



Conversion and discipleship are New Testament concepts.¹

It appears, however, that God gave a parallel for these concepts in the law on slavery in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament as a picture book.

The Old Testament is sometimes called a picture book of the New Testament.

Jesus said that the scriptures of the Old Testament tell of who He is (John 5:39).

Each section of the tabernacle and all the laws concerning the ministry of the priests and the sacrifices have a deep spiritual significance, which all point towards Jesus.

Likewise, Jesus entered into a conversation with two men on the way to Emmaus:

- *And beginning with Moses all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)*

As an example of what was going to happen to Him He referred to Jonah, who stayed three days in the belly of the fish (Matthew 12:40) and as a future image of society, the time of Noah and Lot (Luke 17:26-30).

This is how Paul saw a warning for a holy lifestyle in the history of the Jewish people, and wrote:

- *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. (1 Corinthe 10:11)*

Conversion and discipleship are not found literally in the Old Testament.

There is, however, a parallel to be found in the law on slavery², in the person of a Hebrew man or woman who sells him- or herself as a slave, as it is written:

- *If any of **your people** - **Hebrew men or women** - sell themselves to you, ... (Deuteronomy 15:12)*

A summary of the law on slavery.

A Hebrew man.

A Hebrew man or woman is someone from the Jewish people, an Israelite among the Israelites, who, for whatever reason, is no longer able to support him- or herself.

- *If any of **your fellow Israelites become poor** and are unable to support themselves among you, ... (Leviticus 25:35)*

A Hebrew slave.

This man was able to sell himself in order to survive.

- *If any of **your fellow Israelites become poor** and **sell themselves to you**, ... (Leviticus 25:39)*

Hebrew people were not forced into slavery, for:

- *If someone is caught **kidnapping a fellow Israelite** and treating or selling them as a slave, the kidnapper must die. (Deuteronomy 24:7)*

¹ Study: Receiving New Life.

² See: Exodus 21:2-11, Leviticus 25:39-55 and Deuteronomy 15:12-18.



Neither were they to be regarded as merchandise.

- ... **they must not be sold as slaves.** (Leviticus 25:42)

The relationship with a Hebrew slave.

Although a master had 'bought' a Hebrew man as a slave, he was not allowed to do as he wished with him. He was not to regard him as his 'property'.

- ... **do not make them work as slaves.** (Leviticus 25:39)
- **Do not rule over them ruthlessly,**... (Leviticus 25:43)
- ... **you must not rule over your fellow Israelites** ruthlessly. (Leviticus 25:46)
- **They are to be treated as hired workers** or temporary residents among you. (Leviticus 25:40)

A Hebrew slave only served for a certain term.

A Hebrew man sold himself for the time up to the Year of Jubilee, or for the term of six years. The master had to allow him to leave again as a free man in the Year of Jubilee, or in the seventh year.

- ... **they are to work for you until the Year of Jubilee. Then they ... are to be released,** ... (Leviticus 25:40-41)
- **If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything.** (Exodus 21:2)

If a married man sold himself as a slave, he was later allowed to leave with his wife.

- **If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him.** (Exodus 21:3 / Leviticus 25:41)

However:

- **If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.** (Exodus 21:4)

The master was obliged to give a 'golden handshake' to a slave who departed.

- **And when you release them, do not send them away empty-handed.** Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the LORD your God has blessed you. (Deuteronomy 15:12-14)

A Hebrew slave was not obliged to depart.

A Hebrew slave could choose either to depart, or to continue serving his master.

- **But if your servant says to you, "I do not want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and is well off with you,** ... (Deuteronomy 15:16)
- **But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,'** ... (Exodus 21:5)

This decision for life was confirmed and made public.

The desire of a Hebrew man to continue serving his master as a slave for the rest of his life had to be **confirmed publicly**.

- ... **then his master must take him before the judges (Elohiym),** ... (Exodus 21:6)

'Elohiym' is translated as 'judges' in this Bible verse, according to the NIV translation.



However, 'Elohiym' is translated as '**God**' in almost all the 2,241 verses in the Old Testament. The Dutch Naardense Bijbel also translates it as '**God**', just as the French Louis Segond translates it as '**Dieu**'.

Groot Nieuws and NBV, other Dutch translations, translate this verse as '**sanctuary**'.

Het Boek (a paraphrase of the Bible in modern Dutch) translates it as '**judges**', like the English NIV translation.

In any case, the agreement between a Hebrew slave and the master was made before the throne of God as it were, or endorsed by judges.

Both interpretations indicate a public announcement before a 'higher authority', whereby the Hebrew slave's decision became a life-long agreement, which could not be broken.

This decision was also **made known publicly**.

- *He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life. (Deuteronomy 15:17 / Exodus 21:6)*

This law was also valid for female Hebrew slaves.

This law was valid for both men and women.

- *Do the same for your **female servant**. (Deuteronomy 15:17)*

The symbolism in the law.

The Hebrew man or woman.

A converted man can be seen in the Hebrew man or woman.

The Hebrew man or woman was not only a descendant of Abraham because of natural descent through birth, but he/she belonged to God's people, because he/she was deemed to live like Abraham, who believed in God.

As the Hebrew man was a descendant of Abraham by faith, we, who have been converted, are counted as spiritual descendants of Abraham.

The apostle Paul wrote:

- *Abraham **believed God**, and it was credited to him as righteousness. (Galatians 3:6)*
- *(**So we, too,**) ... have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be **justified by faith in Christ**. (Galatians 2:16)*

He concluded:

- *Understand, then, that **those who have faith** are children of Abraham. (Galatians 3:7)*
- *So those who rely on faith are **blessed along** with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:9)*

The Hebrew man was unable to support himself.

The New Testament recounts an incident when an Israelite, who came to Jesus, asked Him:

- *Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life? (Matthew 19:16)*



Jesus answered:

- *If you want to enter life, **keep the commandments**. (Matthew 19:17)*

Obedience to the law did not seem to give him full assurance in his heart however, for he asked:

- *All these I have kept, **What do I still lack?** (Matthew 19:20)*

This demonstrates the emptiness, the spiritual poverty, which Paul also lamented:

- *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?*
(Romans 7:24)

Paul recognised that obedience to the law caused an inner struggle:

- *For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. (Romans 7:18-19)*

In general, natural man who has been converted has great difficulty living consciously as a disciple of Jesus and according to the will of God.

The image of the Hebrew man who was unable to support himself and fell into poverty.

The Hebrew man sold himself as a slave - a parallel of the disciple of Jesus.

The Hebrew man who sold himself as a slave can be seen as an image of a **converted man** who decides consciously to place **his life completely under the dominion and the authority of the Lord Jesus**.

This could be seen as an image of a disciple of Jesus.

The Hebrew man who fell into poverty placed himself under the dominion and the authority of the master.

He relinquished the control of his own life and sold himself as a slave.

As Paul saw only one solution to his frustration:

- *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?*
(Romans 7:24)
- **Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!** (Romans 7:25)

And Jesus said to the Israelite, who discovered that he was missing something in his life:

- *If you want to be perfect, ... come, **follow me**. (Matthew 19:21)*

The life of a Hebrew slave - parallel of discipleship.

Someone who came into the master's house as a slave had to leave his old life and his old habits completely behind, in order to be able to live according to the norms and the customs in the master's house.

He came under the dominion and the authority of the master, as a result of which many cares and responsibilities fell away from him. From now on he only had to apply himself to carrying out the assignments the master gave him correctly.

He was given a place to sleep, clothing and food and everything necessary for him to be able to do his work well.



Because of the law on slavery, he was well treated and he was allowed to leave the master's house as a free man at the appointed time if he chose to do so.

Following Jesus is a voluntary choice.

Jesus never forces anyone to obey Him.

No-one is obliged to entrust his life to Jesus. Everyone can also freely decide to depart from Him again.

However, Jesus will provide everyone who 'sells' himself to Him with means of support and everything necessary for him to be able to carry out the assignments given him.

He said:

- ***So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*** (Matthew 6:31-33)

Discipleship is a choice for life.

Old Testament law gives a number of reasons why a slave decided **to remain** serving the master for the rest of his life.

- he lived well with the master.
- he loved the master.
- he loved the master's family.
- he loved his wife, whom the master had given him, and he loved his children.
(they had to decide independently whether they would leave at the end of **their** term, or stay to serve the master for ever)

Discipleship means that someone recognises Jesus as the highest authority in his life and places himself under His authority and loving direction, because he:

- loves Jesus.
- loves the church (the family).
- takes responsibility for the people who have accepted Jesus as their Lord, partially as a result of his efforts.

This decision was confirmed in the 'spiritual' world.

The slave's decision to remain tied to the master's house was confirmed:

- by bringing him to **the judges** (God).

The agreement was confirmed by the slave's repetition of the decision before God or the official authority (depending on the Bible translation).

A converted, Christian man's decision to desire to serve Jesus in every detail of his life will be confirmed in the same way as when he was converted, as Paul wrote in this respect:

- *For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is **with your mouth** that you profess your faith and are **saved**.* (Romans 10:10)

According to Paul, a man is saved and receives eternal life in the presence of God, when he **confesses his faith** in Jesus Christ **with his mouth**.



In other words: says so out loud.

A converted man, who desires to serve Jesus for the whole of the rest of his life and has placed himself consciously under His authority, will therefore have to pronounce his decision out loud in prayer.

One then comes into the house of God as a slave, to finally be accepted as **His child**.

This is discipleship, the practice John writes about at the beginning of his Gospel:

- *... to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, **he gave the right to become children of God.** (John 1:12)*

God makes no distinction between men and women in this respect. Neither does He take account of the age at which a converted man entrusts his life to Jesus.

Everyone who wishes to serve Jesus for the rest of his life, receives the birthright of the firstborn, as it is written:

- *... **you have come ... to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ... to the church of the firstborn**, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, ... to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, ... (Hebrews 12:22-24)*

This is almost impossible to comprehend, but it is the same right as that of The Firstborn, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

As Paul wrote:

- *For those God foreknew he also **predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he (Jesus) might be the **firstborn among many brothers and sisters.** (Romans 8:28-29)*

The decision was confirmed in the 'visible' world.

The slave's choice was made public:

- by his ear being **pinned to the door with an awl**.

Pinning the slave to the door by his **ear** made it clear to everyone who went in and out of the master's house, that this slave committed himself to be **obedient** to the master's house for the rest of his life.

A disciple of Jesus will be obedient to Him:

- according to what is written in the Word, the Bible, the Handbook for life
- and according to what Jesus confirms in his heart by the Holy Spirit.

By the **permanent sign in his ear** it became clear to the outside world that the slave acted on behalf of a master. This laid a great responsibility on the slave, who became his master's 'visiting card' by this visible sign.

In the same way, a disciple of Jesus is His 'visiting card' in this world.

This places a great responsibility on his shoulders.

Jesus told His disciples:

- *You are the salt of the earth. (Matthew 5:13)*
- *You are the light of the world. (Matthew 5:14)*



- *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)*

Conclusion.

John writes in His Gospel:

- *... to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)*

Believing in Jesus is called conversion.³

Everyone can remain in this stage of conversion.

However, whoever believes in Jesus **receives** the **right**, the authority, **to become a child** of God.

A **converted** man, who consciously recognises Jesus as the highest authority in his life and places himself under His direction and authority, goes on to live in an intimate relationship with Him, as His disciple, and is adopted as a child.

As a **disciple of Jesus** He will give him (her) greater assignments in the Kingdom of God.

In principle, discipleship⁴ is an automatic consequence of conversion.

In practice, however, it appears that someone who has come to believe in Jesus, only gives Him **complete** authority over his or her life later.

³ Study: Conversion.

⁴ Study: Discipleship (1).