

WHO IS A DISCIPLE?

Introduction:

The Greek word for “disciple” (“mathetes”) occurs in the New Testament over 260 times. It means “a learner” and by its use in the Scriptures carries also the idea of an “adherent” (one who follows the life and teachings of their leader).

Some have become confused over the various ways the word is used in the New Testament. Some think it refers *only* to the twelve apostles; some wonder why it is used of people who are not yet Bible Christians.

Let us look at a few key verses which should help us better understand this much used New Testament word.

I. SOME PEOPLE HAD THEIR OWN “DISCIPLES”

- A. Moses had “disciples”....John 9:28
- B. The Pharisees had “disciples”....Matt. 22:15-16; Luke 5:33
- C. John the Baptist had “disciples”.....Matt. 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 7:18-19; 11:1
- D. Paul, the apostle *was* a “disciple” and also *had* “disciples”....Acts 9:19-25

II. JESUS HAD HIS “DISCIPLES”

Jesus had “disciples”.....Matt. 5:1; 9:10; 27:57

- The *crowds* were distinguished from His “disciples”....Matt. 23:1; Mark 4:33-34
- One of Jesus’ “disciples” is named....Joseph of Arimathea...John 19:38
- Jesus’ twelve apostles were also called “disciples” *before* being chosen...Matt. 10:1-2; Luke 6:13
- Jesus’ twelve apostles were also called “disciples” *after* being chosen...Matt. 11:1; Matt. 28:5-7, 16

III. “DISCIPLES” AFTER THE CHURCH WAS ESTABLISHED

- A. People were called “disciples” *before* they were called Christians....Acts 11:26

The twelve men of Ephesus were called “disciples” *before* being baptized (probably John’s disciples, Acts 19:1, 4-5) and then *still* called “disciples” (now disciples of Christ) *after* being baptized (Acts 19:9).

- B. People were *still* called “disciples” *after* they were Christians...Acts 6:1-2, 7; 9:1, 19, 26, 38; 11:26-29 (in Antioch of Syria); 13:52 (in Antioch of Pisidia); 14:19-20, 22, 28; 15:10; 18:23 19:9, 29-30; 20:1, 30; 21:4, 16.

The names of some who were still called “disciples” after becoming Christians:

Ananias....Acts 9:10
Tabitha...Acts 9:36
Timothy...Acts 16:1
Mnason....Acts 21:16

IV. THE PROPER USE OF THE TERM “DISCIPLE” TODAY

- A. “Disciple” is a proper term for anyone who learns from and is a follower of someone’s teaching.

Communists are often called the “disciples” of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin.

- B. “Disciple” is a proper term for Christians because they learn from and follow the life and teachings of Christ (and therefore is synonymous with “Christian”).

- C. “Disciple” is a proper term for someone not yet baptized into Christ, but seeking to learn about Him and follow Him.

There are many today who may be viewed as “disciples” of Christ, but who have *not yet* been baptized into Him for the forgiveness of their sins (therefore not all “disciples” are “Christians”).