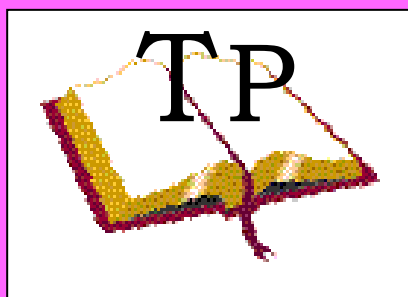


Garrett-Thrasher Debate

The “Great Commission”

Eddie K. Garrett
&
Thomas N. Thrasher



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Introduction

Several hundred religious debates have been published in book form since the commencement of controversies during the Reformation. However, no debate is known to have been published on the issue discussed by Eddie K. Garrett, Sr., of the Primitive Baptist Church and Thomas N. Thrasher, Sr., of the church of Christ. Mr. Garrett affirmed the following proposition: “The ‘Great Commission’ recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18 was given to the apostles alone, and expired when they expired.”

Eddie K. Garrett, Sr. was born on February 20, 1933 in Beattyville, Kentucky. He has been preaching for nearly 52 years, and he continues 41 years of work as pastor of the Thompson Memorial Primitive Baptist Church in Franklin, Ohio. Mr. Garrett has engaged in more formal debates (approximately 30) than any Primitive Baptist minister now living. He has also been a prolific writer for many years, having written material for several publications circulated among Primitive Baptists. For many years he served on the editorial staff of *The Christian Baptist* and as editor of *The Hardshell Baptist*. More recently, he has regularly written and distributed articles on a variety of religious topics.

Thomas N. Thrasher, Sr. was born on April 28, 1948 in Decatur, Alabama. He and his wife, Jerretta, have been happily married for 36 years. They have one son (Tommy, an electrical engineer employed by the U.S. government), and two grandsons (Andrew and Luke). He began preaching the gospel in March 1966, shortly before graduating from high school. He has preached in 20 states and Australia and participated in 100 formal debates, 12 of which have been published in book form. In addition to his preaching, Mr. Thrasher has worked as a mathematics teacher or school administrator for 35 years. He has earned four academic degrees in connection with his secular work: B.S. (University of Alabama, 1970, mathematics), M.Ed. (Alabama A&M University, 1974, school administration), Ed.S. (UA, 2005, educational leadership), and Ed.D. (UA, 2007, instructional leadership). One of

his on-going projects is a six-volume *Encyclopedia of Religious Debates*, the most comprehensive record of religious debating ever compiled.

“You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”
(John 8:32).



Eddie K. Garrett



Thomas N. Thrasher

Proposition for Debate

“The ‘Great Commission’ recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18 was given to the apostles alone, and expired when they expired.”

Affirm:	Eddie K. Garrett
Deny:	Thomas N. Thrasher

Garrett’s First Affirmative

Thomas Thrasher of the “Church of Christ” and I of the Primitive Baptist Church have agreed to have this written debate on what is commonly called the “Great Commission.” The Bible does not call it that, but it certainly is a commission and therefore I have no reason to reject the terminology. Brother Thrasher and I will have two addresses each. I will be in the affirmative and he will be in the negative.

The proposition is this: The commission (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18) was given to the apostles alone, and expired when they expired. In other words the commission was given to the apostles and not to the church. In this address I will simply quote Mark’s version of the commission. *“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”*

My first argument in support of the proposition is that Jesus said, “Go ye,” and not “Send ye.” This language of the commission given to the apostles by our Lord Jesus Christ is perfectly plain and easy to be understood by the children of God. Nothing short of

modern scholastic divinity could fail to observe a wide difference between the words GO and SEND. But lest there should appear to be room for quibbling, the pronoun YE is added. It is “Go ye,” not send somebody else. The persons addressed were to go themselves. But let us notice even further. “Go ye THEREFORE,”—wherefore? Not because they had all power in heaven and earth, and were on that account duly authorized to transmit the keys of the kingdom, to appoint their successors, or to qualify pious young men to preach, and send them out, by any means. No reasonable disciple of Christ can possibly so understand this scripture. The term “therefore” refers them to his exclusive right to call and send forth his ministers. “*All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth, GO YE THEREFORE...*” Go, because I send you, because I have the right to send whom I please; you are duly authorized and commanded to go. But where were they to go, and what were they to do? This was all fully understood; they were to go to all nations of the known world, and teach them to observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded, baptizing such as believed.

Christ did not tell them that they must go to school and learn to preach; or, being learned, to go politicking around, waiting for a monied call; or go and form mission boards, or anything of the sort. Teach what? That it is more blessed to give than to receive, and that the salvation of the world and the exaltation of Christ depends on the liberality of the people, etc.” Not one word of all this. They had nothing more or less to teach than the observance of all things that Jesus Christ had commanded them.

There is not one particle of authority in this commission for any but the apostles to whom it was given. But as all the power of both worlds was and still is retained in the hands of Jesus, as the Head over all things to his church, and as he has instructed his children to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest, we are persuaded that from time to time he has, does and will continue to call whom he pleases, and give them the same imperative order, *Go ye, Go thou*. But if any are called of the Lord, in this day, to go to some foreign country to preach the gospel, and will prove that their calling is of God by showing a readiness to obey, relying alone on God to be with them. To sustain and keep

them, without leaning upon mission societies, or any kind of financial support from whence they went out, we are willing to bid him God speed.

My second argument is as follows: The commission says, *“And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”* This is an integral part of this commission. I wonder if my opponent will try to separate it from the rest of the commission. This simply cannot be done. I don’t think Brother Thrasher is going to say that we today are under this. But how can he say that we are under part of this commission and other parts we are not? Mark 16:20 says, *“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.”* The apostles did all the things mentioned as the signs which should follow. No other persons have ever been able to do those things. No other persons, therefore, were ever under that command. He spoke directly to the eleven, and said unto them—*“GO YE.”* If any of those who believe that this commission was given to the church can demonstrate to me that they have these supernatural gifts, then I will listen to them and believe their position. But they cannot do this! I often pray for sick people and they do not recover. But this text says, *“they shall recover.”* While the apostles were under this commission, there was a special providence over them that they could not die, *“if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.”* Brother Thrasher, show us what you can do with this. Not much I am sure!

My third argument is as follows: There is no place in all of the epistles about this “Great Commission.” Brother Thrasher lay out for me a single word addressed to any church in scripture about this “Great Commission.” Can you point it out to me in the Book of Romans? What about Ephesians? Or what about Thessalonians or any other place? It simply can’t be done; it just isn’t there. Of all the arguments that I set forth in this debate, this is the greatest of all. So, please do not overlook it.

Let me add this in conjunction with this argument. Let those who say that “evangelism” is the fundamental work of the church step forward with the Bible in their hands and show us where God has said any such thing. Brother Thrasher, I want you to produce a single word of God that was written exclusively to the heathen, or the unregenerate. Please produce a word of rebuke to any believer or any church for not reaching the lost with the Gospel of Christ; or bring forth one solitary instance of a church that was commended for its evangelistic endeavors. Do not ignore all the specifics of this last paragraph.

The churches were often rebuked for not measuring up to the life that is in Christ Jesus. They were rebuked for not growing spiritually, or for lapsing into some form of immorality or dependency upon anything other than Christ. Where was any person or church challenged to do anything other than grow in grace, live by faith, walk in the Spirit, or seek the things which are above? Paul rebuked some for being carnal and not growing in grace (1 Cor. 3:1-4); for having fornication among them (1 Cor. 5:1-13); for eating meat offered to idols (1 Cor. 8); corrupting the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34); the tongues disorder (1 Cor. 14); women speaking in the church (1 Cor. 14:33-40); trying to justify themselves through their own good works (Book of Galatians). See also the letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation chapters two and three, etc.

Paul does not repeatedly exhort the churches to subscribe money for the propagation of the Faith, he is far more concerned to explain to them what the Faith is, and how they ought to practice it and keep it. The same is true of Peter and John, and all the New Testament writers. They do not feel any necessity to repeat the great commission, and to urge that it is the duty of their converts to make disciples of all the nations. What we read in the New Testament is no anxious appeal to Christians to spread the gospel, but a note here and there which suggests how the gospel was being spread abroad: *“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly...”* And, ... *“in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything”* (1 Thess. 1:8). And finally, *“Therefore they*

that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

Largely the growth of the early church and the church all the way down through history has expanded “spontaneously.” I mean the expansion which follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of individual members of the church explaining to others the gospel which they have found for themselves; I mean the expansion which follows the irresistible attraction of the Christian Church for men and women who see its ordered life, and are drawn to it by desire to discover the secret of a life which they instinctively desire to have. I know this is strange to people of other orders, like Brother Thrasher, but to me this unexhorted, unorganized, spontaneous expansion has a charm far beyond that of this modern highly organized movement, started by Carey and Fuller.

This is the instinctive force which drives men even at the risk of life itself to impart to others this new-found joy. That is why it is proverbially difficult to keep a secret. As Christians, we feel something down in our hearts that we must tell others about. And we crave the fellowship of those who feel the same way. Hence churches are organized. The Spirit of Christ is in the hearts of Christians, and this Spirit has a keen desire to convert others to the faith. One of the greatest joys I have is to tell others about Jesus Christ and the gospel. The Bible says, “*He that winneth souls is wise*” (Prov. 11:30).

I am looking forward to my second address where I will answer all of the objections that Brother Thrasher brings up. I can already anticipate most of his objections as I have heard them all before. It is my hope that he will give close attention to all that we have said in order that this might be a good debate. I surely hope that he will not get off on some tangent and not deal specifically with my arguments. We are not discussing how God saves a sinner; but we are discussing whether the commission was given to the apostles only, and when the apostles expired, the commission expired.

Thrasher's First Negative

I appreciate the opportunity to participate with my friend, Mr. Garrett, in this mode of Bible study. I am confident that it will transpire amiably, as have our previous five formal debates over the last 35 years.

Mr. Garrett explains, "The proposition is this: The commission (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18) was given to the apostles alone, and expired when they expired." Consequently, he must prove two major points. First, "the apostles alone" received this commission. Second, Mr. Garrett must prove that the commission "expired when they [the apostles] expired." He failed to prove these points by the Scriptures, despite three attempts. In this address, I have often added **bold print** for emphasis.

My friend's first argument was: "Jesus said, 'Go ye,' and not 'Send ye.' ... It is 'Go ye,' not send somebody else." Mark 16:14 and Matthew 28:16 both declare that Jesus spoke these words to "*the eleven*." Judas Iscariot had committed suicide earlier, so only **11 apostles** remained at the time the commission was given. This is important! If Mr. Garrett's first argument is true, then **only those 11 apostles** to whom these words were **directly** spoken in Matthew 28 and Mark 16 received the Great Commission. From his reasoning, it follows that two apostles (Matthias and Paul) were **not** given the **same commission** the other apostles were given. However, the Bible teaches that the Lord chose Matthias to "*take part of this ministry and apostleship ... and he was numbered with the eleven apostles*" (Acts 1:24-26). The Lord also chose Paul to be an apostle, and he was "*not a whit behind the very chieftest apostles*" (2 Corinthians 11:5; cf. 12:11). Question, Mr. Garrett: **Were Matthias and Paul given the Great Commission?** They were not among that group to whom Jesus said, "Go ye ..." in Matthew 28:16, 19 and Mark 16:14-15!

My opponent says the apostles "were to go to **all nations** of the known world, and teach **them** to observe **all things** whatsoever Christ had commanded, **baptizing** such as believed." Was this only to "*the eleven*"? Read Acts 8:1-4, "... *And at that time there*

was a great persecution against the **church** which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, **except the apostles**.... Therefore they that were scattered abroad went **every where preaching the word**." Here were believers, other than the apostles, who carried out the commission by going **everywhere** and **preaching** the word! Compare this with what Jesus told the eleven: "**Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature**" (Mark 16:15). Paul told Timothy, "**And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also**" (2 Timothy 2:2). The same things **Paul** taught **Timothy** were to be passed along to other **faithful men** who were to continue that teaching. This is exactly what Jesus commanded to be done in the commission: "**Teaching them [the ones converted] to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world**" (Matthew 28:20). The work of carrying out the Great Commission is to last as long as the world does. The commission to "**go**" and "**preach the gospel**" was not to "**expire**" when the apostles "**expired**"!

With regard to the Great Commission's involving "**baptizing** such as believed," I ask: Did only the **11 apostles** to whom Jesus spoke in Mark 16 **baptize**? Certainly not! For example, Paul baptized people (1 Corinthians 1:14-16), but he was not one of "**the eleven**." Philip also baptized people (Acts 8:38), but he was not one of "**the eleven**" or even an apostle. It is an obvious fact that the command to **baptize** was part of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16). However, since **others** besides "**the eleven**" baptized believers, the commission was given to **others**, contrary to my opponent's affirmation.

Mr. Garrett frequently introduced issues irrelevant to his proposition. For instance, he said, "Christ did not tell them that they must go to school and learn to preach; or, being learned, to go politicking around, waiting for a monied call; or go and form mission boards, or anything of the sort." I agree! What does that have to do with proving **only the eleven** received the commission, and that the commission expired when the apostles expired?

Even my opponent, contrary to his proposition, seems to allow room for others besides the 11 apostles to carry out this commission. He states: “But as all the power of both worlds was and still is retained in the hands of Jesus ... and as he has instructed his children to pray the Lord of the harvest to **send forth laborers** into his harvest, we are persuaded that from time to time **he has, does and will continue** to call whom he pleases, and **give them the same imperative order, *Go ye, Go thou.***” He also says, “... if any are called of the Lord, **in this day**, to go to some foreign country to **preach the gospel** ... we are willing to bid him God speed.” Obviously, any such individuals would be in **addition** to the **11 apostles** and, therefore, contrary to my friend’s proposition!

Furthermore, when the apostle **Paul** was sent out from Antioch, **Barnabas** participated with him in the same commission: “... *the Holy Ghost said, Separate me **Barnabas and Saul for the work** whereunto I have called them*” (Acts 13:2). They later returned to Antioch from their travels preaching the gospel: “*And when **they** were come, and had gathered the church together, **they** rehearsed all that God had done with **them**, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles*” (Acts 14:27). Barnabas and Paul had done exactly what the Great Commission involves. Later, when they decided to go out preaching again, God’s word declares, “**Barnabas** took **Mark**, and sailed unto Cyprus; and **Paul** chose **Silas**, and ... went through Syria and Cilicia ...” (Acts 15:39-41). Once again, they were doing exactly what Matthew 28:19 (“**Go** ye therefore, and **teach** all nations”) and Mark 16:15 (“**Go** ye into all the world, and **preach** the gospel to every creature”) require.

Mr. Garrett’s second argument was: “The commission says, ‘*And these signs shall follow them that believe; ...*’ The apostles did all the things mentioned as the signs which should follow. **No other persons** have **ever** been able to do those things. No other persons, therefore, were ever under that command.” This assertion is untrue. For example, the 70 did such signs (Luke 10:1-17); Stephen “*did great wonders and miracles among the people*” (Acts 6:8); Philip did as well (Acts 8:5-13); Paul also did (Acts 19:11-12; 2 Corinthians 12:12), although he was not one of “*the eleven.*”

The Lord's comments about "signs" were **not** limited to the **11 apostles**: "*And these signs shall follow **them** that believe; in my name shall **they** cast out devils; **they** shall speak with new tongues; **they** shall take up serpents; and if **they** drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt **them**; **they** shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover*" (Mark 16:17-18). Jesus did **not** say, "And these signs shall follow **you** [the 11 apostles] ... **you** shall" He spoke of "*they*" and "*them*"!

My opponent's statements put him in a curious predicament. His proposition says the commission "**expired when they** [the apostles] **expired.**" However, he also said, "While the apostles were under this commission, there was a special providence over them that they **could not die.**" So, according to Mr. Garrett, the commission couldn't end until the apostles died, but they couldn't die while they were under the commission! If he is correct, why aren't the apostles still living and the commission still in effect?

Mr. Garrett's third argument was: "There is no place in all of the epistles about this 'Great Commission.' ... Can you point it out to me in the Book of Romans? ... Ephesians? ... Thessalonians or any other place?" **Is the commission stated in the Book of John**, Mr. Garrett? The fact that the commission is not stated in a particular book does not prove that the commission was not in effect when that book (e.g., the Book of John) was written.

However, the commission was being carried out by other Christians besides the **11 apostles** to whom Jesus spoke directly in Matthew 28 and Mark 16. The brethren in Thessalonica were carrying out the commission: "So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For **from you sounded out the word of the Lord** not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad ..." (1 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

The Jerusalem disciples "*were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.... [and] they ... went every where preaching the word*" (Acts 8:1-4), as Jesus' commission states.

Philip went “*to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them*” (Acts 8:5). Men and women believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12-13), exactly as the commission says (Mark 16:15-16).

Philip also traveled toward Gaza, encountered the Ethiopian treasurer, and “*preached unto him Jesus*” (Acts 8:35). This man believed and was baptized (Acts 8:36-38), just as the commission requires (Mark 16:15-16).

Paul told Timothy, “*Preach the word*” (2 Timothy 4:2); however, Timothy was not one of “*the eleven*.”

Regarding his third argument, my friend adds: “Of all the arguments that I set forth in this debate, this is the greatest of all.” If that is his “greatest” argument, then his affirmation is weak indeed!

The Bible does say, “*He that winneth souls is wise*” (Proverbs 11:30). I agree with the Bible; however, this verse says nothing to prove the “apostles alone” were given the Great Commission.

My friend says, “I surely hope that he will not get off on some tangent and not deal specifically with my arguments.” This is an odd admonition in view of Mr. Garrett’s repeatedly straying from his proposition in his first address. Indeed, “we are [supposed to be, TNT] discussing whether the commission was given to the **apostles only**, and when the apostles expired, **the commission expired**.” Mr. Garrett not only failed to prove his proposition, but, in several points, he actually contradicted it. I expect better in his second address.

Garrett's Second Affirmative

I have in my hands the first negative speech of my respected friend Tom Thrasher. I believe that Brother Thrasher has done as good a job as could be expected, but it still falls far short of answering my three arguments. Keep in mind that my proposition says that the Great Commission was given to the apostles alone, and expired when they expired. Or, in other words, it was not given to the church. I will not give Brother Thrasher any new arguments but will simply answer his negative arguments. Keep in mind that anything new that he brings up in his next address I will not be able to respond to as he gets the last say.

All of your missionary orders, which includes Brother Thrasher's Church of Christ, believe that the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18) was given to the Church. Therefore a church or a group of churches often SEND a minister into some foreign country to preach the gospel and establish churches. They then send regular contributions to support him financially. All of these people think this is fulfilling the Great Commission. But it is not! This was the first argument that I made. Jesus said 'Go ye,' and not 'Send ye.' Whoever this commission was given to was to go.

Brother Thrasher brings up Matthias (Acts 1:15-26) who was appointed to take Judas Iscariot's place among the Apostles. He says that he was not present when the Lord told the eleven to "Go." Judas had committed suicide prior to the giving of the Great Commission. But in Matthew 10:1-15 we have the first commission that Christ gave to the Apostles. This commission differs considerably from that second commission given at the close of this Gospel, after the King had been rejected, and when he was about to return to the Father. "*They were not to go into the way of the Gentiles...*" (verse 5), but "*they were to go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" (verse 6). Verse one says that the Lord gave them power (authority) against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. If received in peace, they were to preach the gospel of the

kingdom and heal the sick, as empowered by the Lord. If rejected, they were to declare that judgment was about to fall, and were to proceed on their way to other towns and villages.

This passage says that God gave **all twelve** of the Apostles the power to heal the sick etc. In this, there is a similarity between this commission and the later one. When Matthias was ordained to take the place of Judas and be numbered with the eleven, what Jesus had said to the eleven applied to him. Jesus spoke the Great Commission to them as a special body of men and that applied to this peculiar or special situation.

Brother Thrasher also brings up the Apostle Paul. He says, “Barnabas and Paul had done exactly what the Great Commission involves.” This does not teach any such thing. Paul was converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) and was commissioned as the Apostle to the Gentiles. The Bible says, *“For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify mine office”* (Rom. 11:13). The Bible says relative to Paul, *“for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel”* (Acts 9:15). Brother Thrasher has the mistaken idea that because some preach the gospel other than the original apostles, they therefore, must be under this commission. This is a fallacy! Paul had a **special** commission.

Suppose I own a business and I tell one of my supervisors to take this sack of money down to the bank and deposit it in the store’s account. On the way I want you to drop this letter in the mailbox, and on your way back drop this twenty dollar bill in the cup of the blind beggar on the corner. Then one month later I tell another supervisor to go and take this money to the bank and deposit it, and on the way drop this letter in the mailbox. Now there are some similarities between these two commissions; but there is a difference also. The latter was not to put money in the blind beggar’s cup.

When Jesus sent out the seventy recorded in Luke 10:1-12 and commissioned them, there are some similarities with the Great Commission, but it is a different commission. God today, as he has done all through this church age, calls his ministers to go preach

and baptize; but this is not the same commission as the Lord gave the Apostles. I brought up the miraculous gifts that the Lord promised the Apostles and I say again to Brother Thrasher if he can demonstrate that he has these gifts then I will believe that we are still under this commission. His answer to this is very weak. You never did tell me if this part of this commission is still binding. Brother Thrasher, do all of the sick people that you pray for get healed? If you say, No, then you are not under this commission. Please tell us if this part of the commission is still for us today.

My friend quotes Matt. 28:20 which says, *“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.”* He then goes on to say, “The work of carrying out the Great Commission is to last as long as the world does.” I am surprised at Brother Thrasher making such an unscholarly argument. The word **“world”** in Matt. 28:20 means **“age.”** The Greek word is not **“kosmos”** but **“aion.”** Now evidently my friend thinks the “age” under consideration is this church age. But this is not so. The Bible says in Luke 16:16, *“The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached...”* Yet, we are told in Heb. 8:13, *“A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”* On the surface it looks like there is a variance between these two passages; the one saying that the law age ended with John and the other saying that even when the book of Hebrews was written it was decaying and *“ready to vanish away.”* But there are no real contradictions in the Bible; so how do we reconcile this? In a practical sense the change from the “law age” to the “church age” **was gradual**. There was a period of time when they **overlapped**. The law age completely vanished away when the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in A.D. 70 by Titus and his Roman armies. The book of Hebrews was written around 64 A.D.

So the word “world” in Matthew 28:20 refers to the old law age that was gradually passing away and not to the church age, as my opponent believes. Most other versions of the Bible render Matt. 28:20 as “age” and not world.

Brother Thrasher, in dealing with my third argument that said, “There is no place in all of the epistles about this ‘Great Commission,’” said, “Is the commission stated in the book of John, Mr. Garrett? The fact that the commission is not stated in a particular book does not prove that the commission was not in effect when that book (e.g., the Book of John) was written.” This statement looks very close to admitting the truth of my argument. I don’t know why Brother Thrasher does not simply come clean and admit that the “Great Commission” is not mentioned **in any of the epistles**. If my friend could have found such a verse he certainly would have quoted it. But the fact that he could not come up with such a verse proves that there is none and that my argument is valid. He says the Great Commission is not mentioned in John. I know that! But I asked for the verse in **any** of the epistles. Brother Thrasher not only is that verse not in John’s Gospel, it is not found in any book of the New Testament. Perhaps he will give us that verse in his next address; but I rather doubt it, for it isn’t there.

The fact that my opponent can quote verses that show men possessing these “signs” after Christ gave this Great Commission to the Apostles, does not disprove anything that I have said. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 proves that these supernatural gifts **ended with the completed word of God**. Verse 10 says, “*But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part (the supernatural gifts) shall be done away.*” But while these gifts lasted it does not prove that they were under the Great Commission that God gave to his original Apostles. When the Apostles had taken the gospel into the whole known world (the Roman Empire) their commission was over and the special providence that God had over them was lifted, and they all eventually died. When they died the commission died with them. Does that mean that God does not now call men to go preach and baptize and teach? No! I stated this very clearly in my first address. But this in no way contradicts my proposition.

This brings me to another argument that I made in my first address that Mr. Thrasher said absolutely nothing about. I said that all the way down through church history the church expanded “spontaneously.” By this I mean the expansion that follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of individual members

explaining to others the gospel which they have found for themselves. This new-found joy brings a force into our lives that drives men at the risk of life itself to impart to others this wonderful joy. Brother Thrasher did not touch this at all.

Brother Thrasher quoted Acts 1:25 relative to Matthias taking the place of Judas. *“That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell...”* Notice the verse says **“this” ministry**, showing that it was a distinct ministry belonging to the original Apostles only. Acts 14:14 proves that there were more apostles than the original twelve. This verse says that Barnabas and Paul were apostles, but they were not numbered with the twelve. Paul delivered the ordinances to the church. See 1 Cor. 11:2.

Acts 1:21-22 proves that there are two qualifications that a man had to have to take Judas’ place and be numbered with the eleven. One was that they had to have companied with the apostles all the time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, **beginning from the baptism of John**. This means that they had to have been baptized by John the Baptist. And the second qualification was that they had to have been an eye witness of the resurrection of Jesus. All of the apostles had been baptized by John. John 1:35-40 tells us that two of them had certainly been baptized by John. Verse 35 says that **two of John’s disciples** followed Jesus. Verse 40 names one of them to be Andrew. No doubt the apostle John was the other, as humility would keep him from mentioning his own name.

I also asked Brother Thrasher where the Scripture was where Paul ever rebuked any of the churches for not being obedient to the Great Commission. He rebukes them for practically everything else. Why is this? Because the Great Commission was not given to them. My friend, please explain this to us. This ends my part in this brief discussion. Please study it all.

Thrasher's Second Negative

I welcome this opportunity to continue the debate with my long-time friend, Eddie K. Garrett, Sr. I will demonstrate that he **did not prove** the proposition he was supposed to be affirming: “The commission (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18) was given to the apostles **alone**, and expired when they expired.”

Mr. Garrett asserted, “All of your missionary orders, which includes Brother Thrasher's Church of Christ, believe that the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18) was given to the Church.” That is not your proposition, Mr. Garrett, and I am not affirming that “the Great Commission ... was given to the **Church**.” All I need to show in order to disprove the proposition is just **one person**, besides the 12 apostles, who fulfilled the Great Commission. I did that in my first address. The Lord told the 11 apostles to go, teach, and baptize (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:18-19). They were instructed to teach their converts “*to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:20). What had Jesus just commanded the apostles to do? To carry out the Great Commission. When the apostles obeyed the Lord, they taught their converts to carry out that commission, too! To emphasize this point, look at a few other translations of Matthew 28:20:

- New King James Version: “*teaching **them** to observe all things that **I** have commanded **you** ...*”
- American Standard Version: “*teaching **them** to observe all things whatsoever **I** commanded **you** ...*”
- New American Standard Bible: “*teaching **them** to observe all that **I** commanded **you** ...*”
- English Standard Version: “*teaching **them** to observe all that **I** have commanded **you** ...*”
- New International Version: “*and teaching **them** to obey everything **I** have commanded **you** ...*”

My opponent states: “A church or a group of churches often **SEND a minister** into some foreign country to preach the

gospel and establish churches.... Jesus said ‘**Go** ye,’ and not ‘Send ye.’ Whoever this commission was given to was to **go**.” Mr. Garrett, aren’t the “ministers” you referred to “**going**”? If these “ministers” **go, teach, and baptize**, aren’t they doing what the Lord commissioned to be done in Matthew 28:18-19? If these “ministers” **go, preach** the gospel, and **baptize** believers, aren’t they doing what the Lord commissioned to be done in Mark 16:15-16?

My friend does not realize it yet, but in his efforts to salvage his argument he has actually given up his argument ... and the debate! **Mr. Garrett reasoned as follows:**

1. Only the 12 apostles were given the Great Commission.

2. The “limited commission” (Matthew 10:1-15) included Judas Iscariot.

3. The commission given to Judas Iscariot was transferred to Matthias.

4. Therefore, the **12 apostles**, including Matthias, were given the Great Commission.

Of course, even if this were true, it would not prove his proposition, because Mr. Garrett must prove the “apostles **ONLY**” were involved. However, he admits that the commission of Matthew 10 is **NOT** the same as the Great Commission! He says, “But in Matthew 10:1-15 we have the **first** commission that Christ gave to the Apostles. This commission **differs considerably** from that **second** commission [Great Commission, TNT] given at the close of this Gospel.” He added, “There is a similarity between **this** commission and the **later** one.” Consequently, **Judas Iscariot** was given the first or limited commission (Matthew 10), but he was **NEVER** given the Great Commission! Therefore, **Matthias** (who took Judas’ place) was **NEVER** given the Great Commission either, according to the reasoning of my opponent. By his “logic” then, Mr. Garrett admits that the **12 apostles** did **NOT** receive the Great Commission (since Matthias didn’t), and his proposition falls!

Mr. Garrett confesses, “When Jesus sent out the **seventy** recorded in Luke 10:1-12 and commissioned them, there are some

similarities with the Great Commission.” That is true. However, my friend argued that Matthias received the Great Commission because he took Judas’ place, and Judas had received a “similar” commission (Matthew 10). On the basis of his reasoning, since the **70** received a “similar” commission to the Great Commission (Luke 10), why weren’t the **70** also under the Great Commission when it was given? If the 70 were not under the Great Commission, even though they had been given a “similar” commission earlier (Luke 10), then neither was Judas under the Great Commission when he received a “similar” commission earlier (Matthew 10). Consequently, when Matthias took Judas’ place, he was **not** under the Great Commission either! It is easy to see the parallels between the commission of Matthew 10:1-15 (given to the **12 apostles**, including Judas Iscariot, but not Matthias) and the commission of Luke 10:1-12 (given to the **70 disciples**).

Mr. Garrett asserts, “Paul was converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).” This is not true! While Saul was on the road outside Damascus, the Lord told him, “*Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be **bold** thee what thou must do*” (Acts 9:6). After Saul went into Damascus, Ananias came and told him, “*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be **baptized**, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord*” (Acts 22:16). **Saul’s sins were not washed away until he was baptized!** (cf. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21).

Mr. Garrett argues that Paul was **not** under the Great Commission, but a different one: “Paul had a **special** commission.” He uses an illustration (two different “commissions” given by a business owner to two different employees) to suggest the difference between the Great Commission given to the 12 apostles and a similar, but different, commission given to Paul. The problem with my opponent’s illustration is that it does **not** illustrate **what the Bible teaches!** Illustrations do not prove truth; they only illustrate a point, whether that point is true or false.

My opponent observes that Paul “was ... the Apostle to the Gentiles.” I agree. However, if his being sent primarily to the Gentiles means Paul’s commission was not the Great Commission,

then Peter's commission was not the Great Commission either! Peter's apostleship was primarily to the Jews: "*For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me [Paul] toward the Gentiles*" (Galatians 2:8). Actually, Paul and Peter were both under the Great Commission, and both men taught Jews (Acts 2:22; 13:5; 17:1-2) and Gentiles (Acts 15:7, 12; Galatians 2:2). Paul wrote that "*James, Cephas [Peter], and John ... gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen [Gentiles], and they unto the circumcision [Jews]*" (Galatians 2:9). This simply describes their focus in carrying out the Great Commission.

My friend says, "The word '**world**' in Matt. 28:20 means '**age**.' The Greek word is ... '**aion**.'" Since I have taught Greek for many years, I know that *aion* is used in the Greek text of Matthew 28:20; however, I was simply quoting the same **King James Version** from which Mr. Garrett quoted in his address. My friend's appeal to *aion* does not help his argument at all! Notice that Jesus used *aion* in reference to the period ending with His return:

Matthew 13:38-42, "*The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world [aion]; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world [aion]. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*" Whether "world" or "age" is used to translate *aion*, the end point is the return of the Lord.

In Matthew 28:20, Jesus said, "*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 [aion].*" This clearly shows how long the Great Commission was to last. It did not "expire" when the apostles expired; it continues even into the 21st century!

My friend says, “Acts 14:14 proves that there were more apostles than the original twelve.” Yes, in the **general** meaning of the word *apostle* (“one sent forth with orders”—Thayer). In that sense there are apostles today. Is that what “the apostles” in your proposition means? No, Mr. Garrett means the **12** in his proposition.

My opponent says that “there are two qualifications that a man had to have to take Judas’ place ... they had to have accompanied with the apostles all the time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us ... [and] they had to have been an eye witness of the resurrection of Jesus.” Indeed, Peter cites those two qualifications as necessary for Judas’ replacement. However, if **only** these two qualifications were necessary, then “*Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus*” (Acts 1:23) would also have been an apostle, making **at least 13**, and my opponent loses his argument! Furthermore, there is an additional requirement for selection—**the Lord chooses** the individual to be His apostle: “*And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two **thou hast chosen**, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship*” (Acts 1:24-25). Despite Mr. Garrett’s denials that Paul received the Great Commission, Paul wrote that he was an apostle like the others: “*I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles*” (2 Corinthians 11:5); “*in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles*” (12:11); “*Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you*” (12:12). Paul was “*called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God*” (1 Corinthians 1:1). Although he was as “*one born out of due time,*” (1 Corinthians 15:8), he was an apostle who worked as diligently as anyone to carry out the Great Commission.

Unfortunately, although I would like to respond to some other points Mr. Garrett made in his address, limited space necessitates that I omit those responses. However, those other points offer **no proof whatsoever** of my friend’s proposition that the Great Commission “was given to **the apostles alone**, and expired when they expired.” Matthew 28:20 still reads, “*Teaching **them** [converts made through the preaching of the apostles] to observe **all things** whatsoever I have commanded **you** [including the Great Commission to go, teach, and baptize]!”*

The most significant point that all of us should remember as this short debate concludes is the Lord's command to "teach" and "preach" His word (Matthew 28:18-19; Mark 16:15) and that "*He who **believes and is baptized** will be **saved**; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:16). Preach that to all!

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