

Matthew 28:19

“...in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit”

There are, among some Christians and secular scholars alike, questions regarding the authenticity regarding the reading of **Mat 28:19**, popularly known as the “Great Commission”. These questions have arisen due to what may be seen as contradictory evidence in both NT scripture and secular, historical sources that are currently at hand.

Historical sources

Hebrew Gospel of Matthew: There are 3 major biblical manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew that are written in Hebrew:

- the *Shem Tov Matthew*;
- the *DuTillet Matthew*;
- And the *Munster Matthew*.

Some scholars have argued that these Hebrew manuscripts may have been descended (without any intervening translation) from ancient Hebrew manuscripts of Matthew, which were used by early Christians in the 1st-2nd century AD., but were nearly extinct by the time of the biblical scholar Jerome. Jerome was born around A.D. 331 and died in 420. He wrote many exegetical and controversial treatises and letters, as well as the renowned *Latin Vulgate* translation of the Scriptures, from which the King James Version bible was taken.

The *Shem Tov Matthew* is preserved within a work named *Eben Bohem*, which was written by a Jewish physician living in Aragon, Spain, named Shem Tov ben Isaac ben Shaprut (Ibn Shaprut), and after whom the manuscript is named. The text of *Eben Bohem* is preserved in a number of manuscripts, although the manuscript of Matthew that it quotes is lost, if it ever existed independently.

There are some interesting readings in this manuscript, among them **Mat 28:19-20** which simply reads:

"Go and teach them to carry out all the things which I have commanded you forever."

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Jerome also makes an interesting statement:

“Matthew, who is also Levi...composed a gospel...in the Hebrew language and character...Furthermore, the Hebrew itself is preserved to this day in the library at Caesurae which the martyr Pamphilus so diligently collected.” Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers

Pamphilus, presbyter of Caesarea (c. 3rd C. – martyred, 309AD.), was chief among Catholic Biblical scholars of his generation. He was the friend and teacher of Eusebius, who recorded details of his career in a three-book *Vita* that has been lost.

Pamphilus, not unlike the humanists of the Renaissance, devoted his life to searching out and obtaining copies which he collected in the famous library that Jerome was later to use, and established a school for theological study. In the *scriptorium*, a necessary adjunct to all libraries of antiquity, he oversaw the production of accurate edited copies of Scripture.

The collections of the library suffered during the persecutions under the Emperor Diocletian that started in 303 AD., but was repaired subsequently by bishops of Caesarea. It was noted in the 6th century, but it probably did not long survive the capture of Caesarea by the Saracens in 638, though some historians attribute the destruction to its previous capture by the Persians.

Among the priceless lost treasures in the library, it seems from the above statement that Jerome knew of a copy of the Aramaic (so-called "Hebrew") text of the *Gospel of Matthew*. Eusebius refers to the catalogue of the library that he appended to his biography on Pamphilus.

Eusebius of Caesurae: Eusebius Pamphili (c. 260—c. 340AD.) the Bishop of Caesarea and known as “the Father of Church History”, lived in times of rampant doctrinal change, *was* a Trinitarian, and in later life assisted in the formation of the Nicene Creed. Although he wrote prolifically, his most celebrated work is his *Ecclesiastical History*, a history of the Church from the apostolic period until his own time. Today it is still the principal work on the history of the Church at that time.

In about 318 AD., the theological views of Arius, a priest of Alexandria, became the subject of controversy because he taught the subordination of the Son to the Father. Eusebius was soon involved. Expelled from Alexandria for heresy, Arius sought and found sympathy at Caesarea, and, in fact, he proclaimed Eusebius as a leading supporter. Eusebius did not fully support either Arius or Alexander, bishop of Alexandria from 313 to 328, whose views appeared to tend toward Sabellianism (a heresy that

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taught that God was manifested in progressive modes; flesh>spirit). Eusebius wrote to Alexander, claiming that Arius had been misrepresented, and he also urged Arius to return to communion with his bishop. But events were moving fast, and at a strongly anti-Arian synod at Antioch, c. Jan. 325, Eusebius and two of his allies, Theodotus of Laodicea and Narcissus of Neronias in Cilicia, were provisionally excommunicated for Arian views.

When the Council of Nicaea, called by the Roman Emperor Constantine, met later in the year, Eusebius had to explain himself and was exonerated with the explicit approval of the emperor. In the years following the Council of Nicaea, the emperor was bent on achieving unity within the church, and so the supporters of the Nicene Creed [in its extreme form] soon found themselves forced into the position of dissidents. Eusebius took part in the expulsion of Athanasius of Alexandria (335), Marcellus of Ancyra (c. 336), and Eustathius of Antioch (c. 337).

Eusebius inherited from Pamphilus the famous Library at Caesarea, a library that was commenced by Origen (185-254 A.D.). The wording of the statement from the *Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers* by Jerome points to an *original* Manuscript of Matthew that was still to be seen in the Library at Caesarea. It could have meant that an early copy of Matthew's Hebrew writing was there, but the phraseology of Jerome appeared to indicate that it was the actual Manuscript written by Matthew himself.

Eusebius quotes many verses in his writings, and **Mat 28:19** is one of them. He never quotes it as it appears today in modern Bibles, but always finishes the verse with the words "*in my name*". For example, in Book 3 of his *History*, Chapter 5, Section 2, which is about the Jewish persecution of early Christians, we read:

"But the rest of the apostles, who had been incessantly plotted against with a view to their destruction, and had been driven out of the land of Judea, went unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of Christ, who had said to them, 'Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name'."

Again, in his *Oration in Praise of Emperor Constantine*, Chapter 16, Section 8, we read:

"What king or prince in any age of the world, what philosopher, legislator or prophet, in civilized or barbarous lands, has attained so great a height of excellence, I say not after death, but while living still, and full of mighty power, as to fill the ears and tongues of all mankind with the praises of his name? Surely none save our only Savior has done this, when, after his victory over death, he spoke the word to

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his followers, and fulfilled it by the event, saying to them, 'Go ye and make disciples of all nations in my name.'"

Eusebius' writings are older than any of the surviving manuscripts of **Mat 28:19** and he was a staunchly orthodox Christian, writing under the direction of Constantine. It is, therefore, easy to believe that Eusebius' wording was closer to the original text than what we find in the entire NT since the 4th C. A.D. It is much more difficult to believe that Eusebius or someone else changed the text contrary to liturgy; rather, liturgy certainly could have exerted its influence under Constantine to change the original wording to better suit the very politically charged Nicene Creed of 325 A.D., and the liturgy that was based on that Nicene Creed.

Though readings of **Mat 28:19** have not been found in surviving ante-Nicene NT manuscripts and according to the Ante-Nicene Fathers collection of writings [all either Trinitarians or practicing Gnostics]: Ignatius (35-110 A.D.), Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.), Tertullian (155-250 A.D.), Hippolytus (170-245 A.D.), Cyprian (?-258 A.D.), and others, were already quoting the longer version of **Mat 28:19** [with the Trinitarian formula] many years before Eusebius quoted a shorter version [without the Trinitarian formula]. So evidence of Eusebius writings must be cited with these in mind.

It still should be noted that the **Mat 28:19** Trinitarian formula only *lists* together the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It does not equate them as comprising one God as does the Nicene Creed. The doctrine of the Trinity states that the Father, Son and "Holy Spirit" together make "1 God." This verse *refers* to 3, but never says *they are* "1". It should be clear that 3 separate things do not make "1 God." The scholar Morgridge writes:

"No passage of Scripture asserts that God is 3. If it be asked what I intend to qualify by the numeral 3, I answer, anything which the reader pleases. There is no Scripture which asserts that God is 3 persons, 3 agents, 3 beings, 3 Gods, 3 spirits, 3 substances, 3 modes, 3 offices, 3 attributes, 3 divinities, 3 infinite minds, 3 somewhat, 3 opposites, or 3 in any sense whatever. The truth of this has been admitted by every Trinitarian whoever wrote or preached on the subject."

James Moffett's *New Testament Translation*, in a footnote on page 64 about **Mat 28:19**, makes this statement:

"It may be that this (Trinitarian) formula, so far as the fullness of its expression is concerned, is a reflection of the (Catholic) liturgical usage established later in the primitive (Catholic)

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community. It will be remembered that Acts speaks of baptizing ‘**in the name of Jesus**’, cf. **Acts 1:5**."

The Bible Commentary 1919 page 723, Dr. Peake makes it clear that:

"The command to baptize into the threefold name is a late doctrinal expansion. Instead of the words baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost we should probably read simply-‘**into my name**’."

NT sources

If **Mat 28:19** is accurate as it stands in modern versions, then there is no explanation for the apparent disobedience of the apostles, since there is not a single occurrence of them baptizing anyone according to that formula. All the records in the NT show that people were baptized “*into the name*” of the Lord Jesus, just as the text Eusebius was quoting said to do. In other words, the “*name of Jesus Christ*,” *i.e.*, all that he represents, is the element, or substance, into which people were figuratively “*baptized*”:

*“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins’” **Acts 2:38***

*“They had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” **Acts 8:16***

*“So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” **Acts 10:48***

*“On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” **Acts 19:5***

We cannot imagine any reason for the Apostles and others in Acts to disobey a command of the risen Christ. It seems clear from these verses that Christ said to baptize in his name only, and that was what the early Church did.

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

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“In the name of”: It is sometimes stated that the Father, Son and spirit have 1 “name,” so they must be 1. It is a basic tenet of Trinitarian doctrine not to “confound the persons” (Athanasian Creed), and it does indeed confound the persons to call all 3 by 1 “name”, especially since no such “name” is ever given in Scripture (“God” is not a name). If the verse were teaching Trinitarian doctrine and mentioned the 3 “persons,” then it should use the word “names”. There is a much better explanation for why “name” is used in the singular.

A study of the culture and language shows that the word “name” stood for “authority.” Examples are very numerous, but space allows only a small selection. **Deu 18:5, 7** speak of serving in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. **Deu 18:22** speaks of prophesying in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. In **1 Sam 17:45**, David attacked Goliath in the “name” (authority) of the Lord, and he blessed the people in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. In **2 K 2:24**, Elisha cursed troublemakers in the “name” (authority) of the Lord. These scriptures are only a small sample, but they are very clear. If the modern versions of **Mat 28:19** are correct, then we would still not see this verse as proving the Trinity. Rather, they would be showing the importance of the 3: the Father who is God, the Son (who was given authority *by* God; **Mat 28:18**) and the Holy Spirit, which is the gift of God.

Internal Evidence

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." **1 Thess 5:21**

In this verse, the Greek word translated as “*prove*” is *dokimazo*, and it means: “to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy.”

In our efforts to determine which reading of **Mat 28:19** is original, we will submit both renderings to 10 “tests”. In doing so, we hope to be able to recognize the genuine, and expose the spurious.

1. The Test of Context

When examining the context, we find that today’s Trinitarian wording lacks logical syntax, that is, the true understanding of the verse is obscured by a failure of the varying concepts to harmonize. If, however,

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we read as follows, the whole context fits together and the progression of the instructions is comprehensible:

All power is given unto me...go therefore...make disciples in my name, teaching them...whatsoever I have commanded ...I am with you... (Mat 28:18-20)

2. The Test of Frequency

Is the phrase “*in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*” used elsewhere in scripture? Not once.

Did Jesus use the phrase “*in my name*” on other occasions? Yes, 17 times to be exact, examples are found in **Mat 18:20; Mar 9:37, 39, 41; 16:17; John 14:14, 26; 15:16 & 16:23.**

3. The Test of Doctrine

Is any doctrine or concept of scripture based on an understanding of a threefold name, or of baptism in the threefold name? None whatsoever; is any statement in scripture based on baptism in the name of Jesus? Yes! This is clarified in **1 Cor 1:13**:

“Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”

These words, when carefully analyzed, suggest that believers should be baptized in the name of the one who was crucified for them. The Father, in His unfathomable love, gave us His only Son to die in our stead, Jesus later raised to incorruptibility by the Spirit of God. But it is the Lord Jesus himself who was crucified, and therefore in his name believers must be baptized in water.

The Father did not die, nor the Holy Spirit. Scriptures says we have been “*buried with him (Jesus) in baptism*”. Not with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (**Rom 6:3-5**). According to **Mat 28:19** there are 3 names under heaven whereby we must be saved, in opposition to the apostolic declaration that:

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“There is no other name (than the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth) under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:12; cp. Rom 10:9

This, of course, is the same reasoning offered by Paul. Were ye baptized in the name of Paul? Or in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or in any other name that replaces Christ from His position as the sacrificial Lamb and the only name given to us for salvation?

4. The Test of Analogy

Does any other scripture make reference to baptism in the Triune name? No. Does any other scripture reference baptism in the name of Jesus? Yes! The Father baptized the disciples with the gift of the Holy Spirit, a promise that came according to Jesus *“in his name”* (**John 14:26**). This is because Jesus is the *“common denominator”* [literally: name] in both water baptism and baptism of the Holy Spirit, as made apparent by the following scriptures:

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” John 16:7

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”
John 14:26; cf. **John 7:39**

“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” Acts 8:12

Notice that they were baptized as a result of the preaching of the name of Jesus Christ, not the titles *“Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”* By analogy, we should therefore be baptized in Jesus’ name, because the invoking of his name is the catalyst of understanding that prepares us for the baptism of the Spirit, which is also given in his name. (**Acts 2:38-39, 19:1-5, John 3:3-5**)

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5. The Test of Consequence

When we are baptized, do we “*put on*” the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost? No. Do we put on the name of Jesus? Yes. When we are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, according to all baptismal accounts recorded in scripture, we are quite literally being baptized “*into*” the name of Jesus Christ.

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal 3:27

No mention is made in scripture of any baptism being related to the titles of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Every actual account mentions a clear connection with the person of Christ, and his atoning sacrifice.

6. The Test of Practice

Did the disciples, as they were implementing the “Great Commission”, ever once baptize into the Trinity? Never! Did they baptize in the name of Jesus? Always! (**Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5**, etc.) The argument has been made when defending Triune immersion; “I would rather obey Jesus, than to imitate the Apostles.” This kind of reasoning places the Apostles in rebellion, and makes all apostolic baptisms contrary to the word of God.

If *all* of God’s Word was inspired, and it was, then we should not try to pit one verse against another, but rather seek to reconcile all of God’s Word in proper context, and rightly apply it to our lives.

It is easier to believe that the disciples *followed* the final instructions of Christ, than to believe that they immediately disobeyed his command.

7. The Test of Significance

What significance is mentioned in scripture for baptizing believers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost? None; what significance is conveyed toward being baptized in the name of Jesus? First, scripture teaches that baptism in the name of Jesus is an act of repentance leading to the forgiveness of sins (**Acts 2:38**). Second, baptism in his name *alone* is associated with the promise of God’s Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38, 19:1-5**). Third, baptism in the name of Jesus is compared to our personal willingness to be

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living sacrifices or even die with Christ. (**Rom 6:1-4; Col 2:12**). Fourth, being baptized into Christ is how we “*put on*” Christ (**Gal 3:27**). Fifth, baptism in his name is called the “*circumcision of Christ*,” and reflects our “*putting off*” the man of sin, therefore becoming a “*new creature in Christ Jesus*” (**Col 2:11-12; 2 Cor 5:17**).

Baptism in the name of Jesus expresses faith in the physical life of Jesus, the crucifixion of the Son of God for our sins, and the remission of sins through his name. Trinitarian baptism seems to express faith in Catholic theology itself.

8. The Test of Parallel Accounts

Mat 28 is not the sole record in the gospels of the “Great Commission” of the Church. Luke also recorded this event in great detail. In **Lu 24:46-47**, he wrote of Jesus speaking in the third person:

“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations.”

This passage alone establishes wording that seems to contradict **Mat 28:19**, where Jesus spoke in the first person, “*in my name*”. Further, the Gospel of Mark also records another version of the “Great Commission,” using some of the same patterns of speech:

“Go ye...all the world...preach the gospel...every creature ...baptized...in my name...” **Mar 16:15-18**

Of course, it is not baptism that “*in my name*” refers to here, but rather the works that the disciples would do. Yet compared to Matthew, the similarity is striking, for neither is baptism explicitly mentioned there, but that disciples should be made “*in my name*.”

9. The Test of Complimentary Citation

While there is no text that offers a complimentary citation of Trinitarian baptism, there is a striking resemblance between the actual wording of **Mat 28:18-20** and **Rom 1:4-5**.

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Matthew contains the Commission of Christ to his Apostles, while the Romans account is Paul's acceptance of his own commission as an apostle.

10. The Test of Principle

It is written:

"Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." Col 3:17

In this principle laid down by Paul, the implication is clear. The word "*whatsoever*" would of certain necessity include baptism, which is a command involving both word and deed. The traditional wording of Matthew, containing the Trinitarian wording, is clearly not in accordance with the above principle. The shorter wording, without the falsified insertion, follows this principle. This establishes which of the two wordings the contradictory one is. God's Word does not contradict itself; rather it compliments and completes itself. Paul not only expressed this principle, but he applied it specifically to the topic of baptism.

In **Acts 19:1-6** there is an account concerning the disciples of John who had been baptized under his ministry. Like baptism in Jesus' name, John's baptism was one of repentance for the remission of sins (**Mar 1:4; Acts 2:38**). John's message, which accompanied his baptism, was that one would come after him, who would "*take away the sins of the world*" and "*baptize with the Holy Spirit.*" Paul introduced these disciples to that one person, and applying the above principle re-baptized them:

"When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came upon them..."

And so, applying the test of principle to our two readings in **Mat 28:19**, we find very strong support for the phrase "*in my name*".

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