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**INSTANT
EXPERT**

JESUS

→ NICK PAGE

INSTANT EXPERT



GET TO GRIPS WITH THE
HISTORICAL JESUS AND
BECOME AN "INSTANT EXPERT"
ON ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST
FAMOUS MEN

→ **He never** ran a country, led an army, or wrote a book. He lived and died in a geographic backwater. But today two billion people round the world claim to follow him.

Yet for someone who has had so great an impact on history and human civilization, who Jesus Christ was and what his message entailed, is remarkably poorly understood.

Nick Page cuts to the core of what the historical **Jesus** said and did: his teaching, stories, and miracles. Above all he outlines Jesus' radical message – at the same time both inspiring and offensive.

→ **Nick Page** is the author of over sixty books for adults and children, including the best-selling *Tabloid Bible*, *God's Dangerous Book: A History of the Bible*, *The One Stop Bible Atlas*, and many others. He has condensed this knowledge to home in on the key facts you need to know about Jesus in one handy volume.

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JESUS

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1. The Good News

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1)

It's a very odd thing, when you think about it, that a peasant worker from the fringes of the Roman Empire should turn out to be the most influential figure in human history.

Today, 2 billion people around the world claim to be followers of Jesus, and their number is growing every day.

The figure of Jesus – his sayings, the stories about him – dominate the cultural history of the West. His image fills our art galleries. His stories have influenced our language: we talk of good Samaritans, of the return of the prodigal son. Buildings built in his honour are found in towns and cities around the world. His name is even used as a swear word by those who would never call themselves believers.

Jesus' significance is not limited to Christianity. In Islam he is a prophet. Hindus and Buddhists find much in his teaching which resonates with their

own practices. Gandhi, for example, was directly influenced by Jesus in his use of non-violent protest.

People from all races and social backgrounds identify with this man. Rich westerners in London and New York claim to follow him, as do peasant farmers in Colombia and factory workers in China. He is claimed as a capitalist by one side and a Marxist by the other.

So who was he? What is it about Jesus that inspires such fascination and devotion?

It is impossible, of course, in a book this size to summarize everything that has been written about Jesus. Even in the very earliest times, the writer of John's Gospel was aware that he had to leave out many other things that Jesus did. "... if every one of them were written down," he mused, "I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

So, in this book I'm going to concentrate on the historical Jesus and the claims the early church made about him. These claims were made in four texts, four "biographies" of Jesus, which we call the Gospels.

The story of Jesus is told in four books within the Bible: the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is difficult to classify these documents as there is nothing quite like them in any other ancient literature. Written in Greek, they are part biography, part record of Jesus' teaching, part interpretation of who Jesus was. The authors called this new type of writing *euangelion* – good news. In old English this was *gōd* ("good") and *spel* ("news"). Hence, gospel.

1. THE GOOD NEWS

Most experts agree that Mark is the earliest of the four. Luke and Matthew use their own accounts (97 per cent in Luke, 90 per cent in Matthew and 88 per cent in Luke). The extra teaching material and stories in the other Gospels cover most of the same ground in the same order, using similar language.

The fourth Gospel, John, has a different perspective and is unique in style. It includes many of the same events as the other Gospels but also includes long speeches by Jesus that do not appear elsewhere. John's Gospel is written in terms of chronology and shows Jesus coming to Jerusalem and went there for a

The early church attributed the Gospels to different figures from early church history: one of Jesus' disciples; Mark, a friend of Paul; Luke, an associate of Paul; and John, a friend of Jesus. They saw them as the most reliable sources of information about Jesus. An early church leader called Irenaeus in the mid-second century AD, talks about the Gospels which are called Gospels.

GNOSTIC GOSPELS

In recent years a lot of attention has been paid to a group of writings known as the Gnostic Gospels. The earliest of these dates from the second century, but most of them come from the third and fourth centuries.

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The fourth Gospel, John, has a different structure and perspective and is unique in style. Although it shares many of the same events as the other Gospels, it also includes long speeches by Jesus and events which do not appear elsewhere. John's Gospel is very detailed in terms of chronology and shows that Jesus spent time in Jerusalem and went there for a number of festivals.

The early church attributed the Gospels to four different figures from early church history: Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples; Mark, a Jewish Christian from Jerusalem; Luke, an associate of Paul; and John, another of Jesus' disciples. They saw these four Gospels as the most reliable sources of information about Jesus' life. An early church leader called Justin, writing in the mid-second century AD, talks about "the memoirs ... which are called Gospels".

GNOSTIC GOSPELS

In recent years a lot of attention has been given to a group of writings known as the Gnostic Gospels. The earliest of these dates from the mid-second century, but most of them come from much later.

They were written to support the teaching and claims of various forms of mystical Christianity (Gnostic means hidden knowledge). They were written by Greeks, which is why Jesus is presented in them as detached from his Jewish background and portrayed as a Greek mystical philosopher. Some may contain nuggets of original material – the so-called Gospel of Thomas may contain some original sayings of Jesus – but on the whole they tell us a lot about what the Gnostics believed and nothing very much about the historical Jesus.

In recent years it has become fashionable to cast the Gospels as works of homage, if not downright fiction. But they claim something quite different. They claim to be eyewitness accounts. Here's the beginning of Luke's Gospel:

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

(Luke 1:1-4)

1. THE GOOD NEWS

Luke claims to have created the first, incidentally – from eyewitnesses. And he to persuade or reassure a Theophilus, of the truth.

If we are going to explore a meaningful way, we have to see that the Gospels are reliable. hordes of scholars argue over whether they are original or not, whether he wrote them, or even who wrote them. The approach of this book is to deal with reliable testimony from witnesses and arranged for people good news.

And what is this good news?

It is that Jesus is the Son of God who inaugurates a new kingdom. This is what Christians believe. This is why the Gospels were written.

This is, perhaps, where the good news begins. It is, after all, why he is so important. It is because the first followers of Jesus believed that God. "Long ago God spoke to us in various ways by the prophets and various ways by the apostles in a church letter called Hebrews. He has spoken to us by a Son, the heir of all things, through whom all things were created" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

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Luke claims to have created an ordered account – not the first, incidentally – from traditions passed down from eyewitnesses. And he is writing with a purpose: to persuade or reassure a high-ranking Roman, Theophilus, of the truth.

If we are going to explore the life of Jesus in any meaningful way, we have to work on the assumption that the Gospels are reliable sources. And, although hordes of scholars argue over what sayings of Jesus are original or not, whether he did the things attributed to him, or even who wrote the Gospels in the first place, the approach of this book is to assume that we are dealing with reliable testimony, gathered from different witnesses and arranged for one purpose: to give people good news.

And what is this good news?

It is that Jesus is the Son of God, who came to inaugurate a new kingdom on earth: the kingdom of God. This is what Christians believe about Jesus, and it is why the Gospels were written.

This is, perhaps, where we should start with Jesus. It is, after all, why he is so famous and influential. It is because the first followers believed him to be God. "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets," says an early church letter called Hebrews, "but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1–2). In John's Gospel it says,

"No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (John 1:18).

Now this is an astonishing and radical claim. And indeed, a highly dangerous one, because it put the teachings of Christianity on a direct collision course with a group of people who also saw themselves as gods: the Roman emperors.

2. Emperors, Kin

"In those days a decree of Emperor Augustus that all men should be registered." (Luke 2:1)

Jesus was born into a land that had been conquered by the

Power was focused in the elite, at the top of which was the emperor. This reminded its subjects of the emperor's power, not only through routine administration but also through the imposition of taxes and tariffs. The emperor's power was also reinforced by the propaganda of the imperial cult, which portrayed the emperor as a

Before his death in AD 14, Augustus wrote an autobiography listing his triumphs. It was called *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, or *the Divine Augustus*. Jews, on the other hand, were monotheistic. For them, the emperor was not a god. Any other claim was blasphemy. In the empire there was a monotheistic religion. The Romans promoted a religion that portrayed the emperors as divine. This

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2. Emperors, Kings, and Messiahs

**"In those days a decree went out from
Emperor Augustus that all the world should be
registered." (Luke 2:1)**

Jesus was born into a land under occupation. Judea
had been conquered by the Romans in 63 BC.

Power was focused in the hands of a tiny ruling
elite, at the top of which was the emperor. Rome
reminded its subjects of their conquered status
not only through routine acts of brutality, and the
imposition of taxes and tariffs, but also through
the propaganda of the imperial PR machine, which
portrayed the emperor as a god.

Before his death in AD 14, Augustus composed an
autobiography listing his triumphs and achievements.
It was called *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The Acts of
the Divine Augustus*. Jews, of course, were rigidly
monotheistic. For them, there was only one God and
any other claim was blasphemy. But everywhere else
in the empire there was a multitude of gods, and the
Romans promoted a religious cult which viewed their
emperors as divine. This language filled the official

pronouncements about Augustus: in many places he is described as “the son of god”, or “saviour of the world”; “the bringer of peace” or “the lord of all”. An inscription from Preiene, written just a few years before the birth of Jesus, describes how providence sent Augustus as “a saviour” and states that “the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning for the world of the good news that came by reason of him”.

This is exactly the kind of language which Christians used about Jesus. So the claims that the Gospels make about Jesus are, in fact, more than startling or weird. They are seditious. Revolutionary. Every time that Christians said “Jesus is Lord” they were, in effect, saying “so Augustus isn’t”.

**“In the days of King Herod of Judea...”
(Luke 1:5)**

Politically, the emperor might have been the ultimate power, but he was a long way away in Rome, and the Roman Province in which Jesus was born was overseen by the governor of Syria, who had his headquarters in Antioch. However, the Romans were great at delegation and they ruled their territories through client-kings, local rulers. At the time of Jesus’ birth, the Romans were governing the country through Herod the Great. Herod came to power in 37 BC with the aid of the Romans, and he ruled for over thirty years. Herod was not Jewish, he was Idumean, from the region south of Palestine. Although he converted to Judaism, he was really only a nominal Jew.

2. EMPERORS, KINGS, AND MESSIAHS

Later, when Herod died, the kingdom was divided between three of his sons: Archelaus, Philip, and Herodias. Archelaus only ruled for ten years before the Romans removed him for his excessive cruelty and replaced him with a Roman military governor, a prefect. The prefect was based in Caesarea, and he delegated government of Jerusalem and the surrounding area to the high priests, who managed the Temple.

At the local level, the Romans employed a network of tax collectors to raise revenue. Tax collectors purchased the right to collect taxes, by guaranteeing their masters a certain amount of taxes and tolls. So they made as much as they could, by whatever means. Ordinary people hated the tax collectors, who were viewed as collaborators and extortionists.

SAMARITANS

Between Jerusalem and Galilee, in the region known as Samaria, the home of the Samaritans. The origins of the Samaritans are uncertain. Tradition held that these were the descendants of the Israelites who were settled in the area by the Assyrians several centuries before. Jews and Samaritans often hated each other. The Samaritans, like the Jews, were monotheistic – they worshipped only one God, Israel. But they had their own, unique traditions and beliefs.

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At the local level, the Romans and their client-kings employed a network of tax collectors to gather their revenue. Tax collectors purchased the rights to collect taxes, by guaranteeing their masters a certain amount of taxes and tolls. So they made profit by collecting as much as they could, by whatever means. Naturally, ordinary people hated the tax collectors, whom they viewed as collaborators and extortionists.

SAMARITANS

Between Jerusalem and Galilee was the region known as Samaria, the home of the Samaritans. The origins of the Samaritans are obscure. Jewish tradition held that these were the people who were settled in the area by the Assyrians many centuries before. Jews and Samaritans hated each other. The Samaritans, like the Jews, were monotheistic – they worshipped Yahweh, God of Israel. But they had their own, slightly different

theology and, crucially, their own temple on Mount Gerizim.

"When shall we take them back?" asks a later rabbi about the Samaritans. "When they renounce Mount Gerizim and confess Jerusalem and the resurrection of the dead."

The bulk of the populace in Palestine were peasants. They might have some land on which they grew their own produce, but life was hard. They had to pay taxes to the Romans and tithes to the Temple, and if the harvest failed they were in trouble. They might have had to borrow money from the local tax collector, or from the Temple, which served as a kind of central bank. And then they had to hope for a bumper harvest next year, because if they couldn't repay the loan, their land was forfeit. And if you were a landless peasant labourer, you were really poor. You relied on going to the marketplace to find a job.

At the very bottom of society were those who had nothing: beggars, widows, the dispossessed. If you were blind or deaf or lame, if you had a skin disease, if you had a demon, then you had no hope except to rely on the generosity of others.

"... he was waiting expectant for the kingdom of God." (Luke 21:31)

So, from the time of the prophets, the Jews were almost constantly under foreign powers. There was a brief period of independence of the Old and New Testament, but the yoke of their Greek overlords was almost unbearable. The Romans arrived and took over.

In such circumstances, Jews were waiting for a deliverer. They believed that he would free them from oppression, just as he had done when he led them on the exodus. They believed he would achieve this by sending the Messiah.

Messiah is a Hebrew word meaning "anointed one". The Greek word for "anointed" is *christos*, which we get Christ. Different Jewish groups had different opinions over who the Messiah would be like. Theoretically, Jews expected three figures: a king from the line of David, a priest from the line of Aaron and Zacharias, and a prophet who would appear at the arrival of the other two. But the most common was the king figure.

This king would drive out the Romans and restore his illustrious forebear David's kingdom. He would drive out the Philistines. A psalm which was often quoted in the prophecy said, "The Lord says to my king, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'" (Psalm 110:1; see Luke 20:43).

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"... he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God." (Luke 23:51)

So, from the time of the prophets onwards, the Jews were almost constantly under the control of foreign powers. There was a brief period between the times of the Old and New Testament when they overthrew the yoke of their Greek overlords and gained some independence, but that ended in 63 BC when the Romans arrived and took over.

In such circumstances, Jews began to look to a deliverer. They believed that God would rescue them from oppression, just as he had all those centuries ago when he led them on the exodus from Egypt. And God would achieve this by sending a messiah.

Messiah is a Hebrew word which means "anointed one". The Greek word for "anointed" is *christos*, from which we get Christ. Different kinds of Judaisms had different opinions over what the messiah would be like. Theoretically, Jews expected two messianic figures: a king from the line of David and a high priest from the line of Aaron and Zadok. Some also expected a third figure: a prophet who would announce the arrival of the other two. But the main focus was on the king figure.

This king would drive out Israel's enemies, as his illustrious forebear David had driven out the Philistines. A psalm which was seen as a messianic prophecy said, "The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'" (Psalm 110:1; see Luke 20:43). Victory in battle was

non-negotiable: it was part of the messiah's job description.

The messiah was not a divine figure, but an anointed human being. He would bring in a new age of peace and prosperity. Most of all, the messiah would be a spectacular, high-profile success. He would not, for instance, be a peasant leader from the middle of nowhere who ended up being crucified by the Romans.

I mean, *as if*.

"Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!" (Matthew 16:11)

Judaism in the first century was not one single, unified thing. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus, for example, talks about four types: the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and something he calls cryptically "the fourth way". And even within those groupings there were differences in theology.

The two main groups in Jesus' day were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees started as a grass-roots holiness movement. They were attempting to redefine Judaism in a way that actually helped those in the villages and small towns obey the Jewish religious law. So they built up a huge store of secondary legislation around things like Sabbath observance and the various Jewish purity laws.

The problem was that adding all these other clarifications and observations seemed to make life more complicated. This is Jesus' main criticism of them. The Pharisees believed that they were helping

people to worship, but Jesus charged them with burdening people with more rules.

Jesus had strong words for scribes, whom he called them "whitewashed tombs". They looked great but they were full of hypocrisy. Jesus also had friends among the Pharisees. He was found eating in their houses in Capernaum (Matthew 11:37; 14:1). Some Pharisees, such as Nicodemus, became disciples. They warned Jesus not to go to Jerusalem because the Jews wanted to kill him (Luke 13:31).

The opponents of the Pharisees were the Sadducees. They were an urban, aristocratic group in Jerusalem, with a particular focus on the wealthy and the powerful. It is likely that the high priest and the ruling elite were Sadducees. The Pharisees, who drew on Jewish tradition, the Psalms and the prophets, thought that only the Torah – the "Law", or the Jewish Scriptures – was authoritative. Jesus said that the Pharisees "had the key to the kingdom of heaven" and "delivered to the people the observances by succession from the fathers." But he also said that the Sadducees reject the Law and the Prophets, and that the Law of Moses is not written in the law of Moses. It is that the Sadducees reject the Law and the Prophets.

The Essenes were a more extreme group. Some people think that the Qumran community, who hid the Dead Sea Scrolls, were Essenes. None of the scrolls mention the name of Jesus. They were a fundamentalist, ultra-pious group who lived in the towns and cities but

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The Essenes were a more extreme, radical group.
 Some people think that the Qumran community, who
 hid the Dead Sea Scrolls, were Essenes, although
 none of the scrolls mention the word "Essene".
 They were a fundamentalist, ultra-purity group who
 lived in the towns and cities but kept themselves

to themselves, which may be why they are not mentioned in the Gospels. The other group Josephus mentions – “the fourth way” – may equate to the Zealots. These were a religious-political group dedicated to armed rebellion against the Romans. Jesus’ followers included a former zealot – Simon, “who was called the Zealot” (Luke 6:15).

“What is written in the law? What do you read there?” (Luke 10:26)

The Torah was, for all Judaisms, the bedrock of their belief. From this set of books – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – Jews drew their understanding of themselves as uniquely called, God’s chosen people.

The Torah was behind all of the distinctive practices and beliefs of the Jews. In a world full of literally thousands of pagan gods, the Jews were monotheists. Why? Because the Torah told them to be so. Every day, devout Jews recited a prayer from the Torah: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4–5).

They observed the Sabbath. This was a uniquely Jewish custom. From sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday no work was done. The time was set aside for the Sabbath meal, for going to synagogue and for resting from work. They followed Jewish purity legislation. To the Jews things were either pure or

2. EMPERORS, KINGS, AND MESSIAHS

impure, there was no in-between. Jews – were pure; Gentiles were impure. Jews were clean, other kinds were unclean.

Jews were supposed to observe festivals. Adult male Jews were expected to go to Jerusalem for the three main festivals: Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles. While not everyone did this, many made the effort to go at least once a year. (And talking of adult males, circumcision was required for all Jewish males in later life.)

FESTIVALS

The three main festivals were Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. All three were mentioned in the Torah and, particularly, in the story of the Exodus from Egypt, when God had rescued the Israelites from slavery.

- Passover commemorated the escape from Egypt.
- Pentecost was a harvest festival, associated with the giving of the Law at Sinai.
- Tabernacles was a commemoration of the time when the Israelites lived in tents in the wilderness.

There were extra festivals which were also significant, such as the Feast of Dedication.

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later life.)

FESTIVALS

The three main festivals were Passover, Pentecost,
and Tabernacles. All three were rooted in the
Torah and, particularly, in the story of the exodus
from Egypt, when God had rescued the Jews
from slavery.

- Passover commemorated the escape from Egypt.
- Pentecost was a harvest festival, but was also
associated with the giving of the law.
- Tabernacles was a commemoration of the time
when the Israelites lived in tents in the wilderness.

There were extra festivals which were also
significant, such as the Feast of Dedication

(or Hanukkah) which celebrated the rededication of the Temple during the Maccabean revolt, when the Greek rulers of Judea were evicted, and Purim, which commemorated the story of Esther and the rescue of Jews from death in Persia. All of these festivals have a common theme: rescue, liberation, freedom. At festival times, Jews felt their occupied status keenly. No wonder that Josephus reported that it was at festival time that trouble tended to break out in Jerusalem.

"I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together." (John 18:20)

The study and interpretation of the Torah was one of the pillars of Jewish faith. The other pillar was the Temple. The Temple was the most important religious institution in the land. It was where sacrifices were made and festivals celebrated.

The building itself had been completely renovated by Herod the Great. He had built a massive raised platform constructed of gigantic blocks of stone. The retaining walls for this platform – known as Temple Mount – towered more than 80 feet above the surrounding roads and dominated the skyline of Jerusalem. On the platform stood the Temple itself – a magnificent building, made of cream-coloured stone

2. EMPERORS, KINGS, AND MESSIAHS

and decorated with gold. The floor was made of earlier temples, with the holy of holies – which was empty, of course – long since lost.

Within the Temple complex, there were different levels of access. Gentiles were allowed in the Court of Gentiles; women as far as the knee-high wall of the Court of Israelites. The sanctuary building, was the preserve of priests and at the top of this pyramid of purity was the holy of holies, which only the high priest could enter only on one day a year: the Day of Atonement.

The Temple Mount itself was surrounded by gates. The south gates were reached by a flight of steps. To the north of the Temple Mount was the Fortress, the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. It had been specifically designed to guard the Temple, so that they could keep an eye on what was happening. The high priests lived there as a sign of the Jews' submission to Rome.

The activities of the Temple were managed by a number of priests, Levites, and other officials. Some priests' positions were permanent, but there were a large number of "temporary" priests living out in various parts of the land who did Temple duty twice a year. John the Baptist, Zechariah, was one of these.

The high priest was the most powerful man in the land. To attain it required personal wealth

which celebrated the rededication during the Maccabean revolt, when the Jews of Judea were evicted, and Purim, commemorated the story of Esther and the Jews' escape from death in Persia. All of these festivals had a common theme: rescue, liberation, and survival. At festival times, Jews felt their occupied land and wondered that Josephus reported that the festival time that trouble tended to be in Jerusalem.

Openly to the world; I have built a synagogue and in the name of all the Jews come together."

Interpretation of the Torah was one pillar of Jewish faith. The other pillar was the Temple. It was the most important religious building in Jerusalem. It was where sacrifices were offered and celebrated.

The Temple itself had been completely renovated by Herod the Great. He had built a massive raised platform of gigantic blocks of stone. The Temple stood on this platform – known as the Temple Mount – more than 80 feet above the surrounding city and dominated the skyline of Jerusalem. On the platform stood the Temple itself – a magnificent building, made of cream-coloured stone

and decorated with gold. The floor plan followed that of earlier temples, with the holy place, and the holy of holies – which was empty, of course, the ark being long since lost.

Within the Temple complex, different groups had different levels of access. Gentiles were allowed in the Court of Gentiles; women as far as the Court of Women; Jews as far as the knee-high wall at the north end of the Court of Israelites. The sanctuary, inside the Temple building, was the preserve of priests alone. And then, at the top of this pyramid of purity, there was the holy of holies, which only the high priest could enter, and only on one day a year: the Day of Atonement.

The Temple Mount itself was accessed by various gates. The south gates were reached by a wide flight of steps. To the north of the Temple stood the Antonia Fortress, the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. The fortress had been specifically designed and built to overlook the Temple, so that they could keep an eye on what was happening. The high priests' robes were stored there as a sign of the Jews' subjection to the Romans.

The activities of the Temple were run by a huge number of priests, Levites, and other functionaries. Some priests' positions were permanently attached to the Temple, but there were a large number of "part-time" priests living out in various communities who did Temple duty twice a year. John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, was one of these.

The high priest was the most coveted position. To attain it required personal wealth, since the high priest

had to pay out of his own pocket for major sacrifices such as those on the Day of Atonement. But it brought significant income as well, since the Temple was an extremely wealthy institution. The Romans decided who would be high priest, and in Jesus' day the position was rotated among three or four of the ruling aristocratic families.

The dominant family was the house of Hanin. The first of the family to obtain the position was Ananus, son of Seth – or Annas, as he is called in the Gospels. His family was to dominate the post of high priest for the next sixty years. Annas was high priest from AD 6 to AD 15 and five of his sons were to hold the same office. Caiaphas, who was appointed in AD 18 was his son-in-law.

The high priest ruled with the aid of a council known as the Sanhedrin. This had representatives on it from different factions, including the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Temple was in Jerusalem. At the local level, people gathered together in synagogue. Indeed, that's what the word means: gathering. Not every place had a synagogue building; in some villages there was just a space to meet. Where a building was constructed it was simple. People sat in a "U" shape with the women segregated from the men. The synagogue was a place for prayer and study, but it was also where the community met to decide local issues.

The community was aided by scribes, who were local experts in the law. There were some high-status priestly scribes attached to the Temple but for most

locally-based scribes, it was a status job and many of them were in the lower social classes. Their job was to interpret the law for the people and to read and write contracts and agreements. It was the job of a scribe and some scribes were sponging off pious widows in their house and home.

In the synagogue, the Hebrew was often translated for most listeners. The language of the liturgy was Hebrew but most people couldn't understand it. Most people spoke Aramaic. Jesus' sayings contain puns which are often in Aramaic and in some places his original words are preserved: *Talitha cum* ("Lift up the little girl in Mark 5:41; *Ephraim* spoken to the deaf man in Mark 7:34; *Cephas* – Aramaic for rock. Peter's name is out in Aramaic.

The other major language was Greek. At the time of Alexander the Great, Greek was the language of the Mediterranean. It was the language of trade and commerce. It was the language, much as English is today, of an inscription warning Gentiles not to enter the inner courts was written in Greek. The Romans grabbed a few Latinisms – particularly in the field of occupation and the Roman centurion.

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locally-based scribes, it was not a particularly high status job and many of them came from the poorer classes. Their job was to interpret the law for ordinary people and to read and write things such as contracts and agreements. It was thought honourable to support a scribe and some scribes apparently abused that, sponging off pious widows and eating them out of house and home.

In the synagogue, the Hebrew Scriptures had to be translated for most listeners. Hebrew was also the language of the liturgy chanted in the Temple, but most people couldn't understand it. Ordinary people spoke Aramaic. Jesus certainly did. Some of his sayings contain puns which only work in Aramaic, and in some places his original Aramaic words are preserved: *Talitha cum* ("Little girl, get up!") spoken to the little girl in Mark 5:41; *Ephphatha* ("be opened") spoken to the deaf man in Mark 7:34. He called Simon, *Cephas* – Aramaic for rock. Even on the cross, he cried out in Aramaic.

The other major language was Greek which, since the time of Alexander the Great, had been the shared language of the Mediterranean world. It was the language of trade and commerce – an international language, much as English is today. In the Temple an inscription warning Gentiles not to enter the inner courts was written in Greek. Then people also grabbed a few Latinisms – phrases from the language of occupation and the Roman military: prefect, mile, centurion.