

Following the Lamb

The Theme of Discipleship in the Book of Revelation

KEITH T. MARRINER

Foreword by David R. Beck

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FOLLOWING THE LAMB

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For my wife and daughters

Contents

List of Tables | viii

Foreword by David R. Beck | ix

Acknowledgments | xi

Abbreviations | xiii

1 Introduction | 1

2 Discipleship in the Ancient World | 17

3 Literature on Discipleship in the Gospel of John | 47

4 Discipleship in the Book of Revelation | 78

5 Conclusion | 222

Bibliography | 239

Author Index | 253

Scripture Index | 257

2

Discipleship in the Ancient World

INTRODUCTION

The theme of discipleship has received little attention when considering the NT as a whole. All of the major works on the subject have been written since 1950. From the late 1960s to the present day, scholarly attention on discipleship shifted to the individual authors of the NT. This shift began with the Synoptic Gospels, and studies have continued to be focused largely on the Gospels and Acts.¹ The following survey addresses the topic of discipleship in the ancient world, including the NT (apart from the Gospel of John and Revelation).² The chapter charts the following order: (1) the historical background to NT discipleship, (2) the OT background to NT discipleship, and (3) the general characteristics of NT discipleship. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question, “What forms of discipleship existed in the ancient world?”

1. Few studies have been undertaken on discipleship outside of the Gospels and Acts. Some of these can be found in Segovia, *Discipleship* and Longenecker, *Patterns of Discipleship*.

2. Johannine discipleship will be considered in chapter 3, per the outline provided at the conclusion of chapter 1. The pertinent literature on the theme of discipleship in the book of Revelation has already been reviewed in the introductory section of chapter 1. Chapter 4 is an analysis of the theme of discipleship in Revelation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO NEW TESTAMENT DISCIPLESHIP

This section is separated into two distinct units. The first section addresses the use of discipleship in the ancient Greco-Roman world largely through the use of its terminology, beginning with the term *μαθητής* (“disciple”). Finally, discipleship in Judaism is explored through its terminology, as well as certain relationships in the world of Judaism.

The Concept of Discipleship in the Greco-Roman World

The earliest use of *μαθητής* in the context of one who seeks to learn something is found in the work of the historian Herodotus.³ The usage of the term *μαθητής* (“disciple”) early on referred to someone who was an “apprentice” or “learner.”⁴ Eventually the term “disciple” came to be used as something of a technical term with reference to the “‘institutional pupil’ of the Sophists.”⁵ It would later be used in a “technical sense to refer to an ‘adherent’ of a great teacher, teaching, or master.”⁶ For there to be a “disciple” there must also be a “teacher” (*διδάσκαλος*).⁷

There were several master-disciple relationships in antiquity. One of some significance was the disciples of the Sophists. The Sophists’ academic relationship raised the ire of Socrates and those who followed him (Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle).⁸ Rengstorf notes the difference between the Sophists and Socrates in this type of relationship. While the Sophists’ relationship with their “pupils” was more or less based on a transaction, Socrates charged no fee for his services, but instead invited his students to

3. Herodotus *Histories* 4.77.1. Cf. Rengstorf, “*μαθητής*,” 416.

4. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 72. Cf. Rengstorf, “*μαθητής*,” 416. Plato uses the term in this way with reference to one learning to play the flute (*Meno* 90.E). Physicians are also referred to as an “apprentice” (Plato *Republic* X.599.c).

5. Wilkins, *Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel*, 41. Plato speaks of a disciple of Protagoras who “is taking the course professionally with a view to becoming a sophist” (*Protagoras* 315.A).

6. Wilkins, *Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel*, 41. For instance, Euripides was highly esteemed because he was a disciple of Anaxagoras (Diodorus Siculus *Library of History* 1.7.7; 1.38.4).

7. Rengstorf, “*μαθητής*,” 416. So also Wilkins, *Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel*, 41; Longenecker, “Introduction,” 2–3. See also “*μαθητής*,” BDAG, 609.

8. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 74.

enter into a relationship with him.⁹ Socrates's relationship with his students was more of a mutual exploration of the truth, as opposed to Sophists, who were more formal educators.¹⁰ This may have been why Socrates so infrequently referred to his students as μαθηταί or to himself as a διδάσκαλος.¹¹

An additional form of the master-disciple relationship was the one found in the mystery religions. Here the disciple seeks to become a member of the society that has formed itself around a particular god. The master is necessary for this. The disciple follows the master until the goal of initiation has been achieved. Like the Sophists, this was an impersonal relationship.¹²

The death of one's teacher did not appear to completely sever the master-disciple relationship. After the death of their teacher the disciples continued to extol their teaching. In some cases the death of the teacher served to strengthen the resolve of the disciples to propagate their instruction. This desire to see their master's teaching live on led to the formation of communities of disciples for that expressed purpose.¹³

By the time of the late Hellenistic period, μαθητής continued to be used with reference to "learners" and "adherents." By the third century AD the term was used almost exclusively to refer to an "adherent" of a great teacher, one to whose teaching, and also to whose conduct, the disciple sought to adhere.¹⁴ The focus of the term on an "adherent" would make

9. Rengstorf, "μαθητής," 420.

10. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 74.

11. Plato strongly opposed being grouped with the Sophists. For instance in *Apology* 33.A–33.B he stated, "But you will find that through all my life, both in public, if I engaged in any public activity, and in private, I have always been the same as now, and have never yielded to any one wrongly, whether it were any other person or any of those who are said by my traducers to be my pupils. But I was never any one's teacher. If any one, whether young or old, wishes to hear me speaking and pursuing my mission, I have never objected, nor do I converse only when I am paid and not otherwise, but I offer myself alike to rich and poor; I ask questions, and whoever wishes may answer and hear what I say." Cf. Rengstorf, "μαθητής," 418. Although Socrates and Plato rarely used the term μαθητής, they did use it when there was no danger of misinterpreting it with the Sophists' usage (Wilkins, *Disciple in Matthew's Gospel*, 42). For instance, Socrates used μαθητής with reference to "learners" (Plato *Republic* X.618.c), "disciples" (Plato *Symposium* 197.A), and "pupils" (Plato *Cratylus* 428.B).

12. Rengstorf, "μαθητής," 421.

13. *Ibid.*, 423–424.

14. See Dio Chrysostom *Homer* 11.7.

an easy transition into the early church, where the focus was on being an “adherent” to a great master, namely, Christ.¹⁵

In addition to *μαθητής*, the verb *μανθάνω* is used in educational context, which included master-disciple relationships.¹⁶ A student is one who learns, which is the common usage of the term *μανθάνω* (“I learn”).¹⁷ It is used with reference to the acquisition of knowledge, whether through the medium of teaching or an experience.¹⁸ This knowledge may be “theoretical knowledge,” that is, that which is unknown and speculative in nature.¹⁹ The term was used in this way from the time of Socrates moving forward.²⁰

Another term the Greeks used that carried religious or philosophical connotations, although with far less frequency than *μαθητής*, was *ἀκολουθέω* (“I follow”). The term may be used in either a literal or a figurative fashion, the latter referring to one who follows a teacher as a disciple.²¹ In religious and philosophical use it may be used with God as the object one follows. The term more commonly used in antiquity is *ἕπω* (*hepō*), which is not found in the NT. In rare instances it means something akin to “becoming like God by acting as He does.”²² This comports with the Stoics’ usage of the term, which suggested that one’s goal for following a deity was to be incorporated into it.²³

One additional term that could be used with reference to discipleship was *μιμέομαι*. The term is usually translated something like “imitate, emulate, follow.”²⁴ When used, its context was the arts, education, and the

15. Wilkins, *Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel*, 42.

16. In Plato *Euthydemus* 276.A one finds a close association between the terms *μαθητής* and *μανθάνω*. “Then Euthydemus asked: And are there persons whom you call teachers, or not? He agreed that there were. And the teachers of the learners [*μανθανόντων*] are teachers in the same way as your lute-master and your writing-master, I suppose, were teachers of you and the other boys, while you were pupils [*μαθηταί*]? He assented. Now, of course, when you were learning [*ἐμανθάνετε*], you did not yet know the things you were learning [*ἐμανθάνετε*].”

17. “*μανθάνω*,” BDAG, 615.

18. Müller, “*μαθητής*,” 483.

19. Ibid.

20. Rengstorf, “*μαθητής*,” 396.

21. See “*ἀκολουθέω*,” BDAG, 36–37.

22. Kittel, “*ἀκολουθέω*,” 210. One is able to become like God because all human beings come from him and “by means of reason conjoined with him” (Epictetus *Discourses* 1.9).

23. Blending, “*ἀκολουθέω*,” 481.

24. “*μιμέομαι*,” BDAG, 651.

family.²⁵ The term is often used in a negative sense in Greek usage, although not always. When it was used in a negative sense, the word referred “to quasi-dramatic ‘aping’ or [a] feeble copying with lack of originality.”²⁶ It was also used with reference to Platonic cosmology.²⁷ In this instance, the visible world was viewed as the copy (μίμησις) of the “invisible archetype in the higher world.”²⁸ Those philosophers who would give themselves to think of this ideal, higher world were said “to imitate God.” The aim of the person in this case was to move “toward unity” with God.²⁹ Eventually the idea of imitating God would cross over into the ethical arena.³⁰

Whether the term “imitate” was actually used, the idea was reflected in the Greco-Roman culture. Students were encouraged to choose a teacher whose life they could see and imitate.³¹ For instance the Roman philosopher, Seneca, offers these words of advice to a potential disciple: “Choose a master whose life, conversation, and soul-expressing face have satisfied you; picture him always to yourself as your protector and pattern. For we must indeed have someone according to whom we may regulate our character.”³² What Seneca expressed was the relational element of the discipleship relationship. The depth of the relationship was to be characterized by intimacy. Rengstorf recognizes this development in the Greco-Roman discipleship culture:

The significant thing here is the way in which μαθητής is expounded in terms of μιμεῖσθαι. The center of gravity of μαθητὴν εἶναι is thus removed from the formal side of the relation between μαθητής and διδάσκαλος to the inner fellowship between the two and its practical effects, and this to such a degree that the latter is basic to the whole relationship. This is not without considerable

25. Michaelis, “μιμέομαι, μιμητής, κτλ.,” 660–661. Euripedes speaks of the good in children imitating just parents (*Helen* 940). Xenophon speaks of how teachers attempt to make their students “copy” (imitate) their example (*Memorabilia* I.6.3).

26. Bauder, “μιμέομαι,” 490.

27. *Ibid.*, 491.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Morrison, *Mimetic Tradition*, 28–29.

30. Michaelis, “μιμέομαι, μιμητής, κτλ.,” 662; Bauder, “μιμέομαι,” 491. Plato states that to become like God is to take on his character, which he identifies as “righteous and holy and wise” (*Theaetetus* 176.B).

31. Calenberg, “New Testament Doctrine of Discipleship,” 26–27.

32. Seneca *Epistles* 11.9–10.

significance in relation to the development of the Christian use of μαθητής.³³

Summary

The concept of discipleship in the Greco-Roman world is seen through the usage of its relevant terminology. The term μαθητής, which basically meant “learner,” began to be used as a technical term for one who learned from a great master or teacher. What was actually learned (μανθάνω) varied depending on the teacher. The relationships that developed were initially more formal in nature, although in time became more informal, so that the student shared in the life of the master. In some cases, the passing of a great master meant the preservation and continuation of his teaching. Those who continued to study and appropriate his instruction would be considered his disciples. The idea of following (ἀκολουθέω, ἔπω) a teacher also figures prominently in Greek thought. The idea was that one not only literally followed one’s teacher, but also figuratively followed his teaching and way of life (μιμέομαι).

The Concept of Discipleship in Judaism

What terminology existed that described the concept of discipleship in Judaism?³⁴ One term that proves prominent in this discussion is תלמיד (talmidh). This term is similar to the Greek term μαθητής.³⁵ Rengstorf states, תלמיד “is used exclusively for the one who gives himself (as a learner) to Scripture and to the religious tradition of Judaism.”³⁶ The role of teacher and learner was reserved only for men.³⁷ This learner was not alone in his quest for knowledge of the scriptures. He was to attach himself to a great teacher who determined what was to be learned.³⁸ One must have a rabbi

33. Rengstorf, “μαθητής,” 417.

34. The emphasis here is on the time often referred to as second temple Judaism, although some mention is made to the Intertestamental Period.

35. Wilkins notes that both “μαθητής and תלמיד appear to be equivalent terms” (*Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel*, 125). Cf. Rengstorf, “μαθητής,” 442.

36. Rengstorf, “μαθητής,” 431–432.

37. Ibid., 4.433.

38. Müller, “μαθητής,” 485.

(i.e., teacher) if one was to be a תלמיד (i.e., student).³⁹ The student learned from his teacher by listening to his instruction and “appropriating what [was] heard.”⁴⁰ The student would actually attach himself to a teacher and follow him “everywhere” he went, “learning from him and above all serving him.”⁴¹ The method of instruction was lecture with the opportunity for questioning that led to open discussion, which included other students.⁴² The goal of the student was to become a teacher himself, so that he might garner the authority to teach his own students.⁴³ It was not until its use in the rabbinic literature that תלמיד began to take on the special meaning of one who studied Torah, both the written and the oral Torah. The oral and written Torah was the vehicle through which one followed the Lord.⁴⁴ This led to the view that Moses was the “absolute teacher.”⁴⁵

Eventually schools formed around a rabbi. The two great rabbinical schools were Hillel and Shammai. Hillel’s school had the greater impact of the two in terms of adherents and influence. The student followed the rabbi so closely that he would become a “representative of the tradition established by the rabbi.”⁴⁶ This was true of disciples who studied *with* a particular rabbi and of those who studied *under the tradition* of a particular rabbi. Thus, one could study the tradition of a deceased rabbi under the instruction of a living rabbi and still be called a disciple of the deceased rabbi.⁴⁷ Rengstorf believes this pattern owes its genesis to Greek influences, rather than the OT, and provides several lines of evidence in its defense.⁴⁸ For instance, he notes their “lionizing of Moses,” as well as the student-teacher relationship, which he believes was devoid in the OT.⁴⁹ He concludes “the

39. Rengstorf, “μαθητής,” 434–435.

40. Ibid., 435.

41. Blendinger, “ἀκολουθέω,” 481.

42. Ibid.

43. Müller, “μαθητής,” 486.

44. Wilkins, *Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel*, 125.

45. Rengstorf, “μαθητής,” 437. Cf. Seift, *Education in Ancient Israel*, 100–101.

46. Rengstorf, “μαθητής,” 436.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., 438–439.

49. Ibid., 438. Wilkins outright opposes Rengstorf on this latter point (*Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel*, 218). With regard to the “lionizing of Moses” see, Sir 45:1. With regard to the student-teacher relationship, in particular, the custom of some rabbis to take fees, see Strack and Billerbeck, *Talmud and Midrash*, I.863.

[תַּמְלִיךְ] as such came into Judaism from the educative process of the Greek and Hellenistic philosophical schools.”⁵⁰

While one might choose to follow a rabbi, one typically did not speak of following (ἀκολουθέω) God, since he could not be seen. Rather, one could and should “follow the qualities of God,” that is, live consistent to his revealed character and actions.⁵¹ The rabbis believed this was possible by imitating (μιμέομαι) God “in the sense of developing the image of God” in people.⁵² This went a step further in the Pseudepigrapha that encouraged people to not only imitate God, but also to imitate persons of “outstanding character.”⁵³ Philo also spoke of imitating righteous persons, either living or dead. He also called for the imitation of God, but tempered this, noting this exercise had its limitations. The thought of imitating God is altogether absent in the writings of Josephus.⁵⁴

50. Rengstorf, “μαθητής,” 439.

51. Kittel, “ἀκολουθέω,” 212. As God is gracious and merciful, so also should be his people Israel. This comes through imitating God’s character (*Mek. Ex. 15:2*). See also *Sotah*, 14a which, states, “What means the text: Ye shall walk after the Lord your God? Is it, then, possible for a human being to walk after the *Shechinah*; for has it not been said: For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire? But [the meaning is] to walk after the *attributes of the Holy One*, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked, for it is written: And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them, so do thou also clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written: And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre, so do thou also visit the sick. The Holy One, blessed be He, comforted mourners, for it is written: And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son, so do thou also comfort mourners. The Holy one, blessed be He, buried the dead, for it is written: And He buried him in the valley, so do thou also bury the dead” (emphasis added).

However, some aspects of God’s character were not to be imitated, including jealousy and anger (Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 211–212).

52. Bauder, “μιμέομαι,” 491.

53. Ibid. Cf. Michaelis, “μιμέομαι, μιμητής, κτλ.,” 664. For example see 4 Macc 9:23, “‘Imitate me, brothers,’ he said. ‘Do not leave your post in my struggle or renounce our courageous family ties.’” The idea of imitation occurs in other pseudepigraphical works. With regard to the imitation of good men, see *T. Benj.* 3:1; 4:1. With regard to the imitation of God see *T. Ash.* 4:3–4. The concept of imitation may also be found in the Jewish apocryphal work 2 Macc 6:27–28, “‘Therefore, by bravely giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws.’ When he had said this, he went at once to the rack.”

54. Michaelis, “μιμέομαι, μιμητής, κτλ.,” 665–666. Philo refers to the imitation of physicians (*Sacrifices* 123), or Moses (*Moses* 158), and of fathers (*Sacrifices* 68).

Summary

During the time of second temple Judaism rabbinical schools began to be developed. These were at first more informal, but eventually took a more recognized shape around the two great rabbinical schools of Hillel and Shammai. These schools were led by men who taught male students the Torah, both the oral and written Torah. A Rabbi did not so much gather disciples, as did disciples flock to them. A student chose his master. The rabbi taught his students not only by the words he spoke, but also by his example. The goal for the student was to become a master of the Torah, so that one could then teach one's own disciples. Although certainty is not possible, it is believed that the Greek model of discipleship played an influential role in the development of the concept of discipleship in Judaism.

While one might choose to follow a great teacher, one did not typically speak of following God, since unlike the teacher, he did not possess a physical body, and thus, could not be seen. However, in time, some of the religious writings of Judaism began to incorporate some aspect of people imitating God. The purpose was generally to aid in the development of the *imago Dei* in the individual.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND TO NEW TESTAMENT DISCIPLESHIP

This section concerns the possible OT historical background to NT discipleship. To do so, this section covers terminology usually associated with discipleship in the OT and with OT examples that appear to inform the later NT concept of discipleship.

Relevant Discipleship Terminology in the Old Testament

The apparent paucity of linguistic evidence for discipleship in the OT has led some scholars to conclude, chiefly Rengstorf, that it is completely absent in the OT.⁵⁵ Rengstorf notes that the term *μαθητής* does not appear in the

55. "If the term is missing, so, too, is that which it serves to denote. Apart from the formal relation of teacher and pupil, the OT, unlike the classical Greek world and Hellenism, has no master-disciple relation. Whether among the prophets or the scribes we seek in vain for anything corresponding to it" (Rengstorf, "*μαθητής*," 427. Cf. Müller, "*μαθητής*," 485; Jenni, "*למד*," 648).

“established LXX tradition.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, the term’s Hebrew equivalent, תַּלְמִיד, occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible (1 Chr 25:8). Rengstorf believes the reason for the disuse of such terms is in part a matter of the Old Testament’s emphasis on the community, rather than the individual.⁵⁷

Wilkins counters this conclusion, noting the master-disciple relationship is evidenced in the few uses of the OT terms תַּלְמִיד and לָמַד (*lammûdh*).⁵⁸ תַּלְמִיד is used of a pupil,⁵⁹ and of the disciple of a rabbi in rabbinical times.⁶⁰ לָמַד (*lāmad*, “to learn”) carries the “idea of training as well as educating” (Hos 10:1; Deut 5:1; 2 Chr 17:7, 9).⁶¹ It is used with reference to observing the law, as well as for training animals (Hos 10:1; Judg 3:31) and military personnel (1 Chr 5:18; Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3), and “teaching and rehearsing songs” (Ps 60).⁶² לָמַד is a term that may be used of disciples of the Lord or of a human master.⁶³ Concerning the usage of both תַּלְמִיד and לָמַד Wilkins concludes, “Although the occurrences of these terms are scarce, they indicate that established master-disciple relationships are at least to be found among the musicians and writing prophets. The casual way in which the terms are used indicate an even broader usage behind these examples.”⁶⁴

Of particular interest is the occurrence of לְמוּדִים (*lammûdim*) in Isa 8:16, “Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among *my disciples*” (emphasis added). Israel W. Slotki believes the לְמוּדִים are disciples of Isaiah who were instructed by him in the Torah.⁶⁵ Edward Young notes that the disciples in question are first and foremost God’s disciples and Isaiah’s in a secondary sense.⁶⁶ However, God uses means, Isaiah in this case, to medi-

56. Rengstorf, “μαθητής,” 426.

57. Ibid., 427.

58. Wilkins, *Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel*, 89–90. Calenberg adds that Rengstorf fails to acknowledge the usage of לָמַד, which would appear to “negate his conclusions” (“New Testament Doctrine of Discipleship,” 42).

59. Merrill believes the proper translation of תַּלְמִיד in 1 Chr 25:8 is “pupil” based on its occurrence with מֵבֵן (*mēbîn*, “teacher”), and its Aramaic cognate תַּלְמִידָא (*talmida*) (“למד,” 803).

60. Kaiser, “לָמַד,” 480.

61. Ibid.

62. Jenni, “למד,” 646–647.

63. Wilkins, *Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel*, 89–90.

64. Ibid., 90.

65. Slotki, *Isaiah*, 41.

66. Kapelrud notes that the OT describes God as “the ultimate teacher” (לָמַד, 9). Cf. Merrill, “למד,” 2.802. See also 2 Sam 22:35; Job 21:22; and Jer 32:33.

ate his message and to teach it to his disciples. He concludes that one may, therefore, refer to them as disciples of Isaiah.⁶⁷

An additional term that seems to be related to the concept of discipleship is הָלַךְ (*hālakḥ*), which occurs 1,547 times in the Hebrew OT.⁶⁸ The term is used either literally or figuratively. When used literally it expresses “the capacity for self-locomotion” (Gen 12:4; 13:5; 14:24; 33:12; Exod 14:29; Josh 14:10; 24:3; Judg 11:16, 18).⁶⁹ It may also be used metaphorically as a reference to one’s life journey (Josh 8:35; 1 Sam 12:2),⁷⁰ the end of one’s journey, meaning death (Gen 15:2; Josh 23:14),⁷¹ or even following after a teacher. It is also used figuratively with relation to one’s covenant relationship with God (Deut 26:17; 28:9; Josh 22:5).⁷² Often, apostasy is referred to as going after or following false gods (Exod 32:1; Jer 5:23).⁷³ This usage is far more frequent than the handful of references to following God in covenant faithfulness. Sauer conjectures that “pagan cultic processions” may have been the reason for the largely one-sided usage of the expression.⁷⁴

Summary

While linguistic evidence for the concept of discipleship is limited in the OT, it is not entirely absent. When it does occur, it appears to be used in a master-disciple relationship. Teaching the Torah and training persons to follow God’s instructions were certainly important concepts in the OT, and these come through in the case of לָמַד. In addition, there appears to be sufficient evidence to conclude that Isa 8:16, a key text when determining the validity of discipleship in the OT, does in fact refer to the prophet Isaiah having a number of disciples. However, it must be recognized that these disciples are his only in a secondary sense, for the Lord God is one’s teacher first and foremost.

67. Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 314. On the teaching function of prophets see Seift, *Education in Ancient Israel*, 37.

68. Sauer, “הָלַךְ,” 366.

69. Ibid., 367. Cf. Helfmeyer, “הָלַךְ,” 390–391; Coppes, “הָלַךְ,” 216.

70. Helfmeyer, “הָלַךְ,” 391–392.

71. Sauer, “הָלַךְ,” 368.

72. Merrill, “הָלַךְ,” 1033.

73. Sauer, “הָלַךְ,” 369; Helfmeyer, “הָלַךְ,” 395; Coppes, “הָלַךְ,” 216.

74. Sauer, “הָלַךְ,” 369.

Old Testament Examples of Discipleship

Were there any examples of the kind of relationship that might be identified with discipleship in the OT besides the one mentioned in Isa. 8:16? According to Rengstorf the answer must certainly be no. He notes that the relationship between Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, the prophets and their attendants, and Jeremiah and Baruch were not teacher-disciple relationships as is sometimes thought. Rather, Joshua, Elisha, Baruch, and others who followed the prophets were “servants” of those with whom they had a relationship.⁷⁵ In the end, Rengstorf reasons that the teacher-disciple relationship was absent in the OT because there was only one who was to be revered and whose word was to be followed, the Lord himself. The prophets spoke on God’s behalf. Those to whom they spoke were God’s people. God’s word was not bound to only one prophet; rather, it was “continuous and dynamic.”⁷⁶ Thus, there was no room for the kind of teacher-disciple relationship found among the Greeks, in which the human master’s words were venerated, preserved, and transmitted to the next generation.⁷⁷

On the other hand, there are those who argue contrary to Rengstorf’s conclusion regarding the presence of examples of discipleship in the OT. Martin Hengel was one of the first to affirm the existence of discipleship relationships in the OT. Hengel notes how Josephus describes Elisha as a disciple of Elijah.⁷⁸ Josephus actually used the Greek word *μαθητής*.⁷⁹ In addition, Hengel sees the Elisha/Elijah call narrative as a clear analogy to Jesus’ own calling of his disciples.⁸⁰ He further notes that Elijah and Elisha “are frequently used among the rabbis to exemplify the teacher-pupil relationship.”⁸¹

Following Hengel is Richard Calenberg, who believed there were several OT pairs that provided evidence of a pattern of discipleship akin to the

75. Rengstorf, “*μαθητής*,” 427–430.

76. Ibid., 431.

77. Ibid.

78. Martin Hengel, *Nachfolge und Charisma*. English translation: *Charismatic Leader*, 16. All references are to the English translation.

79. Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 8.354, “he [Elisha] parted from them [his parents] and then went with the prophet [Elijah]; and so long as Elijah was alive he [Elisha] was his *disciple* and attendant” (emphasis added). The occurrence of *μαθητής* is absent in the LXX of 1 Kgs 19:21.

80. Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 16–17.

81. Ibid., 17.

Greeks and the rabbinical schools of Judaism.⁸² In particular, he viewed the relationship between Elisha and Elijah as the definite master-disciple model in the OT.⁸³ This is due in part to the language used to describe Elisha following after Elijah. The Hebrew phrase includes the verb *הלך*, which may be used with reference to following after a teacher (cf. 1 Kgs 19:21).⁸⁴ Michael Wilkins comes to similar conclusions, noting the OT possesses examples of master-disciple relationships among the prophets (e.g., Samuel and Elisha), the scribal guild, and in the wisdom tradition.⁸⁵ His conclusion provides a corrective to Rengstorf, who believes the exclusion or limited occurrences of “disciple” terminology means the concept of discipleship did not exist in the OT.⁸⁶

Summary

As noted in the previous section, there is one ultimate teacher in Israel, and all are his disciples. That being said, there does appear to be strong evidence for the existence of disciple-teacher relationships of a secondary nature in the OT. The God of Israel used human means to instruct and lead his people. He called and commissioned men to lead the nation (i.e., Moses) and to speak his word to them (i.e., Elijah). In order to perpetuate the continuation of these ministries, it was necessary to enlist others and prepare them to carry on the work in the absence of the current leader. Discipleship was the process by which this reality was realized.

82. Calenberg, “New Testament Doctrine of Discipleship,” 51–63.

83. Ibid., 60.

84. Ibid., 50. Cf. Sauer, “הלך,” 368, 370.

85. Wilkins, *Disciple in Matthew's Gospel*, 90–91.

86. Ibid., 218. Elsewhere Wilkins highlights the Old Testament's understanding of discipleship as the basis of discipleship in the NT: “the one master-disciple relationship that is analogous to the Old Testament's is the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The God of the Old Testament who calls his people to a covenantal relationship is the same God of the New Testament who, in Jesus, calls his people to the new covenantal relationship” (*Following the Master*, 54).

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW TESTAMENT DISCIPLESHIP

This section begins with a summary of discipleship terminology used throughout the NT, with specific emphasis on the Synoptic Gospels and the Epistles. This is followed by a look at Jesus' distinct form of discipleship, and closes with the apparent emphases on discipleship as articulated in the Epistles.

Relevant Discipleship Terminology in the New Testament

There are several key terms used in the NT that relate to the concept of discipleship. This section reviews several of the most prominent, beginning with “disciple” (μαθητής).

Μαθητής (“Disciple”)

Richard Longenecker notes that although believers are occasionally referred to as people of “the Way” and “Christians,” the most common designation for followers of Christ in the Gospels and Acts is “disciple” (μαθητής).⁸⁷ Μαθητής occurs at least 250 times and only in the Gospels and Acts.⁸⁸ Apart from a few exceptions, a μαθητής is one who is a disciple of Jesus.⁸⁹ According to Rengstorf, when it does occur, the term refers to “the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the one described as μαθητής.”⁹⁰ Wilkins adds, “a ‘disciple’ of Jesus . . . was one who adhered to his master, and the type of adherence was determined by the master himself.”⁹¹ In the book of Acts, the term is used “to designate the person who has placed faith in Jesus Christ.”⁹² The term “disciple” becomes synonymous with one who is a genuine believer in Jesus Christ.⁹³

87. Longenecker, “Introduction,” 2.

88. Rengstorf numbers its occurrence at 250 times (“μαθητής,” 441), while Müller has its occurrence at 264 times (“μαθητής,” 484).

89. Rengstorf, “μαθητής,” 442, 457. Cf. Müller, “μαθητής,” 486. The few exceptions include references to disciples of John the Baptizer, Moses, and the Pharisees.

90. Rengstorf, “μαθητής,” 441.

91. Wilkins, *Disciple in Matthew's Gospel*, 42.

92. Wilkins, “Disciples,” 181. Cf. Freyne, *Twelve*, 217.

93. Wilkins, “Disciples,” 181.

It is not always easy to distinguish who the disciples are in the Gospel accounts. For instance, at times, in the Gospels, large crowds (λαός, ὄχλος) followed Jesus. He even taught these groups. Were they disciples, or is it best to categorize them in some other way? Wilkins notes some of the distinct groups of persons who followed Jesus, beginning with the disciples and the crowds. The difference between the disciples and the crowd was their respective responses to Jesus and his call. Those who were genuine disciples of Jesus exhibited “the twin prerequisites of discipleship: paying the cost and committing themselves to the cause.”⁹⁴

Another necessary distinction is between “the Twelve” (ὁ δώδεκα) and other “disciples.” “The Twelve” were typically mentioned as a group, and only rarely were individual members mentioned.⁹⁵ While some of the Gospel writers essentially view the two groups as synonymous for literary and theological reasons (i.e. Matthew and Mark), it would appear that Jesus called out “the Twelve” specifically from among a larger number of “disciples” (cf. Luke 6:13, 17).⁹⁶ “The Twelve” are presented as the “nucleus of the community of Jesus” and as the guardians of Jesus’ message that would be taught to the future community of believers.⁹⁷ “The Twelve” were distinctly called to be co-workers of Jesus in proclaiming the message of the Kingdom and were to prepare for their future role as leaders in the early church.⁹⁸

It is also necessary to note the relationship between “the Twelve” and the “apostles” (ἀποστόλοι). Although the term “apostle” predominantly occurs in the Pauline corpus, it is not without a witness in the Gospels and Acts.⁹⁹ Wilkins notes that “the Twelve” were a distinct group of Jesus’ disciples, who were also called to be apostles.¹⁰⁰ One must also make a distinction between the occurrence of the referent, apostles in the Gospels and Paul’s usage of the referent. In order to come to an understanding of the distinction, Freyne believes one would be well advised to go to Luke-Acts. He notes that for Luke “an apostle is so closely linked to that of witness to the

94. Ibid., 177. See also Müller who notes that the disciples “would have been a circle of immediate followers who were commissioned to particular service” (“μαθητής,” 489).

95. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 152. For a brief description of the individual disciples see Wilkins, “Disciples,” 179–181. For slightly longer descriptions see Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 152–167.

96. Wilkins, “Disciples,” 178.

97. Freyne, *Twelve*, 47–48.

98. Wilkins, “Disciples,” 178.

99. Freyne, *Twelve*, 49.

100. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 149.

life of Jesus that of all the apostolic men who helped to spread the church the Twelve alone fully deserved that title.”¹⁰¹ Luke was also aware of Paul and used the term “apostle” in Paul’s case to refer to his “preeminent position in the missionary achievement of the apostolic church.”¹⁰² For Freyne, the similarity between the use of the term “apostle” with reference to “the Twelve” and to Paul is their missionary activity. That both have elevated positions in the church seems for the most part to be inconsequential to the term “apostle.”¹⁰³

Ἀκολουθέω (“I follow”)

In addition to the use of the noun “disciple,” the verb “I follow” (ἀκολουθέω) is “also used in the Gospels to identify the ‘disciples’ as those committed to Jesus.”¹⁰⁴ The term ἀκολουθέω occurs almost exclusively in the Gospels, with reference to following the earthly Jesus.¹⁰⁵ Scholars limit its usage outside of the Gospels with reference to the discipleship of Jesus to Rev 14:4, where the 144,000 follow the exalted Lamb.¹⁰⁶ While all disciples “followed” Jesus, only some physically followed him by abandoning their former way of life to walk with him. Other disciples followed Jesus in a “figurative” sense.¹⁰⁷ Women were included among those who followed Jesus in this figurative sense, since they too exhibited the twin characteristics of discipleship.¹⁰⁸

101. Freyne, *Twelve*, 254–255.

102. *Ibid.*, 255.

103. *Ibid.*

104. Longenecker, “Introduction,” 2. Kittel notes all other uses of the verb “speak of a following which has no religious significance” (ἀκολουθέω, 213 n. 28).

105. Blending, “ἀκολουθέω,” 481.

106. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship*, 12. Cf. Blending, “ἀκολουθέω,” 1.482. Donaldson addresses the reality that post-Easter disciples can be said to follow Jesus as his disciples. He does so from the literary purpose of Mark’s Gospel. Mark’s audience, those who were disciples of the risen and ascended Lord, were called to follow Jesus. “Thus, ‘following’ becomes an enduring characteristic of the church for all time and not just a possibility for the twelve” (“Discipleship in Mark,” 75).

Kittel believes the occurrence of the term in Rev 14:4 is an *obvious* application of Matt 10:38 to a specific group of Christians, those to whom John was writing (ἀκολουθέω, 214). Rev 19:14 may also use ἀκολουθέω with some relevance to discipleship. This will be explored in chapter 4.

107. Wilkins, “Disciples,” 178. Cf. Kittel, “ἀκολουθέω,” 213. On the literal and figurative sense of ἀκολουθέω see also Kingsbury, “Following Jesus,” 46.

108. Wilkins, “Disciples,” 178.

When used with reference to individuals in the Gospels, ἀκολουθέω “is always the call to decisive and intimate discipleship of the earthly Jesus.”¹⁰⁹ The term ἀκολουθέω “is essentially restricted to the gospels.”¹¹⁰ According to Donaldson, disciples of Jesus were not the only ones to follow Jesus. The crowds literally followed him, although not as disciples.¹¹¹ Kittel notes the disciples’ following Christ was evidence of his divine nature.¹¹² Blendinger does not deem the usage of the term in Acts and Paul’s letters “theologically significant.”¹¹³ The disuse of the discipleship nuance of the term in the rest of the NT is likely related to the departure of the physical presence of Jesus. However, other terms are used to convey similar ideas.¹¹⁴

One such term is μιμέομαι (“I imitate”). The word group is found almost exclusively in the Pauline Epistles, with additional occurrences in Hebrews and 3 John.¹¹⁵ Bauder notes that the verb and its cognates only occur 11 times in the NT. In each case, the specific term used is “linked with obligation to a specific kind of conduct.”¹¹⁶ This conduct cannot be divorced from following God’s will.¹¹⁷ One is to imitate the example of another.

An additional term is ὀπίσω (“behind, after”). With reference to ὀπίσω Bauder notes, “passages where the genitive *opisō mou* [“follow after me”] refers to Jesus . . . are particularly significant theologically. *Opisō* here takes on the meaning of *akolouthēō*, follow, go ‘behind’ someone.”¹¹⁸ The phrase is used in Mark 1:17 in the context of Jesus calling disciples to be fishers of men. Thus, this usage chiefly relates to Jesus’ discipleship.¹¹⁹ Finally, one may briefly note the verb μανθάνω (“I learn”), which occurs mostly outside

109. Blendinger, “ἀκολουθέω,” 482.

110. Ibid., 483.

111. Donaldson, “Discipleship in Mark,” 75.

112. Kittel, “ἀκολουθέω,” 213. He believes this is related to the Hellenistic “religious and philosophical notion of following God.”

113. Blendinger, “ἀκολουθέω,” 482.

114. Kittel, “ἀκολουθέω,” 214. Several terms could be presented in this section, such as πορεύομαι (“I go, walk”), which may be used in a figurative sense to refer to conducting one’s life according to God’s will. This is similar to the way הָלַךְ is used in the OT. However, only a few key terms are presented to provide a general overview of the terminology that is often applied to the concept of discipleship in the NT.

115. Michaelis, “μιμέομαι, μιμητής, κτλ.,” 666.

116. Bauder, “μιμέομαι,” 491.

117. Michaelis, “μιμέομαι, μιμητής, κτλ.,” 672–673.

118. Bauder, “ὀπίσω,” 493.

119. Ibid.

of the Gospels. When *μανθάνω* does occur it usually refers to learning “the will of God.”¹²⁰

Summary

Of the several terms related to the concept of discipleship in the NT, two in particular stand out with reference to the Gospels and Acts, *μαθητής* and *ἀκολουθέω*. *Μαθητής* is found exclusively in the Gospels and Acts, and apart from a few instances refers to one who is a disciple of Jesus Christ. Given its occurrence in Acts it would appear that one could be a disciple of the resurrected and ascended Christ. It refers to someone who is in a teacher-disciple relationship.

The other term found almost exclusively in the Gospels is *ἀκολουθέω*. Like *μαθητής*, it is used to identify those who are committed to Jesus. It may be used in a literal and figurative sense. The literal sense refers to actually following around the historical Jesus. It may also be used in a figurative sense of those disciples who followed Jesus, although they may not have been included among those who severed all ties to literally walk with him. Just as one may be a disciple of the risen and exalted Christ, so also one may be said to follow him. That being said, the term is not found in the NT Epistles in a discipleship context. The reason for this is almost certainly related to the first century practice of a teacher’s disciples literally following him around. This way of following Jesus ceased with his ascension. The remainder of the NT employs different terminology to convey how a disciple of Jesus Christ continues to follow after him (i.e., *μιμέομαι*).

Jesus’ Form of Discipleship

While there are a few similarities between Jesus and Jewish rabbis of his day (Jesus was called “teacher,” as were they), scholars tend to emphasize the differences between Jesus’ form of discipleship and that of his Jewish contemporaries.¹²¹ Perhaps the first to popularize the uniqueness of Jesus’ form of discipleship was C. G. Montefiore. According to Montefiore, “[d]iscipleship such as Jesus demanded and inspired (a following, not for study but for service—to help the Master in his mission, to carry out his

120. Müller, “*μαθητής*,” 486.

121. Donaldson, “Discipleship in Mark,” 68.

instructions and so on) was apparently a *new thing*, at all events, something which did not fit in, or was not on all-fours, with usual Rabbinic customs or with customary Rabbinic phenomena” (emphasis added).¹²² Years later, Hengel sought to provide justification “both exegetically and in terms of Religionsgeschichte [history of religions]” of Montefiore’s thesis, which rested heavily on Matt 8:21ff (//Luke 9:59f).¹²³ In the final analysis, Hengel concludes that Montefiore was correct in his assessment regarding Jesus’ distinctive form of discipleship. Nevertheless, in at least a couple of places he tempers the certainty of Montefiore’s conclusions.¹²⁴ For instance, Hengel believes the Religionsgeschichte with which Jesus’ form of discipleship seems to have the most similarities is “the apocalyptic prophets and popular Zealot leaders in Palestine and in the Cynic philosophers of the Hellenistic-Roman World.”¹²⁵ In another instance, he surprisingly and strikingly believes there is but one “genuine analogy” of Jesus’ form of discipleship with the OT. Hengel notes, “[a]s to the call of the disciples, in the last analysis only the call of the Old Testament prophets by the God of Israel himself is a genuine analogy.”¹²⁶ It would seem then, for Hengel, that Jesus’ form of discipleship, while differing from how Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries made disciples, did in fact have a historical precedent, one that was in keeping with the God of Israel’s interactions with certain people of God in the OT.¹²⁷

Although one may find an OT analogy to Jesus’ form of discipleship, it is also widely recognized that there are differences between Jesus’ form of discipleship and that of first century Jewish rabbis. The following is a summary of the distinctive features of Jesus’ form of discipleship as found in the Gospels.

First, unlike other Jewish rabbis, Jesus issues a call for his disciples to follow him.¹²⁸ This was uncharacteristic of the teacher-disciple relationships of Jesus’ day. A would-be disciple would attach himself to a master, in order to learn from him the way of the Lord, by way of his instruction

122. Montefiore, *Gospel Teachings*, 218.

123. Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 2.

124. *Ibid.*, 87.

125. *Ibid.*, 34.

126. *Ibid.*, 87.

127. Elijah’s call of Elisha and subsequent relationship may also be a valid OT analogy to Jesus’ form of discipleship (cf. 1 Kgs 19:21).

128. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship*, 20; Rengstorff, “μαθητής,” 444; Blendinger, “ἀκολουθέω,” 482; Wilkins, “Discipleship,” 187; Kingsbury, “Following Jesus,” 49; Sweetland, *Journey with Jesus*, 43–44, 83–84.

and lifestyle. However, Jesus initiated the teacher-disciple relationship by calling certain men to be his followers, to be in a relationship with him.¹²⁹

Second, as has been previously stated, Jesus' form of discipleship was unique in that it was both broad and narrow. The scope of those called could be narrowly defined as "the Twelve" or other men who left everything in order to physically follow him. However, it could be broadly conceived to include those who were not asked to bear this cost.¹³⁰

Third, Jesus broke significant social and religious barriers of his day with his call of discipleship to those who may be deemed unclean, social outcasts, or on the lower end of the social scale. Jesus called the poor and sinners not only to repentance, but also to be his disciples.¹³¹ Jesus also gathered women to be his disciples, something that was unthinkable during his time.¹³²

Fourth, while other disciples sought to supplant their master, or to become teachers leading their own band of disciples, Jesus' discipleship forbade such a thing. Jesus' disciples came to follow him and recognize him as the long awaited Messiah. Since he was understood as such, there was no aspiration on the part of his disciples to part with his instruction and gather their own disciples.¹³³ Those who became Jesus' disciples were required to be so for life. He would always be their master, and they would always be in the position of his disciples.¹³⁴

Fifth, this did not mean Jesus' disciples were not expected to mature in their discipleship. However, unlike their rabbinical counterparts, they did not seek to become masters of the Torah, nor did he "call men to acquire and master traditional models of conduct";¹³⁵ rather, they were "stamped and fashioned" by Jesus, in order to become like him, but not greater than

129. Müller, "μαθητής," 488.

130. Wilkins, "Discipleship," 187.

131. Dunn, *Jesus and Discipleship*, 59. Cf. Müller, "μαθητής," 488.

132. Wilkins, "Discipleship," 187.

133. Rengstorf, "μαθητής," 448.

134. Wilkins, "Discipleship," 188. Cf. Donaldson, "Discipleship in Mark," 68. While it is true that in the rabbinic tradition "the student was bound to his teacher for the rest of his life," what made this different from Jesus' form of discipleship was that a student could after enough time and study graduate to become a rabbi and admit disciples into his instruction, and even surpass his teacher [Lohse, "ῥαββί," 962]. This was not so with Jesus' disciples.

135. Blendinger, "ἀκολουθέω," 482.

him.¹³⁶ This meant that Jesus' own pattern for ministry and his relationship with his heavenly Father were to be the pattern of life for his disciples.¹³⁷

Sixth, Jesus' form of discipleship also meant that his disciples were "with Jesus" and they served him.¹³⁸ To be "with Jesus" meant his disciples were made to share in his teaching,¹³⁹ participate in his mission and authority,¹⁴⁰ witness to his person and work, and also to join in his sufferings, sometimes even to the point of death.¹⁴¹

Seventh, Jesus demanded nothing but total allegiance to his person. This required of his disciples to relinquish all old ties on their lives, in order to fully pursue Jesus' discipleship.¹⁴² Hengel limits this requirement "to individuals [Jesus] invited to 'follow' him in specific situations."¹⁴³ However, Freyne believe this call was necessary of all disciples of Jesus, whether of those who first followed him or of future disciples.¹⁴⁴ Wilkins notes that while all were called to absolute allegiance to Jesus, this did not mean that all must leave "family, profession and property" to follow after Jesus.¹⁴⁵ It would seem that the cost to follow Jesus was in part situational, although no less absolute in its requirement for his disciples to give their entire lives, every aspect of them, in service to him.¹⁴⁶

136. Rengstorf, "μαθητής," 448–449.

137. Donaldson, "Discipleship in Mark," 68. One example of how Jesus' pattern for ministry was to provide a pattern for his disciples (both past and present) is found in his application of the Messianic phrase "Son of Man." For a general overview of the background of the "Son of Man" and its usage in Mark's Gospel see Longenecker, "'Son of Man' Imagery," 222–243.

138. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship*, 20. Cf. Müller, "μαθητής," 488–489.

139. Wilkins, "Discipleship," 188.

140. Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 73; Müller, "μαθητής," 489; Freyne, *Twelve*, 23; Sweetland, *Journey with Jesus*, 43–44, 83–84.

141. Donaldson, "Discipleship in Mark," 76; Müller, "μαθητής," 489; Blendinger, "ἀκολουθέω," 482; Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 72; Wilkins, "Discipleship," 188.

142. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship*, 20. Cf. Blendinger, "ἀκολουθέω," 482.

143. Hengel, *Charismatic Leader*, 61.

144. Freyne, *Twelve*, 108.

145. Wilkins, "Discipleship," 187. Related to the cost of discipleship, see also Green, "Cross-Bearing," 117–133. Green concludes that the requirement for a disciple of Jesus to bear one's cross means "to submit to the rule against which [one] was formerly in rebellion" (ibid., 127).

146. Müller, "μαθητής," 488.

Finally, Jesus' form of discipleship cannot be separated from God's gift of salvation.¹⁴⁷ Wilkins expresses that in Luke-Acts both salvation and discipleship are entered through faith in Christ alone.¹⁴⁸ Like salvation, following Jesus as his disciple is a "decisive act," which calls for a response.¹⁴⁹ Wilkins also draws together Matt 28:19–20 and the command to disciple "all nations," and Luke 24:47 and the promise that "repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his [Jesus'] name to *all nations*, beginning in Jerusalem" (emphasis added) to show that "Jesus' ministry to Israel was to be the beginning point of what would be later a universal offer of salvation to all the peoples of the earth."¹⁵⁰ It is difficult to separate Jesus' call to be his disciple from his call to forgiveness of one's sins.¹⁵¹ This aspect of Jesus' form of discipleship was certainly beyond the pale of Jewish discipleship in the first century.

Summary

Jesus' form of discipleship differed significantly from those of his Jewish contemporaries. While it was quite different, it was not without precedent, most notably God's own calling of OT prophets. Jesus' form of discipleship according to the Synoptic Gospels and Acts emphasizes such areas as: lifelong discipleship with Jesus; servanthood; participating with Jesus in his teaching, mission, authority, and sufferings; and the unique bond between salvation and discipleship.

147. Schweizer seems to allude to this when he states, "His [Jesus'] calling is the beginning of something new, changing all things. It takes place in sovereign liberty and can at once assume the character of an act of divine grace" (*Lordship and Discipleship*, 20).

148. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 210.

149. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship*, 20.

150. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 188–189.

151. Segovia succinctly notes the inseparable nature of discipleship and salvation with respect to the entirety of the NT when he states, "belief in Jesus the Christ emerges as the very ground of discipleship: it is faith that constitutes the basic presupposition and point of departure for all Christian disciples" ("Introduction," 17). He further notes, "belief implies and entails a very definitive style of life on the part of the believer. Furthermore, . . . such a way of life is, quite often, distinctly patterned on or modeled after the life and ministry of Jesus" (*ibid.*, 18).

Discipleship in the New Testament Epistles

Having surveyed discipleship in the Greco-Roman world, second temple Judaism, the OT context, and the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, it may prove useful to provide a brief overview of the ways in which discipleship is conveyed in the NT Epistles. It is undeniable that key terminology used to convey the concept of discipleship from the Gospels and Acts is missing in the rest of the NT. However, this does not mean that the topic of discipleship is non-existent. As was seen in the section covering the concept of discipleship in the OT, to merely rely on lexemes to fully investigate a topic like discipleship is tenuous. While lexemes are helpful in telling part of the story, they are unable to describe all of it. So too with one's investigation of discipleship in the NT Epistles.

Wilkins notes that although the term "disciple" is not found outside of the Gospels and Acts, there is other terminology used to designate "disciples" that is found in the Gospels, Acts, and the rest of the NT. Some of the terms found in the Gospels and the rest of the NT include: "*believers, brothers/sisters, servants, and church.*"¹⁵² Some of the designations for believers that occur both in Acts and the rest of the NT include: "*saints and Christians.*"¹⁵³ He finds that these two groups of terms "provide a link between those who are called disciples in the Gospels and Acts and those who are called other terms in the Acts and Epistles."¹⁵⁴

One may also investigate the concept of discipleship in the NT Epistles by looking for evidence of discipleship themes located in the Gospels and Acts. This may be done by searching for specific occurrences of those themes or by allusions to said themes.¹⁵⁵ One theme in particular that stands out in the NT Epistles and the scholarly literature is the concept of imitation.¹⁵⁶ Several terms are used throughout the NT and in the ancient

152. Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 294.

153. Ibid.

154. Ibid. For a fuller explanation of these terms usage in the NT see Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 294–301.

155. Wilkins (*Following the Master*) does the first on pages 301–304 and the latter on pages 305–308. Segovia notes many of the same methods for investigating the concept of discipleship in the NT along with the usage of source critical methods of investigation ("Introduction," 4–5). In the work on discipleship edited by Longenecker it is essentially assumed that discipleship is addressed throughout the NT ("Introduction," 5–6).

156. Although the terms occur infrequently, one can find the idea of imitation throughout the NT Epistles. Hernando refers to this as "implicit imitation language" ("Imitation Language in Paul," 2).

world with reference to the concept of imitation. The word group that is directly related to the concept of imitation includes the nouns *μιμητής*, *συμμιμητής* (only in Phil 3:17), and the verb *μιμέομαι*.¹⁵⁷ The ancient Greek usage of the word group often had a negative connotation, although when used positively it referred to relationships between parents and their children, teachers and their pupils, and even God and human beings.¹⁵⁸ What is of interest in these relationships is the “transfer of character or personality from one person to another.”¹⁵⁹

It appears that Paul in particular picks up on the relationship between a parent and child with his employment of the terms *μιμητής* and *μιμέομαι*. Paul speaks to the churches he founded as a father to his children. Thus, Paul serves as a spiritual father to these churches.¹⁶⁰ What Paul calls for is not so much for his audience to imitate his particular way of living the Christian life, one that, although common to all Christians, would also have characteristics unique to Paul’s example;¹⁶¹ rather, Paul ultimately calls for believers to imitate Christ, whom Paul seeks to imitate and follow.¹⁶² The imitation of Paul is akin to the disciple-teacher relationships in the OT. They were discipleship relationships of a secondary nature. The ultimate

157. Both Michaelis (“*μιμέομαι*, *μιμητής*, κτλ.,” 673) and Furnish (*Ethics in Paul*, 219) believe *μιμητής* replaces *μαθητής* in the NT Epistles. Hays arriving at a similar conclusion states, “Jesus’ death is consistently interpreted in the New Testament as an act of self-giving love, and the community is consistently called to take up the cross and follow in the way that his death defines. (When ‘imitation of Christ’ is understood in these terms, the often-proposed distinction between discipleship and imitation disappears. To be Jesus’ disciple is to obey his call to bear the cross, thus to be like him.)” (*Moral Vision*, 197.)

Additional terms are used in the NT that may carry the idea of imitation or an example to follow. They include: *ὑποδείγμα* (in John, Hebrews, James, and 2 Peter), *ὑπογραμμος* (only in 1 Pet 2:21), and in some cases *τύπος* and *ὑποτύπωσις*.

158. DeBoer, *Imitation*, 15–16. Cf. Michaelis, “*μιμέομαι*, *μιμητής*, κτλ.,” 660–661.

159. Sanders, “Imitating Paul,” 358.

160. Weaver, “Paul’s Call to Imitation,” 197. See also DeBoer, *Imitation*, 213–214.

161. Stanley, “Become Imitators of Me,” 877. Stanley believes Paul’s teaching was essentially the same as that of the other apostles, but that he was “also aware that . . . his personal testimony to Christ, his preaching and way of life [had] their own characteristic modalities” (ibid.). However, DeBoer, in refuting the claim of Stanley, argues, “Paul’s call to imitation is not in order to secure certain Pauline characteristics in the Christianity that is coming to expression in his readers. The characteristics which must come to expression are those basic to Christianity itself. Paul is not making special pleas for his version of Christianity and his manner of [the] Christian life” (*Imitation*, 209).

162. Bauder, “*μιμέομαι*,” 491.

and first discipleship relationship was between God and his people. So also is the case in the NT. One is a disciple of Jesus first and foremost.

Paul is not the only NT writer to urge his audience to imitate Christ, himself, or other examples. The idea of imitation is found throughout the NT corpus, even when specific imitation language is absent, as in Hebrews 11, where several examples are given of those whose faith in God endured, leaving an example for others to follow (cf. Heb 12:1).¹⁶³

What precisely is one to imitate? The most common characteristic held out for believers to follow is self-denial or selflessness. Linda L. Belleville, in addressing the concept of discipleship in 1 and 2 Corinthians, looks at several models that illuminate the characteristic of selflessness.¹⁶⁴ Jesus is to be an exemplar for the church at Corinth as one who (1) denies self in the service of others (cf. 2 Cor 8:9);¹⁶⁵ (2) exhibits forbearance and gentleness towards those who need correction (10:1);¹⁶⁶ and suffers as one serves others (1:5; 4:10; and 13:4).¹⁶⁷ Paul was an example of one who led by serving, which included serving alongside those he was entrusted to lead (1:24; 4:5).¹⁶⁸ The final example Paul presents to the Corinthian church is the Macedonian churches that served as a model of joyous living and generosity in the midst of persecution (8:1–5).¹⁶⁹ Imitation is not limited only to Christ, but extended to those who rightly follow his example.¹⁷⁰

This idea of imitating selflessness, particularly the example of Christ's self-denial, is heightened in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, so much so that Gerald F. Hawthorne believes that discipleship in Philippians is centrally located in the theme of imitation of Christ.¹⁷¹ For Hawthorne

163. For instance, Hudgins believes that Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Tim 3:10–11a are provided as an example for Timothy to follow. The list represents the education Timothy received under Paul's tutelage (*Likeness Education*, 85). While Paul does not use *μιμέομαι* or one of its cognates, he does use the term "*παρηκολούθησάς* from *παρακολουθέω* ['follow closely'], [which] is a cognate of one of the words (*ἀκολουθέω*) semantically related to *μαθητής*" (ibid., 70).

164. Belleville, "Discipleship in the Corinthian Correspondence," 120–142.

165. Ibid., 127–130.

166. Ibid., 131–133.

167. Ibid., 133–137.

168. Ibid., 137–139.

169. Ibid., 139.

170. Spicq includes the endurance and patience exhibited by the prophets who spoke on behalf of God as an exemplar for believers to follow ("*ὑποδειγμα*," 404).

171. Hawthorne, "Discipleship in Philippians," 163–179.

Christ's example in Phil 2:5–11 serves as *the* pattern for discipleship in the letter.¹⁷² William S. Kurz also identifies Paul as an exemplar for the Philip-
pian Christians to follow.¹⁷³ He believes that both Paul and Christ provide
an example to imitate of those who set aside their rights or self-interest,
which may have resulted in their safety, for the good of others, an act which
also results in their own personal suffering. They endured such suffering by
putting their hope or trust in God to vindicate them, and exalt and reward
them.¹⁷⁴ This striving to be like Christ or even Paul is not to be done by
sheer will power, but “is made possible by the power of the living, exalted
Christ, who is present and at work within the lives of believers through the
work of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:11, 19, 2:12b–13).”¹⁷⁵

The idea of imitating the suffering of Christ found in Paul's letters is
also prominent in the letter to the Hebrews. William L. Lane argues that Je-
sus is presented as the “ultimate paradigm of heroic discipleship” in the let-
ter.¹⁷⁶ Because of this, those who are committed to following Christ will also
experience shame, reproach, and suffering.¹⁷⁷ The imitation of suffering is
also evident in 1 Peter. The picture Peter provides is one of discipleship that
views the Christian as following Christ on his or her journey to heaven. Fol-
lowing Christ includes imitating his example of one who suffered unjustly
and who did not retaliate against those who persecuted him, but instead
continued to do what was good.¹⁷⁸ John H. Elliott sees this theme promi-
nently on display in 1 Pet 2:18–25 in the apostle's instruction to slaves.¹⁷⁹

172. Ibid., 167, 169, 177. Hawthorne readily recognizes that some object to an imita-
tion of Christ interpretation of Phil 2:5–11. For a sample of those against such an inter-
pretation see Michaelis, “μιμέομαι, μιμητής, κτλ.,” 672 and Bauder, “μιμέομαι,” 491–492.
For one who believes Phil 2:5–11 presents a pattern for Christians to follow see Hurtado,
“Jesus as Lordly Example,” 113–126.

173. Kurz, “Kenotic Imitation,” 103–126.

174. Ibid., 122.

175. Hawthorne, “Discipleship in Philippians,” 178. Wild focuses on the believer's
union with Christ as the ability to actually follow Christ's example of being obedient to
God (“Discipleship in Ephesians,” 135–136). Elliott believes 1 Pet 2:18–25 emphasizes
that Jesus is not just an example to follow, but the one who has paid the price to secure
salvation and the ability to follow him faithfully (“Backward and Forward,” 187, 203). He
writes that Jesus is “both an enabler and an exemplar” (ibid., 187).

176. Lane, “Discipleship in Hebrews,” 208, 213.

177. Ibid., 223.

178. Michaels, “Going to Heaven with Jesus,” 253.

179. Elliott, “Backward and Forward,” 188–189. Elliott believes the slaves mentioned
in this text serve “an illustrative and paradigmatic function” of what is expected of all

Slaves were to do what was right even if suffering unjustly because: (1) they had been called to do so, and (2) Christ suffered for them, leaving them an example to follow.¹⁸⁰ This calling to patiently endure unjust suffering was not something that believers were to do alone, but it was something one was to do with fellow travelers on their journey heavenward. Together the church encourages its members to continue on in the face of obstacles to enter into their eternal home.¹⁸¹

In addition to these characteristic, Robert L. Plummer, who focuses his attention on 1 Cor 11:1, believes Paul's missionary example is set forth as an model for the church to follow.¹⁸² While Paul is to be an exemplar for the church as a whole, the scope of his example is limited in the case of the individual believer based on "an individual believer's giftedness and life situation [to] determine the manifestation of that obligation [to evangelize] (1 Cor 12:12–30)."¹⁸³

Lest one fall into the perspective that discipleship in the epistles is strictly about doing what is right, Michael P. Knowles notes that discipleship is more than right ethical living; it must first and foremost be grounded in a correct understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Only after understanding rightly who Jesus is, what he taught, and what he came to do is one prepared to live in light of that reality.¹⁸⁴ The extent to which one is

believers (ibid., 188–189).

180. Ibid., 193.

181. Michaels, "Going to Heaven," 267.

182. Plummer, "Imitation of Paul," 219–235.

183. Ibid., 235.

184. Knowles, "Discipleship in Colossians," 201. On the other hand, Jervis appears to place greater emphasis on the ethical dimension of discipleship. In her essay on discipleship in Romans she concludes, "The gospel, for Paul, is the manifestation of the 'righteousness of God,' that is, the manifestation of God's own character. God's revelation of his own character in the gospel (1:17) is an invitation and opportunity for human beings to become as God is. This is not possible through human endeavor, for righteousness is not a property of humanity but of God. Humans may become righteous only by recognizing that righteousness is not a property of humanity, but only of God, and submitting to the 'righteousness of God' (10:3)" ("Discipleship in Romans," 161). It is possible that this greater emphasis on the ethical dimension is simply due to the limitations of what Romans attributes to the concept of discipleship, rather than Jervis's own notions of NT discipleship.

Davidson notes how James draws heavily on the teaching of Jesus in his letter, so much so that Davidson concludes, "the 'system of meaning and values' that he [James] wants his readers to adopt appears in the teaching of Jesus" ("Discipleship in James," 227).

to live in light of this reality is all-inclusive. One's whole life and being is to be lived in this world with respect to God.¹⁸⁵

Summary

Although lacking the discipleship terminology that is dominantly portrayed in the Gospels and Acts, the NT Epistles are not devoid of the concept of discipleship. A key idea utilized throughout the epistles is the idea of imitation, in particular the imitation of religious exemplars.¹⁸⁶ The example *par excellence* for believers to follow is that of Jesus Christ. Perhaps no passage better illustrates what is required of followers of Christ than his example in Phil 2:5–11. There Jesus is given as one who selflessly sets aside his rights and prerogatives for the good of others. Jesus is also set forth as an example of one who patiently endures unjust suffering, knowing full well that God would vindicate him. Not only does Christ provide an example to follow, but he is also the one who enables Christians to emulate him through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

The concept of discipleship in the Greco-Roman world is seen through the usage of its relevant terminology. The term *μαθητής*, which broadly referred to a “learner” or “pupil,” was also used as a technical term for one who learned from a great master or teacher. The idea of following (*ἀκολουθέω*) a teacher also figures prominently in Greek thought. The idea was that one not only literally followed one's teacher around, but also figuratively followed his teaching and way of life (*μιμέομαι*).

During the time of second temple Judaism rabbinical schools began to be developed. These schools were led by men who taught male students both the oral and written Torah. The rabbi taught his students not only by the words he spoke, but also by his example. The goal for the student was to become a master of the Torah, so that one could then teach one's own disciples.

185. Johnson, “Discipleship in James,” 177.

186. For a more detailed discussion of the theme of imitation in the NT see Hood, *Imitating God in Christ*.

While one might choose to follow a great teacher, one did not typically speak of following God, since unlike the teacher, he did not possess a physical body, and thus, could not be seen. However, in time, some of the religious writings of Judaism began to incorporate some aspect of people imitating God. The purpose was generally to aid in the development of the *imago Dei* in the individual.

While linguistic evidence for the concept of discipleship is limited in the OT, it is not entirely absent. When it does occur, it appears to be used in a master-disciple relationship. There appears to be sufficient evidence to conclude that Isa 8:16, a key text when determining the validity of discipleship in the OT, does in fact refer to the prophet Isaiah having a number of disciples. However, it must be recognized that these disciples are his only in a secondary sense, for the Lord God is one's teacher first and foremost. In addition to these few instances, one may include several examples found throughout the OT of what could be characterized as teacher-student relationships (e.g., Moses and Joshua, and Elijah and Elisha).

Of the several terms related to the concept of discipleship in the NT, two in particular stand out with reference to the Gospels and Acts, μαθητής and ἀκολουθέω. Μαθητής is found exclusively in the Gospels and Acts, and apart from a few instances refers to one who is a disciple of Jesus Christ. Like μαθητής, ἀκολουθέω is used to identify those who are committed to Jesus. It may be used in a literal and figurative sense. The literal sense refers to actually following the historical Jesus. It may also be used in a figurative sense of those disciples who followed Jesus, although they may not have been included among those who severed all ties to literally walk with him. Just as one may be a disciple of the risen and exalted Christ, so also one may be said to follow him.

It appears that by and large Jesus' form of discipleship differed significantly from his Jewish contemporaries. While it was quite different, it was not without precedent, most notably God's own calling of OT prophets. Jesus' form of discipleship according to the Synoptic Gospels and Acts emphasizes such areas as: lifelong discipleship with Jesus; servanthood; participating with Jesus in his teaching, mission, authority, and sufferings; and the unique bond between salvation and discipleship.

Although lacking the discipleship terminology that is dominantly portrayed in the Gospels and Acts, the NT Epistles are not devoid of the concept of discipleship. A key idea utilized throughout the epistles is the idea of imitation, in particular the imitation of religious exemplars. The

FOLLOWING THE LAMB

example *par excellence* for believers to follow is that of Jesus Christ. Not only does Christ provide an example to follow, but he is also the one who enables Christians to emulate him through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.