

# MINISTRY OF DISCIPLESHIP



There are distinct differences between the Rabbinic concept of discipleship and what Jesus introduced.

Differences Between Rabbinic Discipleship and Jesus' Form of Discipleship	
Rabbinic Judaism	Jesus Christ
The disciple chose their own teacher.	Jesus chose His own disciples (John 15:16; Luke 9:57-62). Mark 5:18-19 shows how Jesus even rejected some who wanted to follow Him!
They chose a rabbi based on his knowledge of the Torah because the law was the center of Judaism. A rabbi only had authority based on his knowledge of the Torah; the authority belonged to the Torah, not any individual rabbi.	Jesus expected His disciples to renounce everything, not for the sake of the Torah but for His sake alone (Matthew 10:38). In the New Covenant, Jesus is the central, not the Torah. See Colossians 1:17; John 5:39-40.
In Judaism, being a disciple was only transitional—with the goal of becoming a rabbi.	Jesus discipleship was not a step towards a career; it was in itself the fulfillment of destiny (Romans 8:29-30). It is an ongoing process that continues in this life and beyond (Philippians 3:7-14; 2 Peter 3:18).
Disciples of rabbis were only their students, nothing more.	The disciples of Jesus were also His servants who committed themselves to obeying Him and suffering for His sake (Matthew 16:24-25; John 12:26).
The disciples of rabbis merely passed on their teachings.	The disciples of Jesus were called to be with Him (Mark 3:14) and be His witnesses (Acts 1:8).
The disciples of rabbis were continually attempting to restore the former glory of the nation of Israel.	The disciples of Jesus were and continue to be the precursors of the coming kingdom awaiting the bodily return of Christ.
In rabbinic Judaism, following the letter of the 613 laws and rabbinic interpretations of the Torah was of prime importance.	For Jesus, rules and regulations were not as important as caring for the human soul. See Mark 2:1-12; 3:1-6; Luke 15.
The rabbis stressed separation from non-Jews and those that were unclean.	Jesus taught that loving our neighbors is equal to loving God—irrespective of whether or not a person is a Jew. See Matthew 22:37-40; Luke 10:30-37.



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### THE HELLENISTIC WORLD

- When Jesus arrived on the scene of history it was not only the Jewish world he encountered but the Hellenistic philosophies that infused the present culture, including the Roman Empire.
- Mathētēs in Ancient Greece
- The term mathētēs appears for the first time in the writings of Herodotus in the fifth century before Jesus.
- After Herodotus, mathētēs appears frequently in Greek literature.



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### THE HELLENISTIC WORLD

- Depending upon its context, the term had a field of meaning in classical Greek literature, which ranged from the following:
  - a. Learner/Apprentice – one who acquires a knowledge or skill from an expert.
  - b. Pupil/Student – one committed to learning from a prominent teacher or academic setting.
  - c. Disciple/Adherent – a person who makes a significant, personal, life commitment to a great master, or to a particular culture.



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### JESUS AND DISCIPLESHIP

- Discipleship was not simply a program through which Jesus ran the disciples. Discipleship was life. That life began in relationship with the Master and moved into all areas of life.
- It wasn't just development of the religious or spiritual dimension, discipleship was directed toward the whole person.



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# JESUS AND DISCIPLESHIP

## Spheres of Discipleship

The Twelve (cf. Lk 6:13, 17) (cf. Jn 6:66; Lk 9:59-62; 23:49,55)

- The Twelve are an example of how Jesus deals with all believers and an example of how Jesus trained those who were to be leaders of the movement after his ascension.

The Seventy (Lk 10:1-20)

- We can see here that individuals other than the Twelve are involved in the missionary enterprise. We will see later that the missionary activity of the church in Acts is not restricted to the Twelve.



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### JESUS AND DISCIPLESHIP

The Women who followed Jesus (Lk 8:1-3; cf. Lk 23:49,55; 24:9)

- While Jewish parallels can be found for women supporting rabbis and their disciples out of their own money, property, or foodstuffs, they were not considered disciples of the rabbis.
- The wording in this passage indicates that these women were themselves disciples of Jesus.
- These women were called to a ministry that meant traveling with Jesus and the Twelve in order to provide material support for the group.



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### JESUS AND DISCIPLESHIP

The Women who followed Jesus (Lk 8:1-3; cf. Lk 23:49,55; 24:9)

- Some of this same group of women "followed Jesus" up to Jerusalem, where they were in attendance for the crucifixion and were the first ones to the empty tomb after the resurrection (Lk 23:49,55; 24:9).
- They are with the apostolic band to bear witness and to minister as well.





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# JESUS AND DISCIPLESHIP

## The Wider group of disciples (Lk 14:27)

- While following Jesus around physically was intended only for the Twelve and some of the broader group of disciples, figurative following was required for all.
- The pattern is set in Jesus' declaration to the crowds, “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple” (Lk 14:27).
- Jesus did not expect the crowds to go find a literal cross. The figurative cross stood for dying to their own will and taking up the will of the Father as found in discipleship to Jesus.



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# JESUS AND THE PROGRESSION OF DISCIPLESHIP

## Phase One

- We can see evidence of the first phase when the Jesus movement was characterized by people who took a personal initiative to follow Jesus.
- That initiative was motivated by various levels of understanding John the Baptist's and Jesus' message of the gospel.
- They saw something significant in Jesus (Jn 1:35-42) — they saw some form of Messianic identity in Jesus.



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# JESUS AND THE PROGRESSION OF DISCIPLESHIP

## Phase One

- They exercise some form of “belief”— Cf. Jesus' disciples in John 2:2; 11 with the people in John 2:23-25.
- Process of curiosity, questioning and commitment — see Nicodemus in John 3:22-26; 4:1-2; 7:50-52; 19:38-42. Compare him with the rich young ruler who turned away (Lk 18:18-27).



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# JESUS AND THE PROGRESSION OF DISCIPLESHIP

## Phase Two

- This involved a 'call' from Jesus. It established the plumb-line for Jesus' form of discipleship (see Mt 4:18-22/ Mk 1:16-20).
- The call focused people on making a commitment to Jesus, summoning them to place their unreserved faith in him as the One coming with the proclamation of the kingdom.
- The call at this stage meant commitment to Jesus personally.
- It also included some sense of joining with Jesus in his announcement that the kingdom of God had arrived.



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# JESUS AND THE PROGRESSION OF DISCIPLESHIP

## Phase Two

- The pattern of the calling is clear (see Mt 4:18-22/ Mk 1:16-20):
  - a. While going about the countryside Jesus sees (i.e. selects, chooses) the ones He would call;
  - b. He summons them; and
  - c. At once those who respond rightly “follow Him.”
- Up to this point, people came to Jesus at will. But now Jesus extends a gracious, enabling call.
- This kind of calling was not to be found among other master-disciple relationships of the first century.



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# JESUS AND THE PROGRESSION OF DISCIPLESHIP

## Phase Two

- Unlike some within Judaism, Jesus broke through the barriers which separated the clean and unclean, the obedient and sinful.
- He summoned the fisherman as well as the tax-collector and Zealot.
- A decisive factor is that Jesus called to himself those who, in the eyes of the religious leaders of the time, did not seem to enjoy the necessary qualifications for fellowship with him (cf. Mt 9:9-13; Mk 2:13-17).



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# JESUS AND THE PROGRESSION OF DISCIPLESHIP

## Phase Three

- Now comes the need to sift those who say they are His followers.
- Those following Jesus has grown rapidly. In the early stages of His ministry a great company of disciples attached themselves to Jesus (Luke 6:17; 10:1; John 6:60).
- Jesus' call clarified His purposes for His earthly ministry and His expectations for His followers, but many people continued to misunderstand Him.



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## Phase Three

- Among those who followed Jesus were the “crowds” and the disciples.” At this point Jesus separates these two groups.
- Jesus teaches the crowds” in parables, then gives explanation to the disciples” in His teaching (Mt 13:10-17).
- The purpose/result is to have people clearly revealed who are either with Jesus as His disciples, or else are against Him. There is no middle ground





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# JESUS AND THE PROGRESSION OF DISCIPLESHIP

## Phase Four

- This phase encompasses the final weeks of Jesus' earthly ministry with his disciples.
- Now we find that the number of those around Him became fewer and fewer as Jesus traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem for His encounter with the cross.
- This decrease in number corresponds with an increasing clarification of his earthly ministry.
- Jesus had not come to overthrow the Roman empire and He had not come to establish an earthly kingdom. He had come to proclaim the good news of spiritual salvation; He had come for the purpose of going to the cross.



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# JESUS AND THE PROGRESSION OF DISCIPLESHIP

## Phase Five

- This is represented by the birth of the church and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
- In Acts, the multitude of “believers” (Acts 4:32) is a synonymous expression for the multitude of “disciples” (mathētai) (Acts 6:2)



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### Implications

- Jesus called those who would be His followers. It was a voluntary commitment with others.
- Jesus broke down divisions of status, religiosity, gender, and nationalism.
- Jesus prepared a group of leaders who were to go out with the call to all peoples.
- Jesus' disciples were not bound to follow the traditional expectations of other masters, yet traditions were helpful when practiced appropriately. When tradition becomes binding law, it becomes inappropriate.



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### Implications

- The disciple of Jesus is always a disciple of Jesus first and foremost. We never become greater than the master.
- Jesus binds His disciples exclusively to Himself.
- On the surface Jesus' disciples appeared to be similar to other forms of Jewish disciples. Some of Jesus' own disciples quite likely followed Him in a mistaken fashion, expecting Jesus to be like other revolutionary leaders and their disciples (e.g., Jn 6:60-66).