Jesus Calls Four Fishermen

Teacher Background on Discipleship

Scripture uses a variety of terms to describe those people who shared in the mission and ministry of Jesus. These include: follower, disciple, apostle and more specifically, “the twelve”. It is helpful to understand how these terms are used.

Disciple
This word when traced to its Greek origin means “pupil” or “learner”. It refers to someone attached to a teacher, group or movement who not only "learns" academically but also lives a prescribed lifestyle, sometimes even in a community setting. This term is used 261 times in the New Testament. "Disciple" usually refers to the immediate followers of Jesus, but there are also disciples of John the Baptist (Luke 11:1, John 1:35), of the Pharisees (Mark 2:18, Matt 22:16), of Moses (John 9:28), or of later Christians (Acts 6:1-7).

Follower
Sometimes this verb simply means physically following someone or something else (Mark 10:32; 11:9), but at other times it is used for "those who follow" in the sense of discipleship (Matt 8:10; John 8:12).

Apostle
Again, when traced from the Greek, this term means "someone sent out; a messenger, delegate or missionary". It is from the verb apostello, which means, "to send out". In the New Testament this term sometimes refers to "the Twelve" (Matt 10:2; Mark 3:14; 6:30), but is also used of Paul (in all his letters) and other Christian missionaries like Barnabas (Acts 14:14). In Hebrews 3:1 Jesus himself is called an "apostle" sent by God.

The Twelve
This term refers to a core group of Jesus’ disciples. Their names are listed (with variations!) in Mark 3:13-19, Matt 10:1-4, Luke 6:13-16, and Acts 1:13 but not in John. It is important to note that these twelve are not the only disciples or apostles in the NT; the number is symbolically derived from the "Twelve Tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28).

Teacher Background on Mark 1: 14-20 (Jesus Calls Four Fishermen)

In Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11 and Matthew 4:12-22 Jesus calls four fishermen. They are two pairs of brothers: Simon (sometimes referred to as Peter) and Andrew and the sons of Zebedee, James and John.

In the ancient world, it was common for students/disciples to seek out a teacher (cf. Luke 9:57-62) but Jesus often reverses the dynamic, calling people to become his disciples. As an itinerant (wandering) preacher/teacher, Jesus' disciples literally had to follow him around (Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:57-62; John 1:43) but Jesus was not the only teacher who had disciples; the NT also mentions "disciples of John the Baptist and disciples of the Pharisees (Mark 2:18; 6:29; Matt 9:14; Luke 5:33).

By Jesus’ time there was a flourishing fishing industry in Galilee. The lake teemed with fish to such an extent that it was possible to catch them by throwing a weighted circle of net (the cast net) from the shore and then hauling it in. The usual procedure was to suspend a seine net with weights below and corks above between two fishing-boat and trap the fish in a circle of net in the shallows. Some were sold straight away, but others were salted.
Dragnet fishing, spear fishing and even rod and line were in use. The work was often dangerous because the lake could become stormy almost without warning. Sometimes this was caused by cold winds rushing down from the snow-covered slopes of Mt Hermon; sometimes by hot air rising from the below-sea-level lake and mixing with the cooler air coming over the hills from the Mediterranean.

Recent archaeological evidence has shown that the fishing industry based on the Sea of Galilee was huge. Thousands were engaged in it, both as fishermen and as workers in support industries like boat building, salting and transport. There are and there were enormous quantities of fish in the Lake. Eighteen species were caught, of which ten were commercially important. Among these some three species may be identified in the Gospels.

In the winter of 1985/6, there was a serious shortage of snow falling on Mount Hermon. This meant that the Jordan was deprived of water which had a dramatic effect upon the level of the Sea of Galilee. By mid-January the level of the lake was so low that a wide rim of mud circled it.

However, the unusual circumstances produced a discovery of great importance. As the water receded even further, two members of a lake-side kibbutz spied a strange structure out in the mud. It turned out to be the remains of a very ancient fishing boat. Pottery found in the boat, plus details of the craft’s construction confirmed that it dated from the time of Jesus! It was 8.5m long and 2.5m wide. Close examination has revealed that although the boat is made of cedar and oak, many different kinds of wood were used to repair it. Carpenters would have used whatever wood was to hand.