our Lord after his resurrection from the dead, when he gave his apostles the command: **Go ye, make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.** This then was preserved and fulfilled by his successors, the blessed apostles, and by all the bishops prior to ourselves who have died in the holy church and shared in its life; and it has lasted down to us, because it is firmer than the whole world. For, he said, heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.¹¹

Gregory Thaumaturgus (205-265 AD) in *A Sectional Confession of Faith, XIII* wrote, “...the Lord sends forth His disciples **to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...**”¹²

Cyprian (200-258 AD) in *The Seventh Council of Carthage Under Cyprian* quoted the words of “eighty-seven bishops on the baptism of heretics.” Three of them, namely Lucius of Castra Galbae, Euchratus of Thenae, and Vincentius of Thibarisis, all quoted Matthew 28:19, with the words, “**Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.**”¹³

Tertullian, c. 200 AD, wrote in *On Baptism*, “For the law of baptizing has been imposed, and the formula prescribed: ‘Go,’ He saith, ‘teach the nations, **baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**’”¹⁴ Tertullian also wrote in *Against Praxeas*, chapter 26, “After His resurrection ... He commands them to **baptize into the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.**”¹⁵

¹¹ Dionysius of Alexandria, “First Letter to Xystus, Chief Bishop of Rome,” Newly discovered letters to the Popes Stephen and Xystus, Early Church Fathers,

http://www.ccel.org/p/pearse/morefathers/dionysius_alexandria_letters.htm (accessed May 3, 2006)

¹² Gregory Thaumaturgus, “A Sectional Confession of Faith,” XIII, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VI, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-06/anf06-14.htm> (accessed February 25, 2005)

¹³ Cyprian, “The Seventh Council of Carthage Under Cyprian,” Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. V, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-05/anf05-124.htm> (accessed February 25, 2005)

¹⁴ Tertullian, “On Baptism,” Chapter XIII, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/anf03-49.htm> (accessed February 25, 2005)

¹⁵ Tertullian, “Against Praxeas,” Chapter XXVI, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. III, http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/anf03-43.htm#P10374_2906966 (accessed May 3, 2006)

Hippolytus (170-236 AD) wrote in *Against the Heresy of One Noetus*, "...gave this charge to the disciples after He rose from the dead: **Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.**"¹⁶

Tatian the Syrian wrote in *The Diatesseron* (170 AD), "Then said Jesus unto them, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and earth; and as my Father has sent me, so I also send you. Go now into all the world, and preach my gospel in all the creation; and teach all the peoples, and baptize **them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit**; and teach them to keep all whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you all the days, unto the end of the world'"¹⁷

And of course, *The Didache*, one of the earliest Christian documents after the New Testament, which some scholars date as early as 70 AD, includes the words, "After the foregoing instructions, **baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit**, in living [running] water..."¹⁸ Granted, this document shows the beginnings of the use of this phrase as a formula ("...pour water three times on the head, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit") and there is no question that it became such. But the misuse of the words notwithstanding, the writer of *The Didache* knew of the traditional wording of Matthew 28:19.

While many of these early writers are cited in order to "prove" the Trinity from Matthew 28:19 (which this verse doesn't do) nevertheless it proves that they knew of the wording which Conybeare suggested was a later addition, and which appears in every manuscript. The fact that Eusebius quotes the verse in three different ways makes it doubtful that he was quoting from an earlier manuscript no longer in existence. It is more likely he was simply paraphrasing, and using different wording at different times. G. R. Beasley-Murray wrote,

The real difficulty is to determine whether we have any right to speak of a 'Eusebian reading'. E. Riggenbach, in a lengthy reply to Conybeare's article, showed that Eusebius exercised considerable freedom in quoting the Matthaean text, as is evidenced in the fact that the text appears in various forms, even in one and the same work; after Nicea Eusebius cites the commission in both longer and shorter forms; while (in Riggenbach's view) in the letter written by Eusebius in 325, during the Council at Nicea, the manner in which he cites the common form of the text suggests that he had been familiar with it for long. This exposition of the facts received widespread support.¹⁹

The citation of the common form in the letter referred to above is as follows:

We believe in the being and continual existence of each of these; that the Father is in truth the Father; the Son in truth the Son; the Holy Ghost in truth the Holy Ghost; as our Lord, when sending out His disciples to preach the Gospel, said, "**Go forth and teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father. and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.**" We positively affirm that we hold this faith, that we have always held it, and that we adhere to it

¹⁶ Hippolytus, "Against the Heresy of One Noetus," Paragraph 14, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. V, http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-05/anf05-18.htm#P3712_1172813

¹⁷ Tatian the Syrian, Diatesseron 55, quoted on "Trinitarian Baptism," Catholic Answers, http://www.catholic.com/library/Trinitarian_Baptism.asp (accessed May 3, 2006)

¹⁸ Didache 7:1, quoted on "Trinitarian Baptism," Catholic Answers, http://www.catholic.com/library/Trinitarian_Baptism.asp (accessed May 3, 2006)

¹⁹ *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 81-82

even unto death, condemning all ungodly heresy. We testify, as before God the Almighty and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we have thought thus from the heart, and from the soul, ever since we have known ourselves; and we have the means of showing, and, indeed, of convincing you, that we have always during the past thus believed and preached.²⁰

Beasley-Murray continues:

Lindblom...scrutinized afresh the citations of Mt. 28.19 in Eusebius and examined the context in each case. He came to two conclusions: first, that Eusebius draws on various passages in the New Testament when citing the missionary commission, combining with Mt. 28.19 items from Mt. 10.8, 24.14, Jn. 20.22, and that his 'in my name' is due to the example of Lk. 24.47 along with Mk. 16.17; secondly, the form of the citation is made to suit the purpose in view at the moment of writing; the full text is employed when Eusebius is concerned about some aspect of the teaching on baptism or the Trinity, the shorter is used when the interest is centred on the mission to the nations. A just estimate of these contentions requires a following of Lindblom's presentation of the evidence, but it appears to me more plausible than the alternative suggestions that have been made. The great majority of critics and commentators have felt themselves unable to forsake the unbroken testimony of the texts and versions for the very uncertain witness of Eusebius; indeed, Lagrange characterized adherence to 'Conybeare's whim', as he described it, as 'a real defiance of textual criticism'. The objection to the authenticity of Mt. 28.19 on the basis of sound principles of textual criticism therefore can scarcely be said to have maintained itself.²¹

Internal Evidence

So the witness of Eusebius is at best inconclusive, and virtually nonexistent in comparison to the evidence of the manuscripts themselves. However the factor that is considered to be the most convincing argument against the validity of Matthew 28:19 is that it seems to contradict other parts of Scripture. Nowhere in the rest of the New Testament is baptism performed in the name of the Father, the Son and the holy spirit.²² Baptism was always done in the name of Jesus Christ.

Also, Biblical scholars recognize that the doctrine of the Trinity was not fully developed until some three hundred years after Christ, and so a reference to it in the words of Christ would be an anachronism, and a clear indication that it was a later spurious addition to the text. But the fact is, this verse does not mention the Trinity. It refers to the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit, as three separate entities, but nowhere does it say that they are coequal, coeternal, or three persons in one God. Even scholars who believe in the Trinity caution other Trinitarians against using this verse as a "proof text" for this reason. There are in fact other verses that mention the Father, the Son and the holy spirit together, but do not identify them as members of the Trinity.

II Corinthians 13:

14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

²⁰ Eusebius, "Letter to the Church at Caesarea," Patristics in English (P.I.E.) Project, http://www.seanmultimedia.com/Pie_Eusebius_Letters_Fragmented.html

²¹ *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 82

²² Some critics claim that "Father," "Son," and "holy spirit" are **not** names but titles. However, the phrase "in the name of" means "with respect to," and thus does not require a literal name.

I Peter 1:

2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

I Corinthians 12:

3 Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

Now while Matthew 28:19 does not “prove” the Trinity, it still appears to contradict the rest of the New Testament, because it is thought to be a “formula” for baptism, and therefore contradictory to the “formula” of baptizing in the name of Jesus Christ as seen throughout the rest of the New Testament. But were these words intended as a formula? C. A. Scott, in his article on Baptism in *Hastings’ Dictionary of the Bible*, presents the two most common explanations for the perceived contradiction.

It must be acknowledged that the formula of the threefold name...does not appear to have been employed by the primitive Church, which, so far as our information goes, baptized ‘in’ or ‘into the name of Jesus’ (or ‘Jesus Christ’ or ‘the Lord Jesus’: Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; cf. I Co. 1:13, 15), without reference to the Father or the Spirit. The difficulty hence arising may be met by assuming (a) that Baptism in the name of Jesus was equivalent to Baptism in the name of the Trinity, or (b) that the shorter phrase does not represent the formula used by the baptizer (which may have been the fuller one), but the profession made by the baptized, and the essential fact that he became a Christian—one of Christ’s acknowledged followers. But it is better to infer the authority of Christ for the practice [of baptism] from the prompt and universal adoption of it by the Apostles and the infant Church, to which the opening chapters of Acts bear witness; and from the significance attached to the rite in the Epistles, and especially in those of St. Paul.²³

So the fact that the disciples carried out baptism in the name of Jesus Christ does not automatically prove that the command in Matthew 28:19 was a spurious addition and not the words of Jesus. Nevertheless, there is a third, very simple explanation for the apparent difficulty, as described by Beasley-Murray.

We must first make up our mind whether Mt. 28.19 reflects a baptismal formula in current use in the Church, or whether it is intended to describe the nature of Christian baptism. Several notable exegetes have supported the latter alternative. Schniewind considered that a baptismal formula is as little intended here as in the evangelic traditions of the Beatitudes, the Lord’s Prayer and the Last Supper. F. C. Grant more recently has expounded a similar view: the baptismal statement combines the disciples’ inherited Jewish faith in God (‘the name of the Father’), their new faith in the Son (i.e. Son of Man) and their experience of the holy spirit, the earnest of the New Age.²⁴

²³ *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. “Baptism.”

²⁴ *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 83

So the problems, which seem to demand a forsaking of all known manuscripts in favor of loosely paraphrased references in Eusebius, all disappear when one realizes that Matthew 28:19 was not meant to be a formula, but simply a description of what the new disciples would be baptized into. The Jews knew of the Father, and were aware of the workings of the holy spirit, but the identification of Jesus as the Son of God was now crucial to their baptism. Gentiles, on the other hand, may or may not have known God as a Father, or His holy spirit working in the world, and would need to be introduced into that knowledge as well as that of Christ. This would be a reasonable description of the Commission to preach and teach to “all nations.” All three, God, Jesus, and the holy spirit (which is also called the spirit of Christ) are instrumental in the entire plan of salvation. Thus being baptized as a response to the Gospel can certainly be described as being baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy spirit,” since there is no reference in that verse to the Trinitarian concepts of coequality, coexistence, or triune persons. The words of the Great Commission were in fact turned into a Trinitarian baptismal formula in later years, but there is nothing to indicate that this was the original meaning or intent of the phrase.

When one considers the verse in this way, there is no contradiction. Combined with the evidence of several Church Fathers (including Eusebius in some cases), and with the evidence of EVERY extant manuscript, this leaves us with a clear understanding of our Lord’s command, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

Part 2: Mark 16:16

The Variant Endings of Mark

Another verse that expresses the Lord’s command is in the midst of an entire section of Scripture the validity of which has been questioned. While no texts support the omission of words in Matthew 28:19, a number of manuscripts do in fact omit Mark 16:9-20. They simply end (albeit abruptly) with verse 8. These manuscripts include, among others, the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus, the two oldest Greek manuscripts in extant. Verses 9-20 are also omitted in the Old Latin codex Bezae Cantabrigiae, the Sinaitic Syriac manuscript, about one hundred Armenian manuscripts, and the two oldest Georgian manuscripts (written 897 AD and 913 AD).²⁵

There are some manuscripts that include a passage after verse 8, followed by the traditionally accepted verses 9-20. These include four uncial Greek manuscripts of the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, as well as Old Latin k, the margin of the Harelean Syriac, several Sahidic and Bohairic manuscripts, and not a few Ethiopic manuscripts.²⁶ The added passage is as follows:

But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.²⁷

There is one manuscript (Codex Washingtonianus) which has the following passage inserted after verse 14:

²⁵ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1971), pp. 122-126.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *The Westminster Study Edition of the Holy Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948).

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 [*or*, does not allow what lies under the unclean spirits to understand the truth and power of God]. Therefore reveal thy 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 delivered over to death, that they may return to the truth and sin no more, in order that they may inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness which is in heaven.’²⁸

Most scholars agree that these two shorter additions are spurious. As for the longer ending (verses 9-20), it appears in the **vast majority** of Greek manuscripts²⁹. Still, most textual critics (including scholars such as Bruce Metzger and A. T. Robinson) consider it to be a later addition, and notes to that fact are often included even in modern Bible versions. Some of the scholars who consider the section to be a later addition (such as John D. Grassmick³⁰) believe that it nevertheless represents the inspired teaching of Jesus. On the other hand, a number of scholars defend outright the genuineness of the passage, including Scrivener³¹, Burgon³², McGarvey³³, and Lenski³⁴.

Even if the verses were added, they were added very early on, and were widely accepted as an integral part of the Gospel. Justin Martyr (d. 165 AD) in his *First Apology* wrote that the apostles “...going forth from Jerusalem, preached everywhere.” The Greek words for ‘going,’ ‘preached,’ and ‘everywhere’ are identical to those used in Mark 16:20 (though in a different order), and are very likely an allusion to that verse. Irenaeus has a direct quote of Mark 16:19 in *Against Heresies* (about 185 AD), and Tatian the Assyrian included the ending verses of Mark in his *Diatesseron* (about 175 AD).

Early Church Writers

Some commentaries mention the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Origen as being proof that the long ending was not in manuscripts which they had. However, the fact that they didn’t mention it does not prove it was unknown to them. Jerome is also included among witnesses against the long ending, although he included it when he produced his Vulgate Gospels, in 383/384.

The primary source of doubt is based on the writings of Eusebius, who declared that the verses were omitted by almost all copies of Mark that he knew of. But in *Ad Marinum*, he presented two possibilities by which one may harmonize Mark 16 with Matthew 28, one of which was his comment that the last 12 verses of Mark are lacking in “the most accurate copies” and “almost all the Greek copies.”³⁵ This implies that he was aware that there were some copies which did include these verses.

²⁸ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, pp. 122-126.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ John D Grassmick, “Mark,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John Walvoord & Roy Zuck, Eds. (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983).

³¹ F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Co., 1883).

³² J. W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Ann Arbor: Sovereign Grace, 1959)

³³ McGarvey, *Commentary on Matthew & Mark* (Des Moines: Eugene Smith, n.d.)

³⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961).

³⁵ Eusebius, *Quaestiones Ad Marinum*, 1, quoted in Timothy W. Dunkin, “Why Mark 16:19 Belongs In the Bible,” Study To Answer.Net, <http://www.studytoanswer.net/bibleversions/markend.html> (accessed February 5, 2005)

Although missing from some manuscripts, they were included in the great majority, and very early in the Christian era, as witnessed by the allusions to them by the Church Fathers. J. R. Dummelow, in his commentary, writes:

On the other hand, the section is no casual or unauthorized addition to the Gospel. From the second century onwards, in nearly all manuscripts, versions, and other authorities, it forms an integral part of the Gospel, and it can be shown to have existed, if not in the apostolic, at least in the sub-apostolic age. A certain amount of evidence against it there is (though very little can be shown to be independent of Eusebius the Church historian, 265-340 AD), but certainly not enough to justify its rejection, were it not that internal evidence clearly demonstrates that it cannot have proceeded from the hand of St. Mark.³⁶

Various Theories

If verses 9-20 were added, Mark's original writing ended with verse 8, "And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid." There are several theories as to how such an abrupt ending came about. One is that Mark intended to end it that way. (Some claim that a sentence in Greek would not end with the word *gar*, as verse 8 does, but this occurs in other Greek compositions, including the Septuagint at Genesis 45:3.) Another possibility is that the writer or a copyist was interrupted, perhaps by death, before he finished it. Yet another suggests that it was originally longer, but the ending was lost. Some theologians have even suggested that the original ending was deliberately destroyed because it supposedly conflicted with Matthew or Luke.

As for the origins of the longer ending, a number of theories exist also. One is that while Mark 16 originally ended with verse 8 (whether intentionally or due to interruption) someone at a later time added verses 9-20, considering the ending to be too abrupt. Another theory suggests that the current long ending was written to replace the lost original ending. Some have even suggested that it was written by Mark himself, after the original ending was lost.

Whatever the case, two questions must be considered: Was the passage written by Mark? And, does it represent an accurate account of the events, and of the words of Jesus Christ? No conclusive external evidence supports its omission, yet many scholars consider it to have been written by someone other than Mark. It is the witness of internal evidence that is the basis of this conclusion.

Internal Evidence

The style and vocabulary are said to be different from the rest of the Gospel. There are 17 words in the longer ending which appear nowhere else in Mark. The transition from verse 8 to verse 9 is considered awkward and unnatural. The subject of verse 8 is the women, but the subject of verse 9 is a pronoun apparently referring to Jesus. Also, Mary is introduced as if she had not been mentioned in verse 1. Scholars such as Bruce Terry³⁷ and T. Holland³⁸ have addressed these issues at length, however. The following is a summary of their analysis.

As for the change in subject from verse 8 to verse 9, the use of the pronoun referring to Jesus is not that unusual, when you consider how the pronouns are used throughout chapter 16. Verse 1 starts off by mentioning the women. Then in verses 2-5, they are referred to with third person plural pronouns

³⁶ J. R. Dummelow, ed. *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: MacMillan, 1927) p. 732-33.

³⁷ Bruce Terry, "Another Look at the Ending of Mark," *Firm Foundation* 93 (Sept. 14), 1976.

³⁸ Thomas Holland, *Crowned With Glory: The Bible From Ancient Text to Authorized Version* (Writers Club Press, 2000) pp. 231-234

(‘they’ and ‘them’). This pattern continues until the angel speaks in verses 6 and 7. “And he [the angel] saith unto them [again refers to the women], Be not afrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: **he** is risen; **he** is not here: behold the place where they laid **him**. But go your way, tell **his** disciples and Peter that **he** goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see **him**, as **he** said unto you.” Notice there are no less than seven singular pronouns referring to Jesus in these two verses. Then verse 8 uses plural pronouns again, referring to the women, even though the subject of the immediately preceding verses was Jesus. “And they went out...they trembled... neither said they any thing... they were afraid.” When we then come to verse 9, we again have a masculine singular pronoun (“he”), referring to Jesus. Verse 10 has a feminine singular pronoun (“she”), referring to Mary, and also identifies “them that were with him.” Verses 11-13 have a mix of pronouns, but from the flow of the context it is obvious who is referred to by each one. “He” and “him” refer to Jesus, “she” and “her” refer to Mary, “they” and “them” refer to the disciples. Not until “the Lord” in verse 19 is Jesus referred to by anything but pronouns.

Mark seems to have a tendency to use pronouns in this way. There are in fact five other places in the Gospel of Mark where a new section begins, and Jesus is referred to as only “he” without being mentioned in the previous verse, while the subject of the previous verse (someone other than Jesus) is then not mentioned in the new section. This particular combination of conditions is found in Mark 2:13; 6:45; 7:31; 8:1 (‘he’ is in Greek, although the KJV reads Jesus, and not in italics); and 14:3.

Another objection is that verse 9 refers to “Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils” as if she had never been introduced before, even though she had just been mentioned in verse 1. However, Mark also “introduces” Judas as “one of the twelve” (as if he hadn’t been mentioned before) in two different verses in chapter 14, namely 10 and 43. It is not unusual to add descriptive phrases following a name, not merely for introduction, but as a kind of flashback giving additional information. This is also seen elsewhere in Mark. It is seen in 3:16,17 which says that Simon was surnamed Peter (which had actually happened when Jesus first met him, according to John 1:42), and James and John were surnamed Boanerges, “sons of thunder,” even though they had been mentioned before. And in 7:26, the woman just mentioned in verse 25 is then identified as a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation.

Another reason the transition from verse 8 to verse 9 is considered awkward is that the use of *anastas de* (“now rising”) and the position of *proton* (“first”) in verse 9 are not well-suited to a continuation of the previous section, but are more appropriate for the beginning of a comprehensive narrative. This problem begins with the assumption that verses 9 and following are intended to be a continuation, when in fact they are not. As previously noted, the fact that the previous verse ends with *gar* is not indicative of a missing passage after that, but can in fact be the end of a section. Verses 1-8 record the women finding the empty tomb, while 9 and following tell of the resurrection appearances. They are two separate but important aspects of the witness of the resurrection of Jesus. Neither one without the other is complete. Beginning a section with a participle (“rising”) is somewhat rare, but does occur one other place in Mark, namely 14:66.

Perhaps the biggest problem scholars have with the last 12 verses of Mark, is that of vocabulary. It contains sixteen words that are not used anywhere else in Mark, three of which are used more than once in this section. It also does not include some of Mark’s most often used words, *eutheos* and *euthus* (both meaning “immediately”) and *palin* (“again”).

It should be noted that eight of the sixteen unique words have other forms of the same root word elsewhere in Mark. Also, three of the unique words are words which in the whole New Testament are

only found in the post-resurrection accounts (in the Gospels and Acts) so it is not unusual to find them only in the last section in Mark.

Still, while the mere presence of unique words may not be cause to question the authorship of a passage, the large number of such words could be an indication of the writing style of someone else. However, when you look at another similar length passage (of 12 verses), namely Mark 15:40 – 16:4, you find not just sixteen but between twenty and twenty-two words (depending on textual variances) which appear nowhere else in the Gospel of Mark.

Besides words, there are phrases that are unique to the last twelve verses of Mark, which are supposed to be indicative of a different style, but these are relatively minor and have easily been dealt with by the above-mentioned authors. Bruce Terry gives a good summary of the matter.

In conclusion, we see that all the objections to Mark's authorship of this section based on style fall into one of two classes: (1) either the stylistic feature in question is found elsewhere in Mark, or (2) there is a reasonable explanation for its presence. By far the largest number of objections fall in the first category. This indicates that it is not correct to state that this long ending is not in Mark's style.

It is possible that someone might object that it is not that these stylistic features are not found elsewhere in Mark, but that they are rare in Mark, being used infrequently by him. Thus it is the cumulative factor of using so many rare stylistic features in one place that makes this section non-Markan. This objection is well-taken and must be given consideration.

With the recent discovery of the concept of peak, however, this frequent use of rare features in an important part of the story is exactly what should be expected. Peak is an area of grammatical turbulence. Little used features become prominent in peak sections and often used features are abandoned. Background devices become foreground and vice versa. In languages around the world, peak has been shown to occur in sections of climax and denouement, and sometimes inciting incident, in narratives told by good storytellers. If the crucifixion is the climax, the resurrection is the denouement. One would expect this to be a peak area in which the use of expected stylistic features is abandoned in favor of less frequently used ones. This is exactly what is found in the increased use of words used only once in Mark in the last five chapters. Rather than revealing that Mark is not the author of these last twelve verses, this different cumulative style may show that he was a good storyteller.³⁹

So comparing both internal and external evidence, there is nothing conclusive to warrant the omission of Mark 16:9-20. Even if it were added, however, a more important question is, does this section represent the actual events, as well as the words of Our Lord? As mentioned before, this section of Scripture has been widely accepted since very early in the Christian era. This would not have been the case had it been known to contradict anything in the non-disputed sections of Scripture. The fact is, there is nothing in this section that contradicts any other Scripture. Specifically the commandment to baptize is in harmony with Matthew 28:19 (for which there is much greater textual evidence) as well as the rest of the New Testament's teaching on baptism. In light of this, it can be safely stated that even if Mark were not the author of verses 9-20, the words in verse 16 represent the words of the Lord.

³⁹ Bruce Terry, "The Style of the Long Ending of Mark," BTerry.com, <http://bible.ovc.edu/terry/articles/mkendsty.htm> (accessed Nov. 22, 2005)

Conclusion: Jesus Commanded Baptism

Chances are, we will never see all Biblical scholars agree about the long ending of Mark, or about the command to baptize in Matthew 28:19. However, the various evidence that has been used to try to disprove the validity of these passages is not indisputable or definitive. And while there may be reason to doubt the validity of a passage if it contradicted other clear Scriptures, the words of Our Lord in these verses are in harmony with the rest of Scripture.

The disciples carried out the command to preach, teach, and baptize. They preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, with the added information about what Jesus Christ's sacrifice accomplished, and how to receive forgiveness of sins. They called on people to repent, just as John the Baptist and Jesus himself had done previously. And that repentance was to include the outward sign of baptism. The disciples must have been following the Lord's command, which we find in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:16.

While it would be unwise to base doctrines on one or two "proof texts," it can be seen that the words in Mark 16:16 and Matthew 28:19 are the commands of Jesus Christ, because they fit with what the apostles carried out in obedience to him. The Great Commission includes the commands to preach the Gospel, make disciples, and baptize. All the evidence points to the fact that baptism is a command of the Lord. Therefore being baptized comes down to a simple matter of obedience.