**The Different Names Followers of Jesus Christ Were Called**

***The brethren*** (which includes both women and men) is the first ­mentioned and one of the most frequent names for Christians in Acts. It first occurs in 1:15 (RSV) and, in the Greek, is used some 23 times after that, although NRSV almost always changes it to believers.

The word points toward relationships within the group: brotherly and sisterly love, mutuality and sharing. Perhaps the best commentary on its wealth of meaning is the community described in 2:42-­47 and 4:32-­35: the new Christians showed themselves to be one family in the Lord by sharing their possessions and holding everything in common.

Even in texts where this dimension is not so apparent, such a loving, caring relationship is implied, as evidenced in group solidarity or showing hospitality (cf. 1:15; 9:30; 12:17; 15:3; 16:40; 17:10; 21:17; 28:14).

***Disciples***(including the singular *disciple*) is found 27 times to designate followers of Jesus.

Many of these are word­-choice variations of *brethren*, and the meanings overlap, although where an individual Christian is meant the word *disciple* is used.

Unlike *brother* or *brethren*, it is never used in direct address. This term emphasizes the divine-­human relationships, in contrast to *brethren*, where human connections are primary.

For example, *disciples* is appropriately used for the body of Christians spoken of objectively in 6:1, 2, 7 and again in 9:1, 19, 25-­26, where Saul is in the process of breaking into the group.

Brethren, on the other hand, is more suitable for the discussions before, during, and after the council of Jerusalem, where the term is used ten times (15:1­40).

***The church***is another fairly common designation for Christians in Acts, found 17 times in the singular and three times in the plural.

It is a translation of *ekklesia* \* (lit., "called out") and was used by the Greeks of a public assembly of citizens (as in Acts 19:39).

It was also the term by which the Jews referred to Moses' congregation in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). In Acts, as a collective noun, it means either the Christian movement in general (5:11; 8:3; 9:31) or a local congregation (11:26; 13:1; 14:23).

***Believer*,**(sing. or pl.) is always in participle form in Greek, literally "the (one or ones) believing." It is appropriately used of those who have just recently come to faith in the Lord (as in 2:44; 4:32; 19:18) or of specified types of Christians (like *circumcised believers* in 10:45, or *believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees* in 15:5).

This designation, like *disciple(s)*, stresses one's relationship to Christ. It is found eight times in Acts. In one interesting verse, 18:27, Luke speaks of the *brethren* of Ephesus writing to the *disciples* at Corinth about Apollos, who went there and helped the *believers* (*those who through grace had believed*, RSV).

This illustrates the author's use of different terms for variety's sake and with little difference in meaning.

***The Way***is another significant name by which early Christianity was known, a term Luke uses six times in Acts (9:2 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

It is likely a name the followers of Jesus chose for themselves, based on the idea of *the way of the Lord* (Luke 3:4; Acts 18:25), *the way of God* (Luke 20:21; Acts 18:26), and *a way of salvation* (Acts 16:17).

It is found only in Acts and is always used in connection with Paul: his earlier attacks on those who *belonged to the Way* (9:2; 22:4), a name given to believers in Ephesus, where Paul ministered (19:9, 23), and Paul's admission before Felix that he worshiped God according to this sect (24:14).

Four times in Acts the followers of Christ are called *the saints* (9:13, 32, 41; 26:10). This term, rather common in Paul's letters and in Revelation and found a couple times in Hebrews and Jude, does not refer to any excellence to which Christians have attained, but rather to their *call* to a life of holiness.

Two times in Acts, the saints refer to believers under persecution, suggesting that they are precious in God's sight (9:13; 26:10). The other two are of a more general character, simply a variant of other designations (9:32, 41).

***Nazarenes*** is used only in 24:5. It occurs elsewhere in the NT and in Matthew 2:23, where it is applied to Jesus because of his connection with Nazareth. It appears to have started as a nickname by outsiders and may or may not have been taken up by Christians. In Acts 24:5, Tertullus, an enemy of the faith, calls the *Nazarenes* a *sect*.

**Finally, *Christian*, the name universally used today to designate those who believe in Jesus, is found only twice in Acts (11:26 and 26:28). See the notes on those texts for its probable origin and meaning. It is found in only one other passage in the rest of the NT (1 Pet. 4:16).**