



INSTANT EXPERT



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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.

INFORMATION & REFERENCE
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\$14.99

BN 978-0-7459-5641-1



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JESUS

→ Nick Page



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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 follow in that order. According to their own accounts (97 per cent in Mark, 95 per cent in Matthew and 88 per cent in Luke), Jesus gave them extra teaching material and stories. The four 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 covers many of the same events as the other three, but includes long speeches by Jesus that do not appear elsewhere. John's Gospel is the only one in terms of chronology and shows Jesus going to Jerusalem and went there for a festival.

The early church attributed the four Gospels to different figures from early church history. Peter, one of Jesus' disciples; Mark, an associate of Peter; John, another one of Jesus' disciples. They saw the Gospels as the most reliable sources of information about Jesus. An early church leader called Irenaeus, writing in the mid-second century AD, talks about the four Gospels as "the four pillars upon which the church stands" and 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 second century, but most of them were written in the third century.

1. THE GOOD NEWS

Most experts agree that Mark's account was the earliest of the four. Luke and Matthew use a lot of it in their own accounts (97 per cent of Mark appears in Matthew and 88 per cent in Luke) but they also contain extra teaching material and stories. These three Gospels cover most of the same events, in roughly the same order, using similar language.

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 from eyewitnesses. And he to persuade or reassure a Theophilus, of the truth.

If we are going to explore meaningful way, we have to that the Gospels are reliable. hordes of scholars argue over original or not, whether he him, or even who wrote them. the approach of this book is dealing with reliable testimony, witnesses and arranged for 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 of God. This is what Christians believe, and that is why the Gospels were written.

This is, perhaps, where the question arises: It is, after all, why he is so popular. It is because the first follower of Jesus, God. "Long ago God spoke in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, who is the heir of all things, through whom he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1–2).

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1. THE GOOD NEWS

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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, King

"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 which had been conquered by the Romans.

Power was focused in the Roman elite, at the top of which was the emperor. He reminded its subjects of the emperor's power not only through routine acts of violence, the imposition of taxes and tari-

ffs, but also through the propaganda of the imperial cult. The emperor was always portrayed as a god.

Before his death in AD 14, the emperor Augustus wrote an autobiography listing his triumphs. It was called *Res Gestae Divitiae* or the *Divine Augustus*. Jews, on the other hand, were monotheistic. For them, there was only one God. Any other claim was blasphemous. In the empire there was a major problem. The Romans promoted a religion of the emperor as divine. This led to a

INSTANT EXPERT: JESUS

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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 Herod Antipas. Archelaus only ruled for ten years before the Romans removed him for his excesses and replaced him with a Roman military prefect. The prefect was based in Jerusalem and he delegated government of Jerusalem and the surrounding area to the high priest of the Temple.

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

SAMARITANS

Between Jerusalem and Galilee, a region known as Samaria, the home of the Samaritans, the origins of the Samaritans are unclear. Tradition held that these were the descendants of the Israelites who were settled in the area by the Assyrians centuries before. Jews and Samaritans did not like each other. The Samaritans, like the Jews, were monotheistic – they worshipped the God of Israel. But they had their own, distinct, version of the Hebrew Bible.

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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 expectantly for the kingdom of God." (Luke 7:13) So, from the time of the prophet Jeremiah, the people of Israel were almost constantly under foreign powers. There was a brief period of independence at the end of the Old and New Testaments, but that ended when the Romans arrived and took over in 63 BC.

In such circumstances, Jews believed in a deliverer. They believed that God would deliver them from oppression, just as he had delivered the Israelites when he led them on the exodus from Egypt. He would achieve this by sending a

Messiah is a Hebrew word meaning "anointed one". The Greek word for "anointed" is Christ, which we get Christ. Different Jewish sects had different opinions over what 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 Zadok, and a third figure: a prophet who would precede the arrival of the other two. But the Talmud only mentions the king figure.

This king would drive out the Romans and restore the Jewish state, with his illustrious forebear David as king. He would be a descendant of the Philistines. A psalm which was written in the time of David's reign prophecy said, "The Lord says, 'I will raise up your offspring and set them on your right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'." (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

2. EMPERORS, KINGS, AND MESSIAHS

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

Jesus had strong words for the Pharisees. He called them “whitewashed tombs” because they looked great but they were empty inside. Jesus also had friends among the Pharisees who found eating in their houses in Matthew 11:37; 14:1). Some Pharisees, such as Nicodemus, became disciples. They warned Jesus that the Pharisees wanted to kill him (Luke 13:31).

The opponents of the Pharisees were the Sadducees. They were an urban group based in Jerusalem, with a particular focus on the wealthy and the powerful. It is likely that the Sadducees and the ruling elite were the same. The Pharisees, who drew on Jewish tradition, the Psalms and the prophets, taught that only the Torah – the “Law”, or the Jewish Scriptures – was authoritative. Jesus said that the Pharisees “had the wrong side” and “delivered to the people the traditions of men, observances by succession from their ancestors, which are not written in the law of Moses”. The reason for this, he said, is that the Sadducees reject the Torah.

The Essenes were a more extreme group. Some people think that the Qumran community, which hid the Dead Sea Scrolls, were Essenes. But while none of the scrolls mention the Essenes, they were a fundamentalist, ultra-orthodox Jewish group that lived in the towns and cities but

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Some people think that the Qumran community, who
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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; other kinds were unclean.

Jews were supposed to observe the three main festivals. Adult male Jews were expected to go to Jerusalem for the three main festivals – Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles. While not all Jews could do this, many made the effort to go. (And talking of adult males, they were circumcised. Even those who converted to Judaism in later life.)

FESTIVALS

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

- Passover commemorated the exodus from Egypt
- Pentecost was a harvest festival, associated with the giving of the Law
- Tabernacles was a commemoration of the time when the Israelites lived in tents in the desert

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

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

Jews were supposed to observe the pilgrimage festivals. Adult male Jews were expected to go to Jerusalem for the three main festivals: Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles. While not everyone could do this, many made the effort to go at least once a year. (And talking of adult males, all male Jews were circumcised. Even those who converted to Judaism in 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

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and decorated with gold. The floor of the Temple was of earlier temples, with the holy of holies – which was empty, of course, since it had been destroyed long since lost.

Within the Temple complex, there were different levels of access. Gentiles could not enter the Court of Gentiles; women as far as the knee-high wall of the Court of Israelites. The sanctuarium, the innermost building, was the preserve of priests. At the top of this pyramid of purity was the Holy of Holies, which only the high priest could enter on one day a year: the Day of Atonement.

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

The activities of the Temple were overseen by a large number of priests, Levites, and other temple staff. Some priests' positions were permanent, serving in the Temple, but there were a large number of "second time" priests living out in various towns and cities who did Temple duty twice a year. John the Baptist, Zechariah, was one of these.

The high priest was the most important priest. To attain it required personal wealth, social status, and

which celebrated the rededication during the Maccabean revolt, when Jews of Judea were evicted, and Purim, honored the story of Esther and the from death in Persia. All of these common theme: rescue, liberation, festival times, Jews felt their occupied no wonder that Josephus reported festival time that trouble tended to Jerusalem.

openly to the world; I have in synagogues and in the all the Jews come together."

interpretation of the Torah was one Jewish faith. The other pillar was the Temple was the most important religious center. It was where sacrifices were celebrated. The Temple had been completely renovated. He had built a massive raised platform of gigantic blocks of stone. The platform – known as the Temple Mount – was more than 80 feet above the ground and dominated the skyline of Jerusalem. On the platform stood the Temple itself – a massive, 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

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

In the synagogue, the Hebrew text of the Torah was translated for most listeners into the language of the liturgy of the day, but most people couldn't understand it. Most people spoke Aramaic. Jesus spoke Aramaic, and his sayings contain puns which are lost in translation and in some places his original words are preserved: *Talitha cum* ("Little girl, get up") was spoken to the little girl in Mark 5:41; *Ephphatha* ("Be opened") was spoken to the deaf man in Mark 7:34; *Cephas* – Aramaic for rock, was the name Jesus gave to Peter, out in Aramaic.

The other major language of the Mediterranean world at the time of Alexander the Great was Greek, the language of the Mediterranean world. It was the language of trade and commerce, and it was the language, much as English is today, of the educated classes. An inscription warning Gentiles from entering the inner courts of the Temple in Jerusalem was written in Greek. The inscription was written in Greek, but it had been grabbed a few Latinisms – probably from the Latin language of occupation and the Roman legions. The inscription was written in Greek, but it had been grabbed a few Latinisms – probably from the Latin language of occupation and the Roman legions.

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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.