

## Why the Great Commission Should Be Translated “Go!” and Not “As You Go”

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*There has long been a debate as to whether the participle πορευθέντες in the Great Commission is best translated as an imperative (“go”) or as a temporal adverbial participle (“as you go”). The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that the participle should be understood with an imperatival force by looking at other uses of the same participle in similar constructions in both the Septuagint and the New Testament, especially the Gospel of Matthew. What we discover is that this term is used consistently as an imperative but that stylistically in Greek it was often preferred to use one participle and one imperative instead of two consecutive imperatives. This does not mean, however, that “go” is the main focus of the passage. The main idea of the passage is still “make disciples,” though the imperatival function of πορευθέντες suggests certain implications that will also be explored.*

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There is virtually unanimous agreement that the main command of the Great Commission is to “make disciples” (μαθητεύσατε). But how should we understand the participle πορευθέντες? Is it best understood as a temporal participle and translated “as you go” or as a command, “Go!” In other words, are we to understand the verse as stating that our disposition as we go about our daily routine should be to make disciples? Or, is this verse stating imperatively that believers are commanded to leave their homes and go to a foreign land for the express purpose of making disciples? The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that the participle should be understood with an imperatival force by looking at other uses of the same participle in similar constructions in both the Septuagint and the New Testament, especially the Gospel of Matthew. What we discover is that it was common, even preferable (at least with certain verbs), to use a participle imperatively instead of using two consecutive imperatives.

### The Evidence for “As You Go”

Some maintain that the aorist participle πορευθέντες should be

viewed as a temporal (adverbial) participle and should therefore be translated “as you go.” Grammatically, this is certainly possible and should not be dismissed too quickly. Temporal participles are very common and are sometimes viewed as the default category if no other category fits. In his grammar, Wallace notes that when an aorist adverbial participle (e.g., πορευθέντες) is related to an aorist main verb (e.g., μαθητεύσατε), the participle will often communicate contemporaneous time to the action of the main verb.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, if πορευθέντες is interpreted as a temporal participle, it could be rightly translated “when you go” or “as you go.”

What would be the implications of such an interpretation? After noting that the main command is to make disciples, Robert Culver notes, “Presupposed by this basic command is the fact that Christian believers are already to be deployed on the scene of their missionary labors.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, there is no commission to go, only a commission to make disciples. He continues by claiming that “the point of the great commission is that wherever they are they are to be carrying it out—making disciples. . . . Make disciples in the particular nation among whom you dwell. You need not go somewhere else to operate on the great commission program!”<sup>3</sup> His paraphrase of the verse also clarifies his position: “As ye go, therefore, and wherever you may be . . . make disciples of all nations. . . .”<sup>4</sup>

More recently, Marshall and Payne have made a similar argument. After affirming that “we should be sending out missionaries to the ends of the earth and seeking to reach the whole world for Christ,” they raise the question: “But is that really what Matthew 28 is calling upon us to do?”<sup>5</sup> Here is (at least in part) their answer:

Traditionally (or at least for Carey), this has been read as a missionary mandate, a charter for sending out gospel workers to the world. . . . But the emphasis of the sentence is not on “going.” In fact, the participle is probably better translated “when you

<sup>1</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 624. It should be noted that Wallace does not think that in Matthew 28:19 πορευθέντες is a temporal participle.

<sup>2</sup> Robert D. Culver, “What Is the Church’s Commission? Some Exegetical Issues in Matthew 28:16–20,” *BSac* 125 (1968): 245.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>5</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and The Vine* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2013), 11.

go” or “as you go.” The commission is not fundamentally about mission out there somewhere else in another country. *It’s a commission that makes disciple-making the normal agenda and priority of every church and every Christian disciple.*<sup>6</sup>

In addition, although it stands virtually alone as one among dozens of well-known and trusted English Versions, the International Standard Version (ISV) translates the participle temporally: “Therefore, **as you go**, disciple people in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>7</sup>

Studying the Greek of Matt 28:19 does not easily or quickly solve the issue as to how this verse should be understood. Some argue that the phrase is best understood as a temporal adverbial participle and therefore communicates the idea of “as you go.” And although it is possible for the Greek participle *πορευθέντες* to be interpreted temporally, as we will see, such an interpretation is highly unlikely.

### The Evidence for “Go!”

Most New Testament scholars, however, disagree with the above interpretation and favor taking the participle with an imperatival force.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 13 (emphasis original).

<sup>7</sup> See also God’s Word translation: “So wherever you go, make disciples of all nations.”

<sup>8</sup> Leon Morris correctly notes, “Where the participle is linked in this way with an imperative, it shares the imperatival force (cf. 2:8, 13; 11:4; 17:27). Jesus was commanding his disciples to go as well as to make disciples, though the emphasis falls on the making of disciples” (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992], 746n.30). Similarly, Osborne comments, “The circumstantial participle ‘go’ (*πορευθέντες*) followed by the main verb is a common Matthean stylistic trait, and it becomes in effect another imperative, ‘Go and make disciples’” (Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 1080). Other commentators who follow this interpretation include: Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 431; Fredrick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (The Churchbook: Matthew 13–28), rev. and exp. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 815; D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *EBC* 9, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 666; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 3:667; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC 33B (Dallas: Word, 1995), 88, 886; Craig Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 718–19; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1265n.65; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 951. See also Hal Freeman,

In this case the participle is not interpreted temporally but as a participle of attendant circumstance.<sup>9</sup> This type of participle is coordinate or parallel to the main verb (in Matt 28:19 the imperative *μαθητεύσατε*, “make disciples”) and thus takes on the mood of that verb. It is typically translated as a finite verb with “and” inserted between the participle and the main verb. Wallace lists five criteria that all occur in about 90 percent of the instances of attendant circumstance: (1) the tense of the participle is usually *aorist*; (2) the tense of the main verb is usually *aorist*; (3) the mood of the main verb is usually *imperative* or *indicative*; (4) the participle will *precede the main verb*; and (5) the participle occurs frequently in *historical narratives*.<sup>10</sup> Although the participle and the main verb are translated as parallel or coordinate verbs, the emphasis still falls on the main verb, with the participle being grammatically subordinate.<sup>11</sup> This use of the participle is confirmed by looking at similar constructions in both the Septuagint and the New Testament, especially the Gospel of Matthew.

First, there are several key texts in the Septuagint that demonstrate that the participle often functions imperatively.<sup>12</sup>

- Rebekah tells her son Jacob, “Your curse be on me, child, only obey my voice, and **go** (*πορευθείς*), **bring** (*ἔνεγκε*) them to me” (Gen 27:13 NETS; see also 27:9). Several items are worth noting here. First, this text closely resembles Matt 28:19 as we have an aorist participle (*πορευθείς*) followed by an aorist imperative (*ἔνεγκε*). Second, in the Hebrew text, both of these verbs are

“The Great Commission and the New Testament: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16–20,” *SBJT* 1.4 (1997): 17; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 104n.66; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, vol. 1, *Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 356–57. Schnabel states, “The participle *πορευθέντες* cannot be denied an imperatival sense” (356).

<sup>9</sup> See Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 336–37; David L. Mathewson and Elodie Ballantine Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax for Students of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 212; Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 156; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 640–45 (esp. 645).

<sup>10</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 642.

<sup>11</sup> Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer, *Deeper Greek*, 435–36.

<sup>12</sup> Many of the following examples are found in Cleon Rogers, “The Great Commission,” *BSac* 130 (1973): 260–61.

imperatives, which means the translators of the LXX viewed the participle as having an imperatival function. Third, it would not make sense to translate the participle temporally (“as you go, bring . . .”) since it clearly bears an imperatival force (“go, bring . . .”), which is confirmed by the Hebrew original.

- Jacob instructs his son Joseph, “**Go** (πορευθείς), **see** (ἰδέ) if your brothers and sheep are well, and tell me” (Gen 37:14 NETS). As with the previous example, the Hebrew has an imperative that the Septuagint renders as a participle.
- After they ran out of the food that they had brought from Egypt, Jacob orders his sons, “**go** (πορευθέντες) **purchase** (πρίασθε) a few provisions for us” (Gen 43:2 NETS).
- Pharaoh commands the people of Israel, “**Go** (πορευθέντες), and **get to work** (ἐργάζεσθε)! For the straw shall not be given to you, and you shall deliver the levy of brick-making” (Exod 5:18 NETS).
- The sons of the prophets say to Elisha concerning Elijah, “Please **let them go** (πορευθέντες) and **seek** (ζητησάτωσαν) your master” (2 Kings 2:16).<sup>13</sup>
- Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman, saying, “**Go** (πορευθείς) and **wash** (λοῦσαι) in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean” (2 Kings 5:10).<sup>14</sup>

The same type of construction (aorist participle + imperative) is also often found with the participle of ἀναλαμβάνω in the Septuagint.

- Pharaoh commands Joseph, “**bring** (ἀναλαβόντες) your father, and **come** (παραγίνεσθε)” (Gen 45:19).
- After the tenth plague (the death of the first born), Pharaoh orders Moses and Aaron, “**Take** (ἀναλαβόντες) both your sheep and cattle, and **get going** (πορεύεσθε)” (Exod 12:32 NETS).
- Jeremiah declares God’s word of judgment to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: “**Take up** (ἀναλαβόντες), and **flee** (φεύγετε) to Sion; hurry, do not stop” (Jer 4:6 NETS).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> All Scripture citations from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>14</sup> The Hebrew form is a jussive with an imperatival force.

<sup>15</sup> See also Jdt 12:11 (“**Go** [πορευθείς] and **persuade** [πείσον] the Hebrew woman,” NRSV); Tobit 5:3 (“**go** [πορευθείς] and **get** [λαβέ] the money,”

The above texts are highly instructive because they confirm the use of the participle that functions imperatively.<sup>16</sup> Instead of using two coordinate imperatives, it was common to use a participle followed by an imperative. It was understood, however, that the participle mirrored the mood of the imperative, being taken as a command.

Other uses in Matthew’s Gospel also confirm the attendant circumstance use of the participle. Not only does Matthew use this construction often, he uses the construction with the same verb (an aorist participle of πορεύομαι), followed by an aorist imperative.

- King Herod urgently commands the wise men, “**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **search** (ἐξετάσατε) diligently for the child” (2:8). There is no doubt that Herod was not merely stating “as you go” or “when you go.” Rather, he was forcefully commanding them to go and search for the child.
- Jesus answers the Pharisees, “**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **learn** (μάθετε) what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice’” (9:13).
- Jesus declares to John’s disciples, “**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **tell** (ἀπαγγείλατε) John what you hear and see” (11:4; see also Luke 7:22).
- Jesus instructs Peter, “**go** (πορευθείς) to the sea and **cast** (βάλε) a hook and take the first fish that comes up” (17:27).
- The angel at the empty tomb tells the women, “Then **go** (πορευθείσαι)<sup>17</sup> quickly and **tell** (εἴπατε) his disciples that he has

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RSV); 1 Macc 7:7 (“**let him go** [πορευθείς] and **see** [ἰδέτω],” NRSV). For a participle in construction with an indicative, see Gen 12:9; 27:14; 45:28; Num 13:26; Deut 29:25; Josh 2:1; Dan 6:20; Tobit 1:19; 1 Macc 9:59.

<sup>16</sup> The use of the participle as attendant circumstance should not be confused with the imperatival participle. The former is somewhat common, is used in construction with a main verb, and is found mostly in historical narratives whereas the latter is very rare, is used in a construction that lacks a main verb, and is found most in Romans 12 and 1 Peter (see Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer, *Deeper Greek*, 338–39; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 650–51).

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus meets the women in Matt 28:10, he instructs them to “**go** (ὑπάγετε) and **tell** (ἀπαγγείλατε) my brothers to go to Galilee.” This time, the same message is communicated by two imperatives. Also, the parallel passage in Mark 16:7 also has two imperatives: “**go** (ὑπάγετε), **tell** (εἴπατε) his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee.”

risen from the dead” (28:7).<sup>18</sup>

Again, the above texts demonstrate that the attendant circumstance was a common use of the participle in Matthew’s Gospel (note that each text meets all five of Wallace’s criteria).<sup>19</sup> In each case, it would not make much sense to translate the participle as “when/as you go” but instead the participle clearly functions with an imperatival force. Indeed, Wallace notes that “in narrative literature, in almost all of the aorist participle + aorist imperative constructions, the participle is attendant circumstance.”<sup>20</sup> When the author wanted to convey a temporal function, the present participle is used.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> For more uses of the participle of attendant circumstance in construction with imperatives, see also Matt 2:13 (“an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘**Rise** [ἐγερθείς], **take** [παράλαβε] the child and his mother”; so also 2:20); 5:24 (“**leave** [ἄφες] your gift there before the altar and **go** [ὑπάγε]”); 9:6 (“**Rise** [ἐγερθείς], **pick up** [ἄρον] your bed and go home”); 22:13 (“Then the king said to the attendants, ‘**Bind** [δήσαντες] him hand and foot and **cast** [ἐκβάλετε] him into the outer darkness”). For uses of the attendant circumstance in construction with indicatives, see Matt 2:14 (“And **he rose** [ἐγερθείς] and **took** [παρέλαβεν] the child”; so also 2:21); 8:26 (“Then **he rose** [ἐγερθείς] and **rebuked** [ἐπετίμησεν] the winds and the sea”); 9:7 (“And **he rose** [ἐγερθείς] and **went** [ἀπῆλθεν] home”), 19 (“And Jesus **rose** [ἐγερθείς] and **followed** [ἠκολούθησεν] him”); Luke 11:8 (“**he will rise** [ἐγερθείς] and **give** [δώσει] him whatever he needs”).

<sup>19</sup> Examples of the participle of πορεύομαι with an indicative that are translated as attendant circumstance include the following: Matt 18:12 (“does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and **go** [πορευθείς] and **search** [ζητεῖ] for the one that is straying?” NASB); 22:15 (“Then the Pharisees **went** [πορευθέντες] and **planned** [συμβούλιον ἔλαβον] how to trap Jesus in conversation”); 25:16 (“He who had received the five talents **went** [πορευθείς] at once and **traded** [ἤργασατο] with them, and he made five talents more”); 26:14–15 (“Judas Iscariot . . . **went** [πορευθείς] to the chief priests and **said** [εἶπεν]”); 27:66 (So they **went** [πορευθέντες] and **made** the tomb **secure** [ῆσφαλισαντο]). Cf. Matt. 21:6 which has two participles (“The disciples **went** [πορευθέντες] and **did** [ποιήσαντες] as Jesus had directed them”).

<sup>20</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 642n.71. One exception is Luke 22:32: “but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And **when** you **have turned again** (ἐπιστρέψας), **strengthen** (στήρισον) your brothers.” Interestingly, the text includes the temporal adverb ποτε (“when”) to clarify the temporal nuance.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Matt 10:7: “And **as you go** (πορευόμενοι), **preach** (κηρύσσετε), saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Although most versions translate this verse temporally, the NLT interprets the participle with an imperatival force (“**Go** and announce”).

Therefore, when we come to Matt 28:19 (“**Go** [πορευθέντες] therefore and **make disciples** [μαθητεύσατε] of all nations”), it is natural to take the participle imperatively. In Matthew’s Gospel, every instance of the aorist participle of πορεύομαι preceding an aorist main verb is clearly attendant circumstance.

The same pattern found in Matthew is also consistent in the other Gospels.

- Jesus says to his disciples, “**Go** (πορευθέντες) into all the world and **proclaim** (κηρύξατε) the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15).
- Jesus responds to the Pharisees regarding Herod, “**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **tell** (εἶπατε) that fox” (Luke 13:32).
- After seeing some who chose the place of honor at a dinner party, Jesus teaches, “But when you are invited, **go** (πορευθείς) and **sit** (ἀνάπεσε) in the lowest place” (Luke 14:10).
- Jesus gives instructions to the lepers on how to become clean by saying, “**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **show** (ἐπιδείξατε) yourselves to the priests” (Luke 17:14).
- “Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, ‘**Go** (πορευθέντες) and **prepare** (ἐτοιμάσατε) the Passover for us” (Luke 22:8).<sup>22</sup>

The imperatival function of the participle is also confirmed by English translations. Every major English version translates πορευθέντες as an imperative in Matt 28:19. Interestingly, although the ISV obviously seeks to make a statement by bucking the trend of virtually every other English version, it does not consistently translate the same construction temporally. As with Matt 28:19 (“**as you go**, disciple people in all nations”) and Mark 16:15 (“**As you go** into the entire world, proclaim the gospel to everyone”) the ISV also astonishingly renders Matt 2:8 temporally: King Herod urgently commands the wise men, “**As you go**, search carefully for the child.” It is extremely unlikely that the king is not issuing a command here, especially since they cannot search without going. Perhaps some felt this translation was necessary so that this

<sup>22</sup> See also Matt 21:2 where Jesus instructs his two of his disciples to go into a village to find a donkey and a colt. He then adds, “**Untie** (λύσαντες) them and **bring** (ἀγάγετε) them to me” (cf. Luke 19:30). In the parallel passage in Mark 11:2, two imperatives are used (“**Untie** [λύσατε] it and **bring** [φέρετε] it”). This further confirms that the participle of attendant circumstance functions virtually identical to an imperative.

verse was consistent with the Great Commission.

Such consistency, however, was never achieved. There are a number of places where the same construction in Greek (aorist participle + imperative) is translated with an imperatival force (attendant circumstance).

- Jesus answers the Pharisees, “**Go** and learn what this means: ‘I want mercy and not sacrifice’” (9:13 ISV).
- Jesus replies to John’s disciples, “**Go** and tell John what you hear and observe” (11:4; see also Luke 7:22 ISV).
- Jesus instructs Peter, “**Go** to the sea and throw in a hook” (17:27 ISV).
- The angel at the empty tomb tells the women, “**Go** quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead” (28:7 ISV).<sup>23</sup>

This inconsistency in translating similar constructions casts doubt on their rendering of Matt 28:19 as a temporal participle. Why are the same participles translated temporally but others imperatively? If it is so clear that the Great Commission should *not* be translated as “Go,” then why are other texts not treated the same way?

Again, this does not mean that the participle is the main point. The main verb is “make disciples.” And yet, simply because the participle is not the main verb it does not make it unimportant or dispensable. Instead, such participles are a necessary prerequisite to complete the main command. Rogers comments, “Without the action of the participle having taken place it would not be possible to carry out the command. The participle proposes the way for the fulfilling of the main verb and in this way also has the form of an imperative.”<sup>24</sup>

The imperatival function of the participle *πορευθέντες* in the Great Commission is also confirmed by the immediate context. Jesus not only commands his disciples to “go,” but he specifies that the location of their disciple-making includes “all nations” (*πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*). “Without the going,” explains Rogers, “the making disciples is not possible, and especially when ‘all nations’ is the object.”<sup>25</sup> Schnabel similarly notes,

<sup>23</sup> All of the texts in the Gospel of Luke cited above are also translated as imperatives in the ISV: Luke 13:32 (“**Go** and tell that fox, ‘Listen!’”); 14:10 (“**go** and sit down at the place of least honor”); 17:14 (“**Go** and show yourselves to the priests”); 22:8 (“**Go** and make preparations”).

<sup>24</sup> Rogers, “The Great Commission,” 261.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 262. Rogers concludes that this “construction indicates that ‘going’

“The participle is implicitly imperatival; the Twelve can reach ‘all nations’ only if they leave Galilee (or Jerusalem) and go beyond the confines of Judea to other regions and other cities.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, the imperatival function of the verb fits the global context of the command.

Finally, the imperatival function of the participle *πορευθέντες* is also confirmed by the comparison of the Great Commission with the other commissions given by Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and Acts.

- “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15).
- “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46–48).
- “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21).
- “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).<sup>27</sup>

Schnabel concludes, “The missionary commission of Jesus is extant in other formulations. . . . It is quite a stretch, therefore, to minimize the significance of ‘going’ in Jesus’ directive.”<sup>28</sup>

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is an integral part of making disciples and is to be translated as an imperative” (266). Carson adds, “In a context that demands that this ministry extend to ‘all nations,’ it is difficult to believe that ‘go’ has no imperatival force” (“Matthew,” 666).

<sup>26</sup> E. J. Schnabel, “Mission,” in *DJG*, 2nd ed., ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 607.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Matt 4:19 (“And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men’”); 10:16 (“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves”); 13:38 (“The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom”); 24:14 (“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”).

<sup>28</sup> Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 356–57.

### The Implications of the Imperative Force of πορευθέντες

The following implications are based on the view that the participle πορευθέντες should be interpreted (and translated) with an imperative force in Matt 28:19. First, the church must be *intentional* about reaching the nations. If the command is to go into all the nations and make disciples, then that would seem to require a plan to make sure the church is fulfilling Jesus’ commission. Leon Morris notes, “From this fact [i.e., because “go” is a participle and not an imperative] some have drawn the conclusion that Jesus did not command his followers to go; all that they were to do was make disciples of such people as they happened to encounter.” He rightly adds, however, “Jesus was commanding his followers to go as well as to make disciples, though the emphasis falls on the making of disciples.”<sup>29</sup> It is appropriate (and even mandatory) for the church to prioritize reaching all of the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to make disciples.

Second, the church must be willing to invest its resources (time and money) to fulfill Jesus’ commission. It would be tragic if Jesus’ final commission to the church was ignored or minimalized. It is far too easy for churches to get consumed in extending their local kingdom while failing to extend the world-wide kingdom of God.

Finally, going is the not goal; making disciples is. Although I argued that the participle πορευθέντες is imperative in function, the Greek has only one main verb, the imperative “make disciples” (μαθητεύσατε). Thus, the heart of the Great Commission is to make disciples. The three other verbs, which are all participles (go, baptizing, teaching), are all subordinate to this main idea. Going is merely a means to an end.

### Summary

Although some maintain that the aorist participle πορευθέντες is best interpreted as a temporal (adverbial) participle and should therefore be translated “as you go,” the best evidence supports taking it as a participle of attendant circumstance. As such, the participle mirrors the main verb which, in this case, is an imperative. This usage is common and is consistently used with aorist participles in construction with aorist (and sometimes present) imperatives in narratives. Especially with certain verbs (like πορεύομαι, ἐγείρω, and ἀναλαμβάνω), ancient Greek stylistically often preferred to use one participle and one imperative instead of two consecutive imperatives. Indeed, the aorist participle of

<sup>29</sup> Morris, *Matthew*, 756.

πορεύομαι in construction with an aorist imperative is never used temporally in the New Testament and always carries an imperative force.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Matthew’s use of the participle does not mitigate the force of the imperative but was merely a stylistic variation that still carries an imperative force. Consequently, the participle should be translated imperatively (“Go”). Wallace summarizes, “There is no good grammatical ground for giving the participle a mere temporal idea. To turn [πορευθέντες] into an adverbial [temporal] participle is to turn the Great Commission into the Great Suggestion!”<sup>31</sup> Those who prefer to translate the text “As you go” misunderstand the original Greek and thereby weaken the force of Jesus’ commission.

Of the twelve uses of the aorist participle πορεύομαι (when preceding an aorist imperative) in the Gospels, not one of them is normally interpreted as a temporal participle. Of the twelve major English Bible versions consulted, not one translated the participle πορευθέντες temporally in the Great Commission. Of the twelve commentaries consulted, not one argued for a temporal meaning. Additionally, the imperative function of the participle is especially obvious in the context of the Great Commission which includes making disciples of *all nations*. Finally, the other commissions given by Jesus to bring the gospel to all the nations further confirm imperative force of πορευθέντες. So, while we acknowledge that the participle πορευθέντες is not the main verb (and thus not the main command) in the Great Commission, without doubt it carries an imperative force (“Go!”). Consequently, the church is given a command to go to the nations in order to make disciples.

<sup>30</sup> The same is true with the participle of ἐγείρω before an aorist imperative.

<sup>31</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 645.