# A SHOCK TO WORLD MISSION

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The discovery of a new manuscript changes our whole understanding of Christian mission.
**Category:** Avril Poisson

Ever since the days of William Carey, the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel has been a rallying call for world evangelism. "Go into all the world and make disciples" has run out from pulpits, conference stages and books on world mission.

There have, of course, been discussions about the exact meanings of some of the elements of the commission. In particular, there has been disagreement about the force of the word *Ï€Î¿Ï ÎµÏ…Î¸Î-Î½Ï„ÎµÏ‚,* which is usually translated "go". The argument revolves around whether the word is an imperative - a command to go, or a participle, which assumes we have gone.

However, these arguments have been completely sidelined by the recent discovery of a very early manuscript which includes the whole text of Matthew 28 and which throws new light on the great commission and on Christian mission on general.

The new (or rather very old) manuscript emerged during excavations at a cave on the shores of the Dead Sea. The very dry conditions have kept the manuscript in remarkably good condition and archaeologists have been able to date it to late in the C1. This quote from Avril Poisson, the Snopes Professor of Manuscriptology at the University of Fautpascroire in Montreal explains its importance.

> *The large fragment from Matthew's Gospel was the most significant of a number of manuscripts unearthed during our research in the Yor K'iddinn cave in the Dead Sea area. The Matthaian manuscript is earlier, and therefore more authentic, than any other text available to us. However, the new text agrees with all of our existing manuscripts, with one important exception. The word Ï€Î¿Ï ÎµÏ…Î¸Î½Ï„ÎµÏ‚, which occurs in most of the existing papyrii is absent and in its place is Î°Î±Î¸Î¯Ï†Î±Ï„Îµ. This word would usually be translated as "stay where you are" or "remain there". This would lead to a contextual translation of this portion of Matthew's Gospel of "stay where you are and make disciples". While this may appear to be a radical change to the text, we do not believe that it will make a significant difference to the behaviour of most Christians.*
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> *Prof. Avril Poisson; interview recorded on April 1 2020 at 23.10*

I think we can all agree that this is an important word for Today.