

REAPPRAISING EARLY CHURCH HISTORY



The Great Commission
Part A: The Apostolic
Teaching Agenda

LUKE 24:45-48

Then he ***opened their minds*** so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "*This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise*

*from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **You are witnesses of these things.**"*

Genesis 12:2-3

I will make *you* into a great nation and I will bless *you*.

I will make *your* name great, and *you* will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless *you*, and whoever curses *you* I will curse.

. . . and *all peoples on earth* will be blessed through you.

GENESIS 18:8

Abraham will
surely become a
great and powerful
nation . . .

. . . and *all*
peoples on earth
will be blessed
through him.

Genesis 22:16-18

I swear by myself,
declares the Lord--

**... I will surely bless
you and make *your*
descendants as
numerous as the
stars in the sky and
as the sand on the
seashore . . .**

**. . . and through
your offspring *all*
nations on earth
will be blessed.**

GENESIS 26:4

I will make *your descendants* as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands . . .

. . . and through your offspring *all peoples on earth* will be blessed.

GENESIS 28:14

Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.”

All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.

ISAIAH 49:6

“It is too small a thing for you ... to restore the tribes of Jacob.... **I will also make you a *light for the Gentiles* that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”**

ISAIAH 26:18b

“We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not *given birth* to people of the world.”

PSALM 47:9

“The nobles of the nations assemble as the *people of the God of Abraham.*”

GALATIANS 3:29

“If you belong to Christ, then *you* are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

The Great Commission

Part B: A World- Encompassing Directive

ACTS 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses

in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.“



**REAPPRAISING EARLY
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How the Great Commission Inspired the Early Church

EXPONENTIAL GROWTH IN 3 WAYS:

- 1. # of believers**
- 2. # of fellowships of believers**
- 3. # of languages in which there were fellowships of believers**



**REAPPRAISING EARLY
CHURCH HISTORY**

**THE CHURCH'S FIRST MAJOR
STRATEGIC ACCOMPLISHMENT:**

**The complete encirclement of the
Mediterranean Sea with a 7,000-mile-
long oval-shaped 'church belt'**

THE WORLD'S FIRST "CHURCH BELT"



SUBSEQUENT CHRISTIAN OUTPOSTS





REAPPRAISING EARLY
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How the
GREAT COMMISSION
became a Great *Omission!*



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**What the Church began substituting for
obedience to the Great Commission—
ASCETICISM, manifested by:**

- a. Hermitting in caves
- b. The 'Stylite' movement
- c. Trappist orders, etc.

A GLORIOUS OPPORTUNITY — *MISSED !!*



Vikings

Goths

Tartars

Persians

Arabs

REAPPRAISING EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

Results of that tragic substitution:

- a. Missionless creeds
- b. The Dark Ages
- c. The rise of Islam
- d. Empire building outpaced evangelism
- e. *Exponential* growth ceased

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THE TRAGIC CONSEQUENCE OF THE POST-APOSTOLIC GROWTH RATES

Church historian Rodney Stark, in *Cities of God*, reports that 1,000 believers shortly after Pentecost increased to 30 million by 350 A.D.—a growth rate of 3.4% per year! Had that growth rate continued, the # of Christians would have swelled to 1 billion Christians in just another 104 years! Instead, the growth rate of the Church slowed abysmally. Why?



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CALVIN'S VIEW of the GREAT COMMISSION:

“We are taught [from Scripture] that the kingdom of Christ is neither to be advanced nor maintained by the industry of men, but this is the work of God alone.”

REAPPRAISING EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

GUSTAV WARNECK'S SUMMARY OF JOHN CALVIN'S LACK OF ZEAL FOR MISSIONS:

“...Calvin’s exposition of the missionary commandment is silent regarding a missionary duty on the part of the Church. ... the command to go into all the world is spoken of [by Calvin] only in regard to the Apostles, not indeed in such a way as to exclude its application to subsequent generations, but yet without any such application.”

(from Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time: A Contribution to Modern Church History, p. 20)



**REAPPRAISING EARLY
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**THE REDISCOVERY of
GOD'S GLOBAL PURPOSE**

- a. The Radical Reformation
- b. William Carey and the beginning of modern missions

REAPPRAISING EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What evidence does Scripture provide that the 'Great Commission' didn't originate with Jesus in the New Testament?
2. What are the two themes ("mega themes") that Jesus opened his disciples' minds to understand in the final chapter of Luke's gospel? How does that teaching relate to his reaffirming the Great Commission in Acts chapter 1?
3. What did some of the Church Fathers eventually do with the Great Commission, and what did that decision cost us?