



**A
WORLD
ON FIRE**

DAVID METZLER



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The Great Commission

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world
as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.”*

—Matthew 24:14

Following Christ’s crucifixion, “the sun of the disciples’ hope had set, and night had settled down upon their hearts.”¹ Jesus’ disciples now numbered eleven: “Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James” (Acts 1:13). “His death had come to them as a surprise. . . . When Christ was crucified, they did not believe that He would rise. He had stated plainly that He was to rise on the third day, but they were perplexed to know what He meant. . . .

“Crushed by despondency, grief, and despair, the disciples met together in the upper chamber, and closed and fastened the doors, fearing that the fate of their beloved Teacher might be theirs. It was here that the Saviour, after His resurrection, appeared to them.”²

During the next forty days, Jesus “spoke of the prophecies concerning His advent, His rejection by the Jews, and His death, showing that every specification of these prophecies had been fulfilled.”³ The words of Jesus now carried unusual weight, for the disciples were hearing One who had literally returned from beyond the grave. “And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

“Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things’ ” (Luke 24:45, 46).

“Christ told His disciples that they were to begin their work at Jerusalem. That city had been the scene of His amazing sacrifice for the human race. There, clad in the garb of humanity, He had walked and talked with men, and few had discerned how near heaven came to earth. There He had been condemned and crucified. In Jerusalem were many who secretly believed Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah, and many who had been deceived by priests and rulers. To these the gospel must be proclaimed.”⁴

We serve a risen Savior! This year share the good news with others.

1. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1911), 25.

2. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 25, 26.

3. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 26.

4. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 31.

Preparing to Serve

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

—Acts 1:8

The disciples were to ‘wait,’ not to ‘go a fishing,’ as Peter and the others had done a little while before (John 21:3).¹ Jesus met with the disciples for forty days following His resurrection. These were times of enlightenment. Jesus again set before them the nature of His kingdom. In His name, they were to carry the message of salvation to the world. Their job would not be easy. Christ promised to be with them during difficulties: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20). The disciples were transformed during their forty days with Jesus. Initially discouraged, grief-stricken, and fearful, hiding behind locked doors, they now gained new insights and education that emboldened them.

“As they heard their beloved Master explaining the Scriptures in the light of all that had happened, their faith in Him was fully established. They reached the place where they could say, ‘I know whom I have believed.’ 2 Timothy 1:12.”² But they still believed they were on the eve of seeing the Messianic kingdom restored to Israel. Eagerly, they looked forward to the immediate overthrow of Rome. Jesus calmly explained that it was not for them to know the times or seasons that the Father put in His authority. They must wait for the Spirit and then boldly tell others of the salvation found through Jesus Christ!

“The gospel commission is the great missionary charter of Christ’s kingdom. The disciples were to work earnestly for souls, giving to all the invitation of mercy. They were not to wait for the people to come to them; they were to go to the people with their message.”³ It was only after the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost that the disciples finally grasped the spiritual nature of the Master’s kingdom. Accepting the mercy and salvation Christ offered, they felt compelled to go to their relatives with the good news of salvation.

We, likewise, are not to wait for others to approach us. We must work earnestly for souls. Go!

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1957), 121.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1911), 27.

3. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 28.

A Formula for Effective Prayer

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.

—Acts 1:14

The eleven disciples continued to meet in the upper room of a private Jerusalem home. Together with the *women* who supported Christ's ministry, *Mary* the mother of Jesus, His brothers, and others who believed, they strengthened each other's faith. We are not told who owned the house or whether this was the same room in which the disciples had observed Passover with their Master. We know more believers than those mentioned in Acts 1:13, 14 met periodically with the disciples, raising petitions to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ their Lord, because Acts 1:15 records 120 disciples meeting together for prayer and fellowship. Acts 2:1 states that this group was of "one accord" in "one place." Given the cultural downplaying of women in community roles, it is notable that they are mentioned here. These disciples did not pray for personal blessing. They had a conscious burden to save souls who were perishing without a Savior. Their formula for effective prayer consisted of "(1) the petition—they prayed; (2) the perseverance—they continued in prayer; (3) the unanimity—they prayed with one accord."¹ In sharp contrast to the competitive spirit shown during the Last Supper with their Lord (Luke 22:24), the remaining disciples now met in a spirit of unity.

Previously, they had argued among themselves. Who should stoop to wash the other's feet? Now united in purpose, they prayed that the Spirit, the Comforter, would come. Jesus had assured them He would "send the Promise of My Father upon you" (Luke 24:49). The ten days since His ascension were days of humility, true repentance, and confession. "Oh, if they could but have the past three years to live over, they thought, how differently they would act! . . . But they were comforted by the thought that they were forgiven. . . ."

" . . . Putting away all differences, all desire for supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship."² Here is the model current believers should emulate. What mighty works for God might be done if congregations put aside differences and with Christian love prayed for the Spirit and each other!

*"Our prayers in public should be short, and express only the real wants of the soul, asking in simplicity and simple trusting faith for the very things we need. Prayer from the humble, contrite heart is the vital breath of the soul hungering for righteousness."*³

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1957), 127.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1911), 36, 37.

3. Ellen G. White, "The Prayer That God Approves," *Signs of the Times*, December 3, 1896, 5.

Diversity Becomes “One Accord”

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

—Acts 1:14; emphasis added

Who were “the women” of Acts 1:14? Some commentators maintain they were the wives of the disciples. They say the mother of Jesus was singled out specifically because she was *not* the wife of a disciple. (It should be noted this is the last biblical mention of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is described as being united with those who “continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.”) Others believe Acts 1:14 refers to the women who aided Jesus during His earthly ministry. This view has wider acceptance as it is based upon Luke 8:2: “And certain *women* who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—*Mary called Magdalene*, out of whom had come seven demons, and *Joanna* the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and *Susanna*, and many others who provided for Him from their substance” (emphasis added). What a diverse group!

The brothers of Jesus did not accept His divinity during His earthly ministry (John 7:1–9) and are not mentioned as being at the foot of the cross (John 19:25–27). When Jesus was a child in Nazareth, His brothers had tried to intimidate and control Him. “Jesus loved His brothers, and treated them with unfailing kindness; but they were jealous of Him, and manifested the most decided unbelief and contempt. They could not understand His conduct.”¹ They disagreed with Him at various times and argued He should observe the teachings of the rabbis more scrupulously, ceasing to antagonize them. The final scenes in Christ’s earthly life brought about their rebirth, and they now stood up and were counted among His followers. We are told the brothers of Christ were named James, Joses (Joseph), Simon, and Judas (Matthew 13:55). “No more is heard of Simon and Joses, but James is probably the one who became a leader in the church . . . , and is thought by many to be the author of the Epistle of James. . . . Judas may be the Jude who wrote the brief epistle that bears his name.”²

“This reference to the mother of Jesus is instructive. Her unique relationship to the ascended Lord justifies her being singled out for special mention, but she is not given any undue pre-eminence.”³

1. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1940), 87.

2. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1957), 127.

3. Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 127.

One of Us

“Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled . . . concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.”

—Acts 1:16, 17

Peter felt the group needed to address the behavior of Judas. All knew Judas had guided the priests and temple soldiers to arrest Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. “What a fearful change in occupation! He who had been ordained to lead men to Christ that they might be saved, chose to lead men to Christ that the Saviour might be destroyed.”¹ Peter rightly pointed out that while Judas was “numbered with” the disciples, Jesus had never called him to discipleship. Judas had come to the disciples and asked them to intervene with their Master. He came offering his services with the hope that should Jesus be the Messiah, there might be a place in the coming kingdom for one such as him. The man had impressed the other disciples because “he was of commanding appearance, a man of keen discernment and executive ability, and they commended him to Jesus as one who would greatly assist Him in His work. They were surprised that Jesus received him so coolly.”² Yet, Jesus ordained Judas Iscariot with the other eleven and sent him on a mission with the others (Matthew 10:1–42; Mark 3:13–19; Luke 6:12–16; 9:1–6).

Everyone knew of Judas’s role in the plot to arrest Jesus. The disciple John had been present in the judgment hall on the night of Jesus’ trial and had witnessed Judas’s anguish. During the trial of Christ, Judas was shocked to see that the Master did nothing to free Himself. “As hour after hour went by, and Jesus submitted to all the abuse heaped upon Him, a terrible fear came to the traitor that he had sold his Master to His death.”³ “Judas saw that his entreaties [to Caiaphas on behalf of Jesus] were in vain, and he rushed from the hall exclaiming, It is too late! It is too late! He felt that he could not live to see Jesus crucified, and in despair went out and hanged himself.”⁴ It was no secret that Jesus had been betrayed by one of His own disciples. It was a topic of discussion throughout Jerusalem, and many were being influenced for Christ as a result.

Those who become Christians for personal gain, fame, or ambition often meet with disaster. Like Judas, many fall headlong from the heights of human acclaim, becoming tragic spectacles.

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1957), 128.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1940), 294.

3. White, *Desire of Ages*, 721.

4. White, *Desire of Ages*, 722.

Blood Money

“Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity.”

—Acts 1:18

Some believe Luke inserted the description of Judas’s betrayal and death by hanging into the book of Acts to explain the need to select a replacement disciple. Those present as Peter spoke were well aware of the actions so recently taken by Judas against their Lord. When Luke wrote, “This man purchased a field,” he was not saying Judas made the purchase personally, but rather, his blood money was used in the purchase. The thirty pieces of silver that Judas threw at the feet of the high priest were used to purchase a level field where city potters dumped unused clay. Here Judas had been buried. “Because of this, or because the money was the price of ‘innocent blood,’ the place was called the ‘field of blood’ (. . . Matt. 27:3–10).”¹ Peter rightly called to the minds of his listeners the prophecy found in Psalm 69:25: “Let their dwelling place be desolate; let no one live in their tents.” “Tradition associates the [field of blood] with *Hakk ed-Dumm*, on the south bank of the Valley of Hinnom, to the south of Jerusalem. . . . The field bought with the 30 pieces of silver was used for burying strangers who lacked relatives or friends to inter them.”²

How ironic that the priests refused to return the silver coins to the temple treasury. They reasoned the blood money was used in the commission of a crime and therefore was tainted and impure. They refused to see that the innocent blood of their Victim was a stain on their souls. By entering the house of worship and standing before the people as paragons of virtue, their sanctimonious behavior was an affront to God. Their lack of concern for the remorse of Judas, their refusal to show him pity or offer any hope of forgiveness, showed the haughty callousness of their hearts for all sinners whom they considered beneath themselves. Remaining aloof from Judas’s actions, they saw no sin in their own conduct. Truly, Jesus described them correctly when He called them “whited sepulchres” (Matthew 23:27, KJV). Wishing others to think them holy, they put on a lily-white religious front, but their pious façade hid decaying characters, and their wicked deeds were recognized. The treachery of Judas, his suicide, the plotting of the priests, the betrayal of Christ by one of His own disciples, and the Crucifixion were topics of discussion in Jerusalem on this Pentecostal holiday. The people were not fooled by the intrigue surrounding the death of Jesus.

Ambition for earthly glory and position clouded Judas’s judgment. Motives reveal character.

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1957), 128.

2. Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 129.

What Price Jesus?

“And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter’s field, as the LORD directed me.”

—Matthew 27:9, 10

Matthew’s writings characteristically point to prophecy fulfilled as a confirmation of Christ’s divinity. Yet the fulfillment of Messianic predictions came about in natural ways, so far as Jesus’ contemporaries could discern. Events often were recognized as prophecy fulfilled only many years after they occurred. References to “thirty pieces of silver” and a “potter’s floor” are found in Zechariah 11:12, 13. Pronouncements of this event are also found in Jeremiah 18:2–12; 19:1–15; and 32:6–9. New Testament writers often attributed Old Testament prophecies to the more famous of two prophets. Frequently, the Minor Prophets are not annotated, in favor of the Major Prophets. Matthew combines the accounts of Zechariah and Jeremiah and credits them both to Jeremiah. The same literary technique is again seen in Matthew 3:3. Here, Matthew references Isaiah’s prophecy foretelling the message and manner of John the Baptist’s ministry. While Isaiah 40:3 does speak to the manner and ministry of John the Baptist, Malachi 3:1 also does; however, the prophecy of Malachi is not mentioned.

Let us look closer at the prophecy found in Zechariah 11:12, 13. Here we see Zechariah, representing the Chief Shepherd, asking the flock of Israel to pay him a just wage. In return, the nation offers thirty pieces of silver (shekels), worth approximately \$243.37 today. “This very small amount reflected the Israelites’ contemptuous thankfulness for what God had done for them. Thirty shekels was the price of a slave.”¹ God told Zechariah to cast the money unto the potter as an example of the people’s ingratitude for the Lord’s blessings. “A change in one letter in the original Hebrew gives the reading ‘treasury’ instead of ‘potter.’ . . . Some understand the words ‘cast it unto the potter’ as merely an expression to denote the contemptuous rejection of the ‘pieces of silver’ when they were brought to the treasury of the Temple.”² The low estimation ancient Israel placed upon the gifts of God (Zechariah 11:12) was reflected in the meager amount demanded as payment to betray the priceless gift of His Son (Matthew 26:15).

What value do you place upon God’s gifts? Is salvation through Jesus listed among your assets?

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1955), 1111.

2. Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 1111.

Matthias

And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

—Acts 1:23

Peter insisted Judas be replaced by quoting Psalm 109:8: “And let another take his office.” “Peter apparently thought that the original number of the disciples should be maintained. The apostles doubtless had a concept of 12 as a full number, after the example of the 12 tribes of Israel. In fact, they had been promised 12 thrones from which to govern the tribes (Matt. 19:28), a promise that calls to mind the 12 stars in the crown of the church (Rev. 12:1), and the 12 foundations of the walls of the New Jerusalem, with the names of the 12 apostles on them (Rev. 21:14). Jesus had ordained a company of 12, one of whom was lost. Peter reasoned: The full number is necessary to give testimony concerning all aspects of the Lord’s life and works; a mighty task lies before the apostles, and the full quota of witnesses is needed for its accomplishment.”¹

Commentators are divided on whether the next event took place behind closed doors between the 11 disciples or before the entire 120 followers of Jesus that had gathered. In any case, Peter outlined the criteria for a replacement disciple. The man to be chosen must have been with the disciples throughout the life and ministry of Jesus, from His baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist to the day He ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives. Peter was asking for someone who had witnessed the miracles of Jesus with his own eyes, heard the teachings of Christ with his own ears, and believed that Jesus was the Son of man with his whole heart. Only one with these qualifications could tell others what he had seen, heard, and believed.

Only two men met the requirements. Again, commentators disagree on the phrase “they appointed two” (Acts 1:23, KJV). The Greek *estesan duo* may be translated either as “they set two forward” or “two stood.” If the first meaning is accepted, the disciples nominated the men. If the second is to be believed, these men were present and stood, indicating they met the requirements as set forth by Peter. Now the disciples prayed for guidance, and they cast lots. The lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the disciples.

The true disciple of Jesus will have an intimate relationship with the Master.

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1957), 130.

Casting Lots

And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias.

—Acts 1:26

It seems curious to us today that the apostles would have resorted to what we would call a game of chance in the selection of Matthias. It becomes evident from the scriptural account that the disciples, leading with prayer, expected the Lord to choose the replacement, and Peter's suggestion to use lots was not challenged. The casting of lots certainly had precedent in the Bible. Three of the most common cases were those in which the two goats for the Day of Atonement were selected (Leviticus 16:5–10), the land known as Palestine was apportioned to the various tribes originally (Numbers 26:55; Joshua 18:10), and the land was assigned by lot again after the Captivity (Nehemiah 10:34; 11:1). Repeatedly in the history of Israel, we see lots being cast: “in settling criminal cases where there was uncertainty (Joshua 7:14, 18; 1 Sam. 14:41, 42); . . . in choosing forces for battle (Judges 20:8–10); . . . in appointing to high office (1 Sam. 10:19–21); and . . . in allotting the cities of the priests and Levites (1 Chron. 6:54–65). The method is seen in operation in 1 Chron. 24–26. The Lord was understood to have the final dispensing of lots (Prov. 16:33). Soldiers cast lots on Calvary for the Lord's seamless garment (Matt. 27:35; . . . John 19:23, 24). But the choice of Matthias by lot is the only recorded instance among Christians in the NT [New Testament].”¹

Ellen White counsels that the casting of lots is no longer an acceptable method of determining the desires of the Lord. “Let none be led from the sound, sensible principles that God has laid down for the guidance of His people, to depend for direction on any such device as the tossing up of a coin. Such a course is well pleasing to the enemy of souls; for he works to control the coin, and through its agency works out his plans. Let none be so easily deceived as to place confidence in any such tests. . . .

“The Lord works in no haphazard way. . . .

“I have no faith in casting lots. . . . To cast lots for the officers of the church is not in God's order.”² Following Pentecost, “the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit made the casting of lots superfluous (Acts 5:3; 11:15–18; 13:2; 16:6–9).”³

Do you want to discern God's will? Study your Bible, pray for guidance, and then move forward.

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1957), 131.

2. “Ellen G. White Comments—Acts,” in Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 1054.

3. Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 131.

Pentecost— Celebrating the Harvest

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

—Acts 2:1

The Greek word *Pentecost* was used for the Feast of Weeks as early as 120 BC. For almost two centuries, Pentecost was the accepted term for this celebration of the wheat harvest. “Each aspect of the old Feast of Weeks presented a symbolic meaning that made it typical of the work now about to be accomplished. As the Feast of First Fruits, it was fitting that it should be the occasion of the first great gathering from the fields that were ‘white already to harvest’ (Ex. 23:16; John 4:35). At this feast the Israelites, remembering that they had been slaves in Egypt, could feel again the liberty the Exodus had given them (Deut. 16:9–12), and be free of servile work (Lev. 23:21).”¹ Pentecost was a national holiday. No one was expected to work. Entire families were expected to participate, including foreigners. By rabbinical decree, Palestinian Jews were allowed one day for celebration while Jews of the Dispersion were given two days for the feast. “It was therefore a fit time for the outpouring of the Spirit of God; and ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty’ (2 Cor. 3:17).”²

“It is interesting to recall that the rabbis, who computed the interval between the first Passover and the giving of the law on Sinai, concluded that God spoke the law to the people (Ex. 20:1) on the day that was later observed as Pentecost. Through this tradition, the feast is thought to have acquired a commemorative character.”³ “Christ arose from the dead as the first fruits of those that slept. He was the antitype of the wave sheaf, and His resurrection took place on the very day when the wave sheaf was to be presented to the Lord. . . . The sheaf dedicated to God represented the harvest. So Christ the first fruits represented the great spiritual harvest to be gathered for the kingdom of God. His resurrection is the type and pledge of the resurrection of all the righteous dead. ‘For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.’ 1 Thessalonians 4:14.”⁴

Fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt, God gave Israel His commandments at Sinai. Fifty days after Jesus gave us an exodus from sin by His death and resurrection, God gave the early church His Spirit at Jerusalem.

1. Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1957), 134.

2. Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 134.

3. Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 134.

4. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1940), 785, 786.