

Discipleship¹ Then and Now



SABBATH—JANUARY 5

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:20; John 3:21–30; Acts 5:34–39.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then the disciples [followers] went out and preached everywhere. The Lord worked with them. And he backed up his word by the signs that went with it” (Mark 16:20, NIV).

SEVERAL HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE JESUS CAME INTO THIS WORLD as a man, there were teachers who called disciples to follow them. These teachers influenced² the lives of others with their teachings. This was true with the Greeks, the Jews, the Chinese, and other cultures.³ Several of these teachers did not use the word *teacher* or the word *disciple* between themselves and their pupils. They were that close!

This week, we will explore other kinds of discipleships. We will examine what they mean for Jesus' disciples living today.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON IN BRIEF (SHORT): What was discipleship like among the Greeks and the Jews? How was discipleship different with John the Baptist and with Jesus of Nazareth? What can we learn from discipleship in the time of Jesus?

1. discipleship—surrendering (giving) fully our lives and hearts to God; being willing to sacrifice (give up) our desires to follow God; being willing to suffer for God's way.

2. influenced—to have power or control over persons or things.

3. cultures—the ideas, skills, arts, tools, and ways of life of certain people at certain times; civilizations.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 6**DISCIPLESHIP AMONG THE GREEKS (John 12:20, 21)**

We know that these Greeks went to worship during the Passover Feast. This should tell us something about them already. Also, the verses tell us that so much was happening. For that reason, the attitude (feeling) of the Greeks should not come as a surprise to us.

How can Jeremiah 29:13; John 1:9; 6:44; and Acts 10:34, 35 help us understand what was happening?

Last week we saw that Jesus always chose His own disciples. The above verses might tell us something different. But that is not the case. Even here, the Holy Spirit was gently leading these Greeks to Jesus.

In Greek culture, there were many kinds of discipleships. Some Greek teachers would ask a student to become a disciple. But in most cases the student usually chose the teacher. The students, not the teacher, started the relationship. Also, it was common for the teachers to charge a fee for the students who studied with them.

In this case, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, these Greeks were searching for Jesus to learn from Him. Their story teaches us that God uses what we know to teach us what we need to know. Ellen G. White also notes that “the Greeks wanted to know the truth about Jesus’ mission.” —Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*,

page 622. She said that Jesus went out of the temple to talk with them.



The Holy Spirit led some Greek men to Philip to ask if they could meet with Jesus and learn from Him.

Suppose someone were to come up to you, as these Greeks did to Philip, and say, “We would see Jesus.” What would you answer? How would you help this person get to know Him?

MONDAY—JANUARY 7**DISCIPLESHIP AMONG THE JEWS (Acts 5:34–39; Acts 22:3)**

Teacher-pupil (student) relations are brought up in the writings of Jewish teachers and thinkers, such as Philo and Josephus. Famous teachers, such as Hillel and Shammai, attracted followers and had rival schools in Jerusalem. Saul of Tarsus was a pupil of Rabbi Gamaliel, another famous first-century Jewish teacher (Acts 5:34–39; Acts 22:3).

What can we learn about Gamaliel from Acts 5:34–39 and Acts 22:3?

These teachers were well-known among first century Jews. They attracted students from the whole world to Jerusalem to sit at their feet. To become a rabbi (teacher), a young Jew began his education as a student when he was probably 14 years old. He was very close to his teacher. He listened to his teachings. He copied his actions. He learned from him in the classroom and in daily life. He was a learner, sitting at his master's feet. When he completed his education, he became a nonordained⁴ scholar.⁵ Ordination⁶ came later at a certain age. At that time, the title rabbi was given to him. He also received authority (power) to make decisions for the Jews of the whole world.



In Jewish discipleship, students sat at the feet of their teachers to learn from them.

4. nonordained—when someone has not been presented to God in a special service to receive God's blessing to preach and take care of people's spiritual needs.

5. scholar—a well-educated person; a deep thinker.

6. ordination—a very special service and prayer making a person an official minister (preacher), elder, or deacon in the church.

The training of a rabbi follows certain principles (rules) of Jewish teacher-pupil (student) relations in the New Testament. How do these principles help us understand Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18?

Have you known a teacher who made a big, positive difference in your life for good? What parts of that teacher's character did you admire? In what ways can you try to copy these traits in your own life?

TUESDAY—JANUARY 8

DISCIPLESHIP WITH JOHN THE BAPTIST (John 3:21–30)

Explain what John the Baptist says in John 3:21–30 about discipleship. Was he also a disciple-gathering teacher? John the Baptist was not educated to be a rabbi. But what does the title rabbi say about the respect his pupils had for him?

It is clear that some Jews wondered if John the Baptist was the Messiah. This is suggested by the questions the messengers, whom the priests and Levites from Jerusalem, asked of John the Baptist (John 1:19–28). Their questions are important because the Jews had a belief in two different messiahs. This developed (grew out of) during the time period between the Old and

New Testaments. The Jews believed there would be a priestly messiah from the tribe of Levi and a kingly messiah from the tribe of Judah. It is interesting to note that the priests and Levites belonged to the tribe of Levi.

It is possible that the disciples of John the Baptist thought he was a priestly messiah. John himself was from the tribe of Levi. This belief could also have encouraged the Jerusalem visitors to ask John about his mission (purpose; calling). Some Bible scholars believe that this was why the author of the fourth Gospel wrote so much of what the Baptist said about Jesus. John the beloved wanted it to be very clear that John the Baptist saw Jesus, not himself, as the Messiah. Perhaps this information helps us to better understand John 3:25, 26.

What was the issue that caused some disappointment among John's disciples in John 3:21–30? What does their attitude (opinion) say about them? But what does John's answer tell us about his character? What principle can we learn from John's response that we could use in our own lives?

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 9

DISCIPLESHIP WITH JESUS (Matthew 4: 18–20)

From the very beginning of His public ministry (work), Jesus had disciples. He appeared as a disciple-gathering

teacher following the custom (practice) of both Greek and Jewish teachers. The disciples also had an opportunity (a chance) to learn from John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus to help prepare Him for His mission.



John the Baptist baptized Jesus to help prepare Him for His mission.

Just as Jewish and Greek teachers had followers, Jesus had disciples who followed Him everywhere. They listened to His teaching. They also tried to copy His style (Matthew 5:1, 2; John 1:35–40; John 2:1, 2).

Carefully read Matthew 4:18–20. Go back over Sunday's and

Monday's lessons and compare⁷ the ways in which one came to be a disciple of Jesus, of the Greek teachers, and of the well-known rabbis. What things were the same? What things were different?

“Until this time none of the disciples had fully joined together as fellow workers with Jesus. They had watched many of His miracles. They had received His teaching. But they had not fully given up their former work. When John the Baptist was thrown into prison, it had been a bitter disappointment. If such were to be the result of John's mission, they could have little hope for Jesus. Because all the religious leaders joined together to work against Jesus, it was a relief to the disciples to return for a short time to their fishing. But now Jesus called them to drop their former lives, and to work with Him full time. Peter had accepted the call. Upon reaching the shore, Jesus commanded the three other disciples, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Quickly they left all, and followed Him [Matthew 4:19, 20].”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 246–249.

What has Jesus called you to give up so that you could follow Him? What has been your answer to that call? Are you still holding onto something that would prevent you from obeying the Lord all the way?

7. compare—to show how two things are the same.

THURSDAY—JANUARY 10

MODERN-DAY DISCIPLESHIP (Mark 16:20)

What does Mark 16:20 tell us about one important trait of the disciples of Christ? What message is there for us too? Read also Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:19, 20; Revelation 14:6–12.

The disciples were preaching everywhere. Mark said that the Lord worked with the early disciples and backed up His word by the signs that went with it. Are modern disciples watching for God's support of His word through signs and miracles? What are some of the signs and miracles we see? How do we explain signs and miracles? Should we expect the same kind of signs and miracles in every culture, time, and society?

Are there other ways, without signs and miracles, for God to support His word among us? If so, how?

Jesus does not expect less from His disciples today than He did from the early ones. He requires the same loyalty and dedication to the task from us. But, He says, “‘It will happen to you just as you believed’ ” (Matthew 9:29, NIV). He says, “‘And I will do anything you ask in my name. Then the Son will bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my

name. I will do it' ” (John 14:13, 14, NIV).

How involved are you in the work of spreading the gospel?⁸ What are your own spiritual gifts? How can they be used in this work? When was the last time you did anything to help others know God's wonderful truths? What does your answer tell you about yourself?



Jesus expects the same dedication from His disciples today as He did from His early disciples.

FRIDAY—JANUARY 11

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, pages 432, 433, 582–585, 932, 1022, 1023; Ellen G. White, “Who Is the Greatest?” page 442, in *The Desire of Ages*.

8. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news of salvation.

9. influence—the power to change persons or things.

10. popularity—how well known and well liked someone is by others.

“For a time John the Baptist’s influence⁹ over the nation had been greater than its rulers, priests, or princes. Suppose John the Baptist said he was the Messiah, and raised a rebellion [war] against Rome. Priests and people would have joined his army. Satan tempts the world’s great rulers to lust after more power. Satan had stood ready to tempt John the Baptist into claiming that he was the Messiah. But John the Baptist had steadfastly [firmly] refused to fall into this trap. Instead, John the Baptist directed all the attention and glory to Jesus. Now John the Baptist saw that Jesus was becoming more and more known. And day by day John became less and less. . . . But the disciples of John the Baptist became more and more jealous of Jesus’ growing popularity.”¹⁰—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 178.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ How do you drop everything to follow Jesus? What are the different ways we can show in our lives that we are faithful disciples? In class on Sabbath, be prepared to talk about how you understand what this means.
- ❷ What parts should our churches and schools have in helping make disciples? How can our churches and our schools better work together in this important work?

③ Even in the time of Jesus, there was jealousy among disciples. Why is something like jealousy so common, even among a work that is so honored and important? This work should keep us all humble and eager for the success of others. What useful things can we do to keep ourselves from falling into the trap of jealousy?

④ Do we believe in signs, wonders, and miracles? Do we believe in them? If so, what do we believe about them? What do signs and wonders prove? What do they not prove? Why should we always use these things carefully and humbly while depending fully on the Word of God (the Bible)?