

RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP (LESSON 12)

The first time the word “disciple” is used in the Bible is Isaiah 8:16: “Seal up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.” This is the only reference to disciples in the English version of the Old Testament. The word means instructed and comes from a primary word meaning “to goad” or “to teach.” Earl Radmacher states, “Isaiah’s disciples put his prophecies in the form of a legal transaction probably to prove their authenticity when they were fulfilled.” This lone passage carries the idea of followers who were “instructed” to obey Isaiah’s instructions for the purpose of guarding and preserving the prophecies of their mentor. The New Living Translation renders the whole verse: “I will write down all these things as a testimony of what the LORD will do. I will entrust it to my disciples, who will pass it down to future generations.” Although discipleship is not prevalent in the Old Testament, in the New Testament the concept is clear. Discipleship has to do with preserving, guarding, and passing on a message from one person to another, from one generation to another. Unger comments, “The testimony (8:1-2; 30:8) and the law were to be bound up and sealed so that nothing might be added to or taken away from them, since they were complete. They were related to distant events...which were not understood by the unbelieving, and only in part by the believing (Psalm 25:14). What makes Biblical discipleship unique is its content. In the New Testament the discipleship of Jesus involved training followers to commit His message to others who would do the same. Paul exhorted Timothy to teach what he received from him, to faithful men, who would teach others – a total of four generations (II Timothy 2:2). Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples in every nation (Matthew 28:19). This is where Paul got the idea. In principle it is no different than the instruction Isaiah gave his disciples. The difference in the old Testament and the New Testament is in its direction. The New Testament proclaims truth about the Christ of the promise. The Old Testament proclaims truth about the promise of the Christ. Discipleship in the Old Testament had to do with declaring and preserving prophetic truths that would lead people to the Messiah/Savior. The Scriptures came to us through the centuries as “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (II Peter 1:21). This cohesive inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures required disciples to guard the accuracy and preservation of the unchangeable message God sent, beginning with the fall and the expulsion from the Garden. “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10).