



TAKING *the* WORLD for
JESUS
The Remarkable Story of the Greatest Commission

Kevin Swanson

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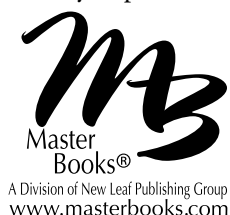
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*This book is dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ,
who is Lord of all.
He is the Chief Shepherd of His Church.*





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Preface

It is my hope that this book will encourage Christians everywhere around the world. Our perspective of the Kingdom of God is always too small. We are too short-sighted. We have a hard time seeing beyond our immediate situation when we encounter the ebb and flow of Gospel work, not to mention our own limitations and sinfulness. As this study opens up the aperture for a worldwide perspective and a 2,000-year view of the progress of Christ in history, I trust it will leave a permanent word of encouragement with the reader.

Where man's kingdoms and man's works have been of central importance in many of our history books today, this book is shifting the focus. After all, history is *His story*. God is completely sovereign over the kingdoms of men, and the Son of God is establishing His Church in the world. Indeed, Jesus is changing the world by the power of the Word and Spirit.

Therefore, in each section of the book we establish the world context first. We ask the question, what in the world is going on in this nation or that nation? Then, Jesus and His people enter the scene and... everything changes. Every century marks progress. The empires of this world come and go, but Christ's Church presses on.

I have integrated Scripture into the book in order that the reader might see that God's will is coming to pass on this earth, in time and space. The Christian must learn to interpret history through the lens of Scripture, a biblical worldview. We must prioritize certain events only because that's what Scripture does. We must discern between good and evil events, right and wrong actions by God's law, not by man's law.

To further enrich this study, the reader is encouraged to saturate it in Word and prayer throughout. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you read, and be sure to end each reading in thanksgiving and prayer. The power that has transformed nations through the centuries is still accessible to us here and now. How might the Lord Jesus Christ visit your community or your church, by the outpouring of His Spirit? The potentialities are thrilling.

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:13–18).



Introduction

How do you look at the world? Some will look at the world, and they do not see very much. They can see their own neighborhood, but they do not give a lot of thought to the bigger world beyond. They reflect little on what happened last year and have scant knowledge of what took place in the last century. All they focus on is what is happening in their world this week. They have a very small perspective of the world.

Some people will read the newspapers, and they think of what is going on in sports and civil government. They watch nations rise and nations fall. They see athletes win big games, and then these athletes grow old and die. They see rich people building big towers, and eventually these big towers fall down. Sometimes men will build even bigger towers, and these towers come down too. Beyond this, they think that little else of consequence is happening in the world.

But what about those of us who follow Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born in Bethlehem, died on the cross, and rose again on the third day? How do we view the world? How should we look at history?

We must begin by recognizing that God's Word—given to us in the Old and New Testaments—is the light we need to rightly see and understand the world



Christ's Resurrection transformed the world.
An ancient tomb in the Holy Land.

around us. His sure testimony is “a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path” (Ps. 119:105), and there are a number of key truths found in Scripture that we must grasp in order to have a proper outlook on the world.

First of all, the life, death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the most important event in the history of the world (Acts 13:26–39). Those who ignore or minimize this pivotal work of God will veer off course in their attempts to interpret history. All of history centers around this great event of His death and Resurrection.

Appropriately, history is divided by the years that come before and after Christ. Almost every calendar in the world today is set around the date of Jesus' birth. Our calendars use the term “A.D.” for the present designation. This is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase “anno Domini,” which means “in the year of our Lord.” We published this book in A.D. 2017, for example. A monk by the name of Dionysius the Humble, who lived somewhere in modern-day Romania or Bulgaria, introduced this designation in A.D. 525. When we speak of the years before Jesus' birth, we use the letters “B.C.” or “before Christ.”

Secondly, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is in control of all of history as we read in Colossians 1:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (Col. 1:16–17).

Not only does Jesus control all things, but He holds everything together (Heb. 1:3). He holds the nations together (Ps. 22:28). He holds families together (Deut. 7:9). He also holds entire eco-systems together, so that the sun will shine, the rain will fall, and the crops will grow every year (Gen. 8:21–22).

Thirdly, Jesus has placed the Church at the center of His eternal, redemptive purpose for history (2 Tim. 1:9). He gave His life to save and sanctify her as His people (Matt. 1:21; Eph. 5:25–26), and following His Resurrection and ascension, He now presides as head of the Church. Ephesians 1 notes:

[God the Father] raised Him [Jesus] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:20–22).

In Christ's exalted state, He always acts for the benefit of His Church. Whatever events play out in history—whether it be natural disasters or what seem like bad political decisions—all will work out for the good of the true Church of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28).

Fourthly, it is a historical certainty that Jesus Christ now sits on the right hand of the Father, caring for His Church and actively ruling until His enemies are subdued. Hebrews 10 affirms this truth:

But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool (Heb. 10:12–13, cf. 1 Cor. 15:24–25)



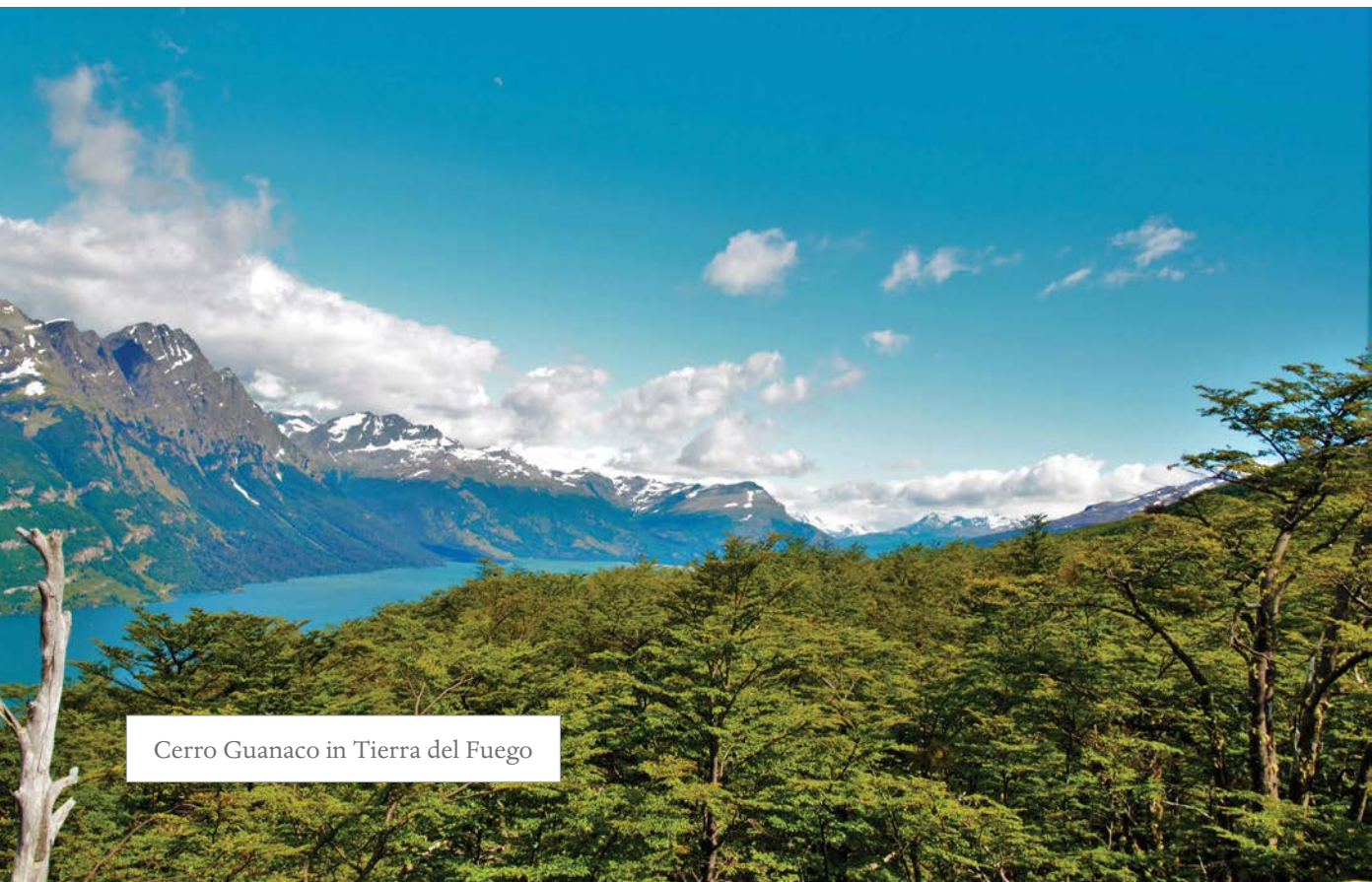


The great empires of men always crumble.
The Asclepion of Pergamon (Bergama) in Turkey.

As we look across the centuries, we will learn of many wars and of a great number of nations and empires rising and falling. In this study of history, the Christian student must always keep the Ephesians 1:21–22 and Hebrews 10:12–13 paradigm in mind—for God is building and preserving His Church, even as He is bringing His enemies down.

Fifthly, we must also remember the Great Commission that the Lord gave to His disciples just prior to His ascension. This remains the ongoing mission for all Christians until the end of the age. This commission, given to the 11 disciples, is found in Acts 1 and Matthew 28.

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 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 1:6–8).



Cerro Guanaco in Tierra del Fuego

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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.” Amen (Matt. 28:18–20).

Take special note of the scope and content of the commission. The scope encompasses all nations and the uttermost ends of the earth. This must include all lands, not to except Mongolia, the South Sea Islands, Madagascar, and the Tierra del Fuego Islands off the tip of Argentina.

The content of this discipleship work is to be rich and deep. It is clear from these words that Jesus did not want His disciples to take a short evangelistic message to the nations. He wanted His missionaries to teach *everything He commanded* in the Word of God. This is a quite a big project that must take many years, even centuries, to bring about.

Throughout the following survey, we will cover the exciting history of the world from A.D. 30 to the present. It is a thrill because Jesus is Lord over all things, and this is “His Story.” It is the story of the world written by Jesus for His people whom He gave His life to redeem—whom He will reconcile to Himself in history by the implementation of the Great Commission, even as He makes His enemies “His footstool” (Heb. 10:13).

In addition to these key points, there are two insightful parables that help us to better see how Jesus works practically in history. They explain two key strategies He has chosen to use in the building of His Kingdom.

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

Another parable He spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened” (Matt. 13:31–33).

The Parable of the Mustard Seed tells us that Jesus’ Kingdom would grow slowly and almost imperceptibly at first, but that it would blossom, over time, into a large tree that would be a haven for many. The language of a large tree serving as a

lodging-place for birds was used in the Old Testament to describe the far-reaching scope of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires (Ezek. 31:3–6; Dan. 4:10–12). Jesus employed this familiar language with His disciples to describe the ultimate triumph of His Kingdom over all others.

The Parable of the Leaven points to the influence of Christ's Kingdom as pervasive and far-reaching. Like the small mustard seed, it would be hard to detect this influence in its early stages. The lesson is this: When Jesus builds His Church and when His people influence the world, it is not always obvious at first. Though Christ's leaven is having an effect, it may not be announced on the front page of the newspapers. In fact, great pagan empires usually ignore the most important work that faithful men and women of God are doing. At times, Jesus' Church grows slowly and quietly in little nooks and crannies here and there around the world. Yet as we step back and carefully review two thousand years, we will see the undeniable evidences of Christ's Kingdom everywhere around the world.

A proper study of history will recognize Christ's Kingdom and appreciate what He is accomplishing over time. Such an outlook requires real and abiding faith. Such studies as this should encourage the faith of Christians around the world to know that Christ is, indeed, building His Church. While Satan is still active, Christ is robbing the strong man's house (Mark 3:22–27). This means that the most powerful forces in the universe, whether they be demonic or human governments, cannot possibly prevent Jesus from pulling off His "church project." His Kingdom is coming on earth, as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2).

When one looks back from the 1st century until now, the evidence of this fact is astonishing. The first church assembly, recorded in Acts 1 and 2, started with 120 people in the upper room (Acts 1:13–15, 2:1). Now, one of the most respected research organizations in the United States has documented that Christianity has the most adherents of any religion in the world today. The Pew Research Center notes: "As of 2010, Christianity was by far the world's largest religion, with an estimated 2.2 billion adherents, nearly a third (31 percent) of all 6.9 billion people on Earth."¹ This means that Jesus' Church has grown by a factor of more than 18,000,000 times over the last two thousand years.

May this survey encourage much joy and raise each Christian to give God the glory for His great work accomplished throughout the centuries. Whereas the kingdoms of this earth come and go, the Church of Jesus Christ continues to grow, and "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).



The Spreading Influence of Christianity

—— A.D. 70 ——

■ Roman Empire ■ Spread of Christianity



The Roman Empire and the Men Who “Turned the World Upside Down”

World history begins with God’s creation (Gen. 1) and man’s Fall in the Garden (Gen. 3). Without this framework, the study of history, the study of man’s behavior and social systems, would be completely misguided. That is why *secular* social studies and history classes which reject this framework become nothing more than the futile exercise of the blind leading the blind.

Man’s Fall in the Garden resulted in murder, violence, and chaos on a grand scale (Gen. 6:11), as well as murder, violence, and chaos between smaller tribal groups (Gen. 14:1–12). After the Flood and the dispersion at the Tower of Babel, a thick darkness settled over the world, especially on those tribes that were completely cut off from trade routes and access to God’s revelation that came through such men as Abraham and Moses. This is why the most degraded practices were found among the Aztecs in the 16th century and the isolated Pacific islanders in the 19th century. Mass-scale murders and gross moral degradations have been perpetrated by the great humanist empires in history (Babylon, Greece, Rome, China, Germany, Russia, and modern-day America), while the decentralized tribes have degraded themselves on smaller scales.

Under the sovereignty of Christ, Satan was allowed free rein to govern a fallen world from 4000 B.C. to A.D. 30, as “the god of this world” and the “prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2–3).

Before pronouncing the Curse upon Adam and Eve after their Fall into sin, God graciously promised salvation from their dreadful condition. He proclaimed that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

At first, the Lord God made a covenant with one man, who traveled from Ur of the Chaldees into the land of Canaan around 1900 B.C. Only one family on earth would maintain a relationship with the true and living God during these early centuries, while the rest of the world lay in darkness. When God communicated His promise to this man, Abraham, however, He was careful to mention that in this family “all nations” would be blessed. Later, the Apostle Paul, commenting on this promise, said:

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham” (Gal. 3:8–9).

The Gospel preached from A.D. 30 through the present day was first preached to Abraham. Clearly, this was God’s plan from the beginning. Thus, we find previews of God’s saving grace throughout the Old Testament era, with the inclusion of many Gentiles in the number of those who heard this Gospel and believed. Examples would include Job, Rahab the Harlot, Ruth the Moabitess, Naaman the Syrian, and so forth. The Old Testament prophets also looked forward to a great future missionary outreach to the Gentile world:

It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:6).

This was fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Eternal Son of God who is wholly God became man (Matt. 1:18; John 1:14; Heb. 4:15), in order to save us from sin and the devil (Matt. 1:21; 2 Cor. 4:4–6; 1 John 3:8). He came to save both Jew and Gentile, as the promised Seed who would be a blessing to every

nation on earth (1 Cor. 1:24–31; Eph. 2:12–14; 2 Tim. 2:9–11; 1 John 4:14–15). When He died on the Cross, Jesus Christ became a sacrifice for sin. He was called the “Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.” He rose from the dead, and was given complete authority over heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18) and “appointed heir of all things” (Heb. 1:1–3).

At the time of Jesus’ ministry on earth (between A.D. 30 and 33), “the ruler of this world will be cast out” (John 12:31). He reported seeing Satan fall like lightning (Luke 10:18) and gave His disciples authority to tread on snakes and scorpions (the demonic world). This is the point at which world history radically changed directions.

During Jesus Christ’s three-year ministry to the Jews, some insight into a worldwide outreach is given. We find Jesus commending “great faith” among Gentile converts like the Syrophoenician woman (Matt. 15:21) and the Roman Centurion (Luke 7:1–10). With the Resurrection and ascension of our Lord to the right hand of the Father came the implementation of the plan shared with Abraham 4,000 years earlier. Now, all nations were to be blessed in this Seed of the Woman, this Seed of Abraham—the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile came crashing down, and “now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:12–13).

This Gospel was meant for the world, and this is the story of how the Gospel took the world by storm between A.D. 33 and the present.

The Roman World

At the time that Jesus Christ was born, sometime between 6 B.C. and A.D. 1, the Roman Empire was approaching its zenith in world influence and glory. After multiple attempts to build world empires with Babel, Assyria, Persia, and Greece, finally the world had achieved the greatest empire of all.

Three centuries earlier, Rome was just a dot on the map—a city-state in the ancient world. By the time Augustus established his rule shortly before Jesus the Messiah was born in Bethlehem, the Roman Empire included North Africa, modern Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, and the Netherlands. The Roman armies invaded Britain between A.D. 43 and 84, gradually obtaining a foothold over the southern part of the British Isles. At its peak, the Roman Empire

was never much larger than what you see in the map at the beginning of this chapter.

ISSUES IN FOCUS

Christ's Kingdom Trumps All Others

The kingdoms of men going back as far as Nimrod's Babel (Gen. 11) have attempted to give glory to man. They work to solve man's problems by powerful governments, and they always fail. The rise and fall of the greatest empires of the ancient world were prophesied by the prophet Daniel. These include Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, Cyrus' Persia, Alexander the Great's Greece, and finally Rome under the Caesars—all would be set aside and they would render fealty to the greatest kingdom of all: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44).

Octavian—who was given the title "Augustus Caesar" by the Roman Senate—reigned between 27 B.C. and A.D. 14 and inaugurated an era known as the "Pax Romana," or the Peace of Rome. Apart from a few wars in Judea and Parthia and conflicts on the far perimeter of Rome's reach, the empire enjoyed a season of relative peace for two hundred years. At the introduction of Jesus Christ to the world, human institutions had achieved the highest levels of power, peace, prosperity, and pride. It seemed that man had finally achieved something for himself. It was common at that time for the Caesar to be referred to as "the savior of the world." The Priene Calendar Inscription of 9 B.C. introduced the emperor as "Augustus . . . filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him *as a savior* [emphasis added] . . . that he might end war and arrange all things."¹

It was at these great heights of human endeavor that another Savior was born in a stable in Bethlehem—a direct rival to Augustus and the great empires of men. His primary reason for coming, however, was not to free Israel from Roman power, but to "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). He was born of a virgin named Mary. This young woman had never been with a man, so it was by

the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit of God that the Lord Jesus was conceived in her womb. He came as the Messiah, the Savior of the World. He is the eternal Son of the living God, and He is also called the Son of Man. This great event occurred during the reign of Caesar Augustus, according to the clear testimony of the Gospel of Luke.

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:1–7).

Roman Government

Five hundred years before Christ, Rome formed as a Republic, with elected leaders serving the people. But powerful nations and empires usually degrade into dictatorships where one man takes control of all (or nearly all) the levers of power. This is what happened to Rome in 27 B.C. when Octavian was declared “Emperor.” Augustus postured himself as a god-like being, assuming the title of “Pontifex Maximus.” This title may be translated as “the highest priest” or the highest religious person on earth. Because Augustus Caesar controlled the military, his power was virtually unlimited. The central government in Rome would also send out governors to rule in the various provinces around the Empire, including Judea where Jesus was born.

Roman Culture: A Low View of Human Life

The Roman culture maintained a very low view of human life. They would routinely abandon infants out in the elements to die. It was not uncommon for fishermen to retrieve babies out of their nets when fishing the rivers around Rome. Roman law also gave fathers a great deal of power, under the Roman tradition of *pater familias*. Under this legal doctrine, the father could choose to abort a child or kill the child as soon as he or she was born. Table Four of Rome’s “Law of the Twelve Tables” states that a “dreadfully deformed child shall be quickly killed.”² Sadly, these pagans did not submit to biblical law which offers protection for the lives of children as well as adults.

Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect in charge of Judea between A.D. 26 and 36, and he was responsible for sentencing Jesus to the death of the Cross. According to some accounts, Pilate committed suicide just a few years after Jesus’ death and



Ecce Homo by Antonio Ciseri depicts Pilate during the trial of Jesus.

Resurrection.³ This was very common among the Roman leaders. These kingdoms of men were cruel.

Herod the Great ruled over Judea from 37 B.C. until shortly after Jesus was born. He thought nothing of killing all of the babies in Bethlehem — not unusual in the Roman world nor for the king. History records that Herod had one of his ten wives, and three of his own sons murdered. Having built the temple for the Jews, he was immensely popular among the religious leaders. When news came to



Herod the Great (73-4 B.C.).

Jerusalem that the King of the Jews was born in Bethlehem, the Scriptures say, “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matt. 2:3). These wicked leaders in Jerusalem would allow no competition with their rulership. Therefore, Herod’s goal was to kill the newborn Messiah of the Jews, and that is why he ordered the murder of the children in Bethlehem.

Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men (Matt. 2:16).

What Was Going On in the Rest of the World at This Time?

China was the other great empire that got its start around the same time as the Roman Empire (221 B.C.). The first dynasty lasted 15 years, and then the second dynasty continued until roughly A.D. 30. After several thousands of years of smaller confederacies vying for control of China, the warlord Qin Shi Huang launched China’s imperial age. He collected an army of 600,000 men and gained control over about one-third of modern-day China. Again, this great empire was controlled by an emperor who was very powerful and cruel. War and revolution was a way of life for this empire. They governed by a philosophy called “legalism,” which gave the government the right to be despotic, cruel, and tyrannical. This philosophy that was taught in the schools created a strong centralized political system. This made way for powerful, tyrannical governments, a precedent that continues today with its current Communist regime.

Most of the rest of the world was broken up into many small tribes and villages that would come and go within a few hundred years of time. Ireland offers a good example of the primitive world, located far from the influence of the God of Scripture. The Roman Empire avoided Ireland entirely and treated the Irish as “barbarians.” From a Christian perspective, the problem with these far-off tribes is that they were completely ignorant of the true and living God. The more isolated the nation from the influence of Jews and Christians, the more likely the natives would give way to human sacrifice, cannibalism, witch doctors and spiritism, abject fear, mass starvation, slavery, and ignorance found there.

Jesus Christ and His Men Turn the World Upside Down

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8; KJV).

To this dark world entered the Lord Jesus Christ, the very Son of God born in a stable in Bethlehem (about six miles south of Jerusalem). After He died on the Cross for our sins and rose from the dead, He gave His disciples the Great Commission. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The Lord charged them to take the message first to Jerusalem, then to Judea, to Samaria, and after that to the uttermost parts of the earth. And that is exactly what happened from A.D. 30 onward.

Thankfully, we have an entire book of the Bible dedicated to recording the high points of initial missionary work during the first century. As Jesus instructed them in the commission, it was vitally important that the Apostles receive power first, which came by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Here, we find a tremendous transformation that came over the Apostle Peter. Forty-nine days earlier, he had denied Jesus in the face of a servant girl. Now, he stood in the most public location in the Temple and preached the Resurrection and Lordship of Jesus Christ in the presence of the people who put Him to death. Thousands were converted, and the Church in Jerusalem was formed (Acts 2:41ff).

It is very important that all Christians carefully follow the Gospel message preached by the Apostles from the beginning. Acts 2, 3, and 4 contain this seminal message, and we would do well not to stray from it. Here is a sample of the first sermon Peter preached:

And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it....

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:21–24, 34–36).

Not long after these first sermons were preached, Peter and John were imprisoned, but they walked out of the prison twice by supernatural intervention. The ministry continued against tremendous opposition, even as more were converted and baptized. In Acts 10, the first Gentile household was baptized into the Christian Church by the Apostle Peter. This marked the beginning of the outreach to the Gentiles which has continued for the last 2,000 years. Virtually the same pattern can be seen throughout history, witnessed more recently in Korea, Fiji, and elsewhere. The breakout of Holy Spirit revival produces thousands of conversions within days and weeks, followed by mass evangelism and, at times, severe persecution.

The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem began to persecute the first Christians in Judea, which forced the believers to scatter north into Samaria. This “diaspora” is described in Acts 8:1–8. After that, the disciples proceeded to take the Gospel up into the city of Antioch in Syria. Over time, this city became a new center for the Christian faith, as well as a mission-sending “agency” for the Apostle Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and others. Within the first century, the Gospel had covered the Roman world. By the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Church at Colossae, the Gospel had been preached “in all the world” (Col. 1:6).

This pioneering work is not without risk and danger, and it always calls for great faith on the part of all the missionaries involved with it. Truly, these courageous men are robbing the strong man’s house of his goods (Mark 3:27). They are robbing Satan of his people (whom he has controlled for thousands of years). Satan is never happy to see his house robbed, and there are usually persecuting repercussions that result.

We have the most information on the missionary endeavors of the Apostle Paul in Asia Minor (Turkey), Greece, and Rome, who faced many challenges in his work. He took the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire, and planted many

churches. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul speaks of the various persecutions and troubles that befell him in his journeys:

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness (2 Cor. 11:23–27).

Few missionaries have ever taken that much abuse, yet Paul was dedicated and persevering. His first missionary journey covered 1,400 miles (taking in Cypress and Turkey). His second missionary journey was twice as long, spanning about 2,800 miles as he traveled through Syria, Turkey, Greece, and Jerusalem. On his third missionary journey, Paul visited Turkey, Greece, Lebanon, and Israel, logging roughly 2,700 miles. The Apostle Paul wrote a large portion of the New Testament, following up with churches to which he had ministered over the years of his service. Finally, he sailed for Rome on his fourth missionary journey while under arrest by the Roman guard. Paul was put to death in Rome by Nero sometime around A.D. 67, probably by beheading. His final recorded words are found in his second epistle to Timothy, which includes this poignant statement:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the LORD, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Tim. 4:7–8).

After His Resurrection, the Lord gave Peter forewarning that he would face martyrdom in John 21:18. Peter's ministry included Asia Minor or Turkey (1 Pet. 1:1) and Rome. He is believed to have been killed in Rome under orders of Nero sometime around A.D. 67 or 68. According to a later Christian writer named Origen, Peter was crucified upside down on his own request. He did not think he was worthy of dying in the manner of his Lord and Savior.

The Apostle John’s ministry spanned somewhere between 60 and 80 years. John was active in Asia Minor and is believed to have spent much of his time in Ephesus. He wrote five New Testament books in all, including three epistles and the Gospel of John. He penned his fifth work, the Book of Revelation, while exiled on the Island of Patmos. John died sometime between A.D. 80 and 100 and was buried at Ephesus.⁴ John’s brother James was executed by Herod around A.D. 44 in Jerusalem (Acts 12:1–2).

Peter’s brother Andrew took the Gospel into Scythia (Ukraine and Southern Russia), according to the earliest recorded accounts of his ministry. Later writers assert that he preached the Gospel in Greece, Asia Minor, and the strategic city of Byzantium (later Constantinople and Istanbul). He is believed to have been crucified in Achaia (Southern Greece).

The Apostle Philip is believed to have preached in Syria, Greece, and Phrygia (Central Turkey). An episode passed down concerning his death is memorable. In response to Philip’s preaching in the city of Hierapolis (located in southwestern Turkey), the Roman proconsul’s wife was converted. Her husband responded in anger, tortured Phillip and his sister (who was ministering with him), and killed them both by crucifixion. In 2011, archaeologists discovered what appears to be Phillip’s tomb in ancient Hierapolis.

According to the church historian Eusebius, the Apostle Bartholomew brought Matthew’s Gospel to India. Bartholomew, along with Jude (Thaddeus), is also regarded as the first to introduce the Gospel into Armenia in the first century. He preached the Gospel, healed the sick, and cast out demons in what was an explosive environment in Armenia. When the daughter of King Sanadroug was converted, the believers were subjected to beatings. Bartholomew was fatally injured in the beatings, but before he died, he was said to have prayed these words: “Lord God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, do not overlook the entreaties of the apostles who labored for this country. Grant to these people the grace of your mercy and enable them to renounce the worship of their vain idols.”⁵

Thomas doubted the Lord’s Resurrection at first, but he became a great missionary who took the Gospel far and wide. While he is believed to have shared the good news in ancient Parthia (Northern Iran and Turkmenistan), his most enduring legacy was in India. He reportedly landed at a seaport called Muziris on the southern tip of India in A.D. 52—less than 20 years after the Resurrection of Jesus. According to the Nasrani Christians, Thomas planted seven churches in

India, and died circa A.D. 72, killed by an arrow or a spear.

The earliest accounts of the Apostle Matthew's labors indicate that he focused his Gospel ministry in and around Jerusalem for about 20 years following Christ's ascension. After this, there is a great deal of debate about his exploits, yet his missionary work is believed by some to have reached the Persians and Medes (in modern-day Iran) as well as the Ethiopians in Africa.

Jude and Simon the Zealot are believed to have partnered together on a mission throughout the Middle East, including Persia (Iran), Samaria (Israel), Idumaea (near Jordan), Syria, and Libya. According to one tradition, both of them were sawn in pieces, either in Persia or Syria.

These Apostles of Jesus Christ were filled with the Holy Spirit, and with great boldness and faith. They met fierce opposition, but it did not deter them. They steadfastly built the Church everywhere they went. By the time Paul made it to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, his reputation had preceded him. The people in the city said, "These [are the men] who have turned the world upside down . . ." (Acts 17:6).

Christ's Apostles had gained the attention of the whole Roman Empire, and the Empire would retaliate hard against them.



The oldest church in the world
planted by Thomas in Muziris, India.