

Jews Developed This Christlike Concept Long Before Jesus

Large crowds followed our Master, but Jesus did not seek large numbers of followers. Instead, He wanted a few good men and women. He sought disciples.

The Gospel of Matthew says, “When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain.” He went up on the mountain to escape the crowds so that He could teach His disciples. It says, “After He sat down, His disciples came to Him” (Matt. 5:1).

When His disciples saw Him sit down, they came near to Him because they knew He was about to start teaching. The rabbis always taught from a seated position. In the vernacular of first-century Judaism, a rabbi sitting down is the equivalent of a pastor stepping up to a pulpit. The phrase “he sat and taught” appears commonly in rabbinic literature to refer to a rabbi discoursing on a subject of Torah. That explains why His disciples gathered around him when they saw him sit down. It was their job.

Discipleship already existed as a well-established institution within Judaism long before the appearance of Jesus and His followers. All the great sages, the rabbis, the sages among the Pharisees, and the teachers of the Torah had disciples. The Hebrew word for disciple is *talmid* (תלמיד), a word that simply means “student.” The plural is *talmidim* (תלמידים): students. A disciple’s job was to learn everything that his master had to teach.

Disciples memorized their teacher’s interpretations, explanations and exegesis of Scripture. They memorized the stories, parables, illustrations and anecdotes their teacher told. They learned to practice Torah by imitating their

teacher and incorporating his manner of observance into their own. Disciples kept the Torah the way they learned to keep it from their teacher. A disciple endeavored to become like his or her teacher: "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

After the disciple was fully trained, he became the teacher and passed on the teaching to disciples of his own, who, in turn, when fully trained, became teachers and raised up disciples of their own. They taught their disciples in the name of their own teacher, and his teacher, and his teacher's teacher, transmitting a body of oral tradition as vast as the sea. This was the method of higher, religious education in the days of Jesus.

When the disciples saw their teacher sit down, they knew what was expected of them. They had a job to do. So they stepped forward, and He began to teach.

As His disciples, we have the same job. The teacher is seated. Are you ready to learn? {eoa}

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