

# The baptismal phrase of Matthew 28:19

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*“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy [Spirit] . . .”*

In 1962 the late Brother Arthur Broughton published a booklet<sup>1</sup> presenting reasons to believe that the original reading of this passage was “Go ye and make disciples of all nations in my name”. This article presents the views expressed in that booklet for the reader’s consideration.\*

## The Ecclesial Guide

Firstly a little background so that we can understand how the current phrase, often used at baptisms, came into use. In 1883, at the age of 44, Brother Robert Roberts published one of his most influential works, *The Ecclesial Guide*, a booklet of fifty-six pages, and this publication has been generally accepted as the basis for the organisation of ecclesias. In that publication he wrote:

### “Baptismal Formula

“As regards the form of words, it is better to say, ‘baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’, than simply ‘baptized into the Lord Jesus’, for this reason: the first form of words keeps the truth concerning Christ in the foreground—that he is the manifestation of the Father by the Holy Spirit and that what he did, he did not of himself as a man; whereas the latter leaves the way open for the idea to grow up that Jesus came in his own name (which he expressly says he did not) and not in his Father’s name (which he expressly says he did)” (p. 6).

However, in another publication Brother Roberts wrote:

“According to triune-immersion, it is not sufficient to be baptized into the Son . . . Thus Christ is displaced from his position as the connecting link—the door of entrance—the ‘new and living way’. And thus there are three names under heaven whereby

we must be saved, in opposition to the apostolic declaration, that ‘. . . there is none other name (than the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth) under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.’”<sup>2</sup>

## The Codices

It is true that both the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus contain the traditional text; however, the following points must be considered:

- 1 Both of those Codices date from the fourth century, and therefore there is a gap of about 300 years between Matthew’s original account and the earliest manuscripts now available.
- 2 During those years the doctrine of the Trinity had gradually gained ground, but was a subject of fierce contention, which, by the fourth century, had become so bitter that it threatened to rend the Christian Church apart. In A.D. 325 the Nicene Council was held, which after much disputation drew up a formula that became the nucleus of the Nicene Creed.
- 3 There is evidence of tampering with the text of the New Testament having occurred during those 300 years. It is now universally accepted, for instance, that 1 John 5:7,8 is spurious. The

1. *A Collection of the Evidence, for and against, the traditional wording of the baptismal phrase in Matthew 28:19.*

\* Readers might also wish to consider the opposite point of view as presented in the following articles: *Christadelphian*: Brother Carter’s editorial in April 1962 (pp. 179-81); letters by Brethren Ralph Lovelock (p. 177), F. W. Turner, H. A. Whittaker and A. L. Cole (May 1962, pp. 221-2) and J. B. Blunt (Aug. 1962, p. 369); “The baptismal formula”, Brother H. A. Whittaker, Jul. 1956, p. 250; “The Lord’s command to baptize”, Brother L. G. Sargent, Apr. 1963, p. 152 and May 1963, p. 202. *Testimony*: “Into the name . . .” Brother P. Wale, Oct. 1939, p. 413; reprinted Sept. 1994, p. 317.

2. *The True Nature of Baptism*, p. 13. The date of this publication is unknown. Brother Roberts died in 1898 at the age of 59.

word “broken” in 1 Corinthians 11:24 is also suspect. In A.D. 303 the Roman Emperor Diocletian issued an edict against the Christians ordering all their churches to be demolished and their sacred books destroyed; very few books survived. About A.D. 350 the library of Caesarea was restored, and old papyrus books that had survived were replaced with vellum copies. Thus the copyists had opportunity to tamper with the text.

- 4 Other very old manuscripts available, the African Old Latin and the Old Syriac versions, have been damaged; the pages containing Matthew 28 are missing!

### Quotations from very early manuscripts that are no longer available

Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, was born around A.D. 264 and died in 340; he is most famous for his *Ecclesiastical History*. He quotes Matthew 28:19 many times. For instance, in Book III of his *History*, Chapter 5, Section 2, he discusses the dispersion of the early Christians: “. . . went unto all nations to preach the Gospel, relying upon the power of Christ who had said to them, ‘Go ye and make disciples of all the nations in my name’”. Again, in Chapter 16, Section 8: “. . . our Saviour . . . spoke the word to his followers . . . saying to them, ‘Go ye and make disciples of all nations in my name’”.<sup>3</sup>

Eusebius commented more than once on Matthew 28:19, and thus in *Demonstratio Evangelica* (col. 240, p. 136) he wrote: “It was right therefore that he should emphasise the virtue of the power residing in his name . . . and therefore say to his Apostles, ‘Go ye, and make disciples of all the nations in my name’”.

Eusebius himself attended the Council of Nicaea and accepted a garbled form of the doctrine of the Trinity; he would have no reason to omit the reference to “the Father, and . . . the Son and . . . the Holy [Spirit]” if that had been in the text before him. It is evident that the text available to him from codices up to 150 years older than those available now ended Matthew 28:19 with the words “in my name”. It appears that the reference to baptism in our text is also spurious.

So it would appear that, unlike the scribes who made copies of the Old Testament with extreme

care, those making copies of the New Testament were able, with ease, to make alterations according to their own preconceptions; and this fact is readily acknowledged by scholars.<sup>4</sup>

### The evidence of Scripture

Important though the above information is, it will be the sheer weight of evidence found within the pages of Scripture that brethren and sisters will find most impressive. Brother Broughton brings forward a number of tests:

- 1 **Frequency of use:** The phrase, “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy [Spirit]” is exclusive to Matthew 28:19. The phrase “in my name” was used by Jesus frequently; for example: Matthew 18:20; Mark 9:37,39,41; John 14:14,26; 15:16; 16:23.
- 2 **Argument:** Not once in Scripture is any argument based on the threefold name presented. Baptism in the name of Jesus is used as the basis of argument. For example: “was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor. 1:13); “so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death . . . Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death . . .” (Rom. 6:3,4); “as many . . . as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27); “by the name of Jesus Christ . . . doth this man stand here before you whole . . . there is none other name under heaven . . . whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:10-12).
- 3 **The example of the apostles:** There is no record of them baptizing anyone in the threefold name. Baptism was in the name of Jesus. “Repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ” (2:38); “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (8:16; 19:5).
- 4 **The link with the Last Supper:** The Breaking of Bread is for those who have been baptized; it brings to mind the body and blood of Jesus, he in whose name we have been baptized: “this is my body . . . this is my blood . . .” (Mt. 26:26-28); “they that gladly received his word were baptized: and . . . continued steadfastly . . . in breaking of bread” (Acts 2:41, 42).
- 5 **Parallel account:** Matthew’s record (28:19) is in direct speech. Luke’s account is in reported speech; this is how Luke presents it: “thus it behoved Christ to suffer . . . and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name . . .” (24:46,47). This strongly suggests that the actual words of Jesus were,

3. Information taken from the website [www.biblicalunitarian.com/](http://www.biblicalunitarian.com/).

4. Gregory, *Canon and Text of the New Testament*, 1907, p. 424.

“. . . preaching repentance and remission of sins in my name.”

- 6 Principle:** In Colossians 3:17 Paul lays down a general principle: “whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” That comprehensive word “whatsoever” must surely include baptism.

### **Conclusion**

It seems to be very likely that the original text of Matthew 28:19,20 was this: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations in my name, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”