

“From the beginning, God chose to speak and act within the context of human culture, so it is no surprise that his Son would do the same. Jesus lived like a Jew, talked like a Jew, and worshiped like a Jew. His words, actions, and teaching methods were in keeping with the customs, traditions, and practices of the Semitic culture into which he was born.” Ray Vander Laan, forward, *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus*, Lois Tverberg 2012b, 10

“A disciple’s goal was to gain the rabbi’s knowledge, but even more importantly, to become like him in character. It was expected that when the disciple became mature, he would take his rabbi’s teaching to the community, add his own understanding, and raise up disciples of his own.” Lois Tverberg, *Listening to the Language of the Bible*, (2004, 125)

#### Nuggets:

1. To understand how Jesus’ disciples understood a calling to discipleship and what all that implied, is a key element in that, unlike us today, they did not need contextual explanations what discipleship was, and what the process of discipleship looked like.
2. Jesus was called “Rabbi,” by followers and opponents, alike. Jesus acted as a rabbi: His theology and lifestyle are grounded in Torah. His teaching (and thought) is in a framework of purity and Jewish piety, and he also looked for the restoration of Israel. He also followed rabbinic tradition of teaching in open outdoors. Jesus wore the tassels as indication of his observance of Torah.
3. In Jesus’ time “rabbi” was an honored title, but not a formal leader of the religious community.
4. John the Baptist is called “rabbi” in John’s Gospel (3:22-26; 4:1-3). Neither Jesus, nor John, nor do the scriptures mention a rabbi in the Gospels, perhaps one can infer they apprenticed with a rabbi from the Essene community at Qumran (in the wilderness). Their ministries were similar, and the fact that Jesus was known as a rabbi with disciples suggested that he went through some educational process in order to be recognized and accepted as such by the people.
5. Jewish schooling began with Ezra, the prophet/rabbi who directed Israel’s spiritual life after they returned from captivity.
6. Scholars are unsure of the literacy rate in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, however, the general thought is literacy among male Jews in Roman Palestine may have been as high as 10%, general population, 3%.
7. Jewish schooling didn’t become structured until late 1<sup>st</sup> century-early 2<sup>nd</sup> century.
8. Jewish schooling loosely:
  - a. Bet Sefer: “House of the Book” Ages 6-10, focused on reading, writing, and memorizing the Torah.
  - b. Bet Talmud: “House of Learning” Ages 10-11, focused on studying oral interpretations of Torah and Hebrew scriptures.
  - c. Bet Midrash: “House of Study” focus on choosing a rabbi with whom they live and travel, to become like his rabbi. At age 30, he may become a full-fledged rabbi. Historians surmise this training may have been more like an apprenticeship.
9. Hillel the Elder was the prominent rabbi during Jesus’ time. His grandson, Rabbi Gamaliel, is mentioned in Acts 17:39.
10. Bar Mitzvahs were not practiced until the Middle Ages

Conclusions: Jesus and his cousin, John, were rabbis, with disciples. Jesus chose his disciples, not the other way around. Jesus’ disciples would have heard Jesus, or heard of him because Jesus was already teaching. Some of his disciples have been educated for a few years at least, and because they were part of the community and culture they well understood the life-altering decision to follow Rabbi Jesus.

