

Jesus of Nazareth

We are largely dependent upon the four Gospels for what we know about Jesus and his life. Jesus' baptism is the turning point in his life. For the previous thirty or so years he grew up in Nazareth and worked as a carpenter, following his father's trade.

For the next two or three years he was a rabbi (teacher), accompanied by twelve men he had chosen and a group of women. He preached, taught and healed people and ministered to individuals.

Jesus met growing opposition from the Pharisees and others who regarded him as an unorthodox rabbi. He travelled to Jerusalem for the pilgrim festival of Passover, aware he was going to die.

After sharing a farewell meal, the Last Supper, with his disciples, he was arrested and the following day handed over to the Romans Governor, Pontius Pilate, who condemned him to death by crucifixion.



Mary Mother of Jesus

We hear lots about Mary at the beginning of Jesus' life, when Jesus is born and is a young boy lost in the Temple.

The next event is many years later at the wedding-in Cana, when Jesus performs his first miracle. Mary seems to expect her son to be able to do great things! (John 2:1-2). Mary is mentioned next, right at the end of her sons' life. At the crucifixion Jesus asks John the disciple to look after her (John 19:25-27). It is impossible for us to imagine how Mary must have felt watching her son die in that way.



Andrew

A disciple and the brother of Peter and also a fisherman. Called with Peter and James and John while fishing.

Asked Jesus in private on the Mount of Olives when the time of persecution would be (Mark 13 :3-4).

Told Jesus about the boy with the loaves and fishes at the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6 :1-14).

Went with Philip to tell Jesus some Greeks wanted to see him (John 12:2

0-26).



Bartholomew

Bartholomew was one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. He was introduced to Christ by Philip and was also known as Nathanael. This disciple was born in Cana in the region of Galilee. Nathanael scoffed after Philip told him about Jesus of Nazareth for the first time, but changed his mind after Jesus demonstrated his power to him (John 1:43-51)

Unlike the strong-willed Peter and sceptical Thomas, Bartholomew pretty much stayed in the background.



James

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John

When Jesus called James and John to be his disciples they were two ordinary fishermen. They were brothers and he nicknamed them 'the sons of Thunder'. Two incidents tell us about their fiery temperaments. James and John, together with Peter, were the closest to Jesus. John, of all the disciples, was closest to Jesus. He is known as the disciple whom Jesus loved'. He is most likely to have sat next to Jesus at the Last Supper. As he was being crucified Jesus asked John to look after Mary his mother



Judas

Judas was the disciple who betrayed Jesus. Little is known of him apart from the fact that he looked after the disciples' money bag and was reputed to steal from it. (John 12:6).

The question remains why did Judas betray Jesus? The simple answer is that he did it for the money. Another theory is that he was afraid what the authorities would do to Jesus' followers, so he tried to please them by selling Jesus to them. Another theory is that Judas had always seen Jesus as a political revolutionary but when it became obvious that Jesus' revolution was of a different kind, Judas decided to force the issue and give Jesus a chance to declare himself to the authorities.



Matthew

The Apostle Matthew was the son of a man named Alphaeus and he lived in the coastal village of Capernaum. He introduced himself as a tax collector in his own book during the time of Herod Antipas. Since he worked as a tax collector, it was possible that Matthew was one of the wealthiest disciples of Jesus. He was with the other disciples after Jesus' resurrection in Acts 1:13.

One of the most remarkable stories about Matthew was his willingness to drop everything and follow the Lord after Jesus called him for his ministry. In addition, Matthew invited Jesus over to his house as a guest of honor in a banquet along with the other tax collectors and other sinners.



Philip

A disciple who came from Galilee. Called with Nathanael (John 1 :43-51). One of the twelve disciples sent out to take the message to the people (Matt 10: 1-15). He was asked by Jesus where to buy food just before the feeding on the 5,000 (John 6:5-7)

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Philip preached as an apostle (Acts 8:4-40).



Simon Peter

Peter was one of the closest disciples to Jesus, together with James and John. His faith was strong but he was rash and hot headed at times. His original name was Simon. He was brought up in Bethsaida by Lake Galilee and had a strong north country accent (Matt 26: 73).

He and his brother Andrew were fisherman and were the first followers of Jesus. Peter was married and his wife accompanied him to spread good news. Jesus gave him the name Peter, which means 'Rock' (Matt 16:18). He was often spokesman for the disciples and became leader of the church after Jesus' ascension.

When Jesus was arrested Peter, scared for his life, denied three times that he knew Jesus (Mark 14:66-72). After this resurrection James came to Peter by the lake side and tested his loyalty three times (John 21: 15-19).



Thomas

Thomas is better known as ‘doubting Thomas’ for his insistence in needing to see and touch Jesus’ wounds before believing in the resurrection (John 20 :24-29).

Thomas is mentioned as ‘the twin’ in the story of the raising of the Lazarus (John 11: 16). He asked Jesus how to find the way to which Jesus replied “I am the way, the truth and the life!” (John 14:5).



Judas Son of James

Judas son of James also known as Thaddaeus or Jude is not to be confused with Judas Iscariot, another apostle and later the betrayer of Jesus. Judas is a name which was common among Jews at the time. “Jude of James” is only mentioned twice in the New Testament: in the lists of apostles. Unlike the apostles Peter and John, the Apostle Jude was one of Jesus’ most mysterious and lesser-known disciples. He received only a handful of mentions. It was only in the gospel of John that Jude got a “speaking part” when he asked Jesus why he chose to reveal himself to his disciples and not to the whole world. All his other deeds during Jesus’ short ministry were not recorded in all four gospels.



Mary Magdalene

Mary may have come from Magdala, a town on the western side of Lake Galilee, hence her name. It is often thought that she was the woman who poured perfume on Jesus' feet in Mark 14:3. In fact Mary Magdalene is only mentioned in the stories about Jesus' death and resurrection and in Luke 8:2. Here it says she was cured by Jesus. We do not know if she was cured of an illness of the body or the mind or from the wrong things she had done in the past. But we do know that her life was very different as a result.

Mary was very brave and followed Jesus to the cross even when others had deserted him (John 19 :25). She is most famous for being the one brave enough to dare to go to anoint Jesus' body on Easter Sunday and be the first to see the risen Jesus (John 20:1-18).



Servants

Although servants are not mentioned in the bible scripture, we can imagine that they would be present at the Last Supper.

The home that had the Upper Room, would have been a wealthy home, as it was unusual to have an upper chamber. All of the preparations for the Passover feast would have already been made by the servants before the disciples arrived. The servants usually washed the feet of guests before they ate, as the roads in the city were dusty, and it was the end of a long day. Servants would also replace food on the table when needed.



Lazarus

Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha (see Luke 18:38-42). He was ill and his sisters sent for Jesus to come and heal him. However Jesus arrived too late and Lazarus was dead, in fact he had been in the tomb for four days! Mary said it wouldn't have happened if Jesus had been with them. Deeply moved, Jesus raised Lazarus from death (John 11).

This event caused quite a stir and Lazarus himself went around telling everyone about Jesus, so much so that the authorities plotted to do away with Lazarus to keep him quiet (John 12:9-11).



Barabbas

Barabbas was a political agitator or terrorist. He was a member of the Zealot party who tried to overthrow the Roman rulers of Palestine.

Barabbas was in prison for inciting a riot and for murder, but the Pharisees manipulated his release instead of Jesus' as the traditional passover goodwill gesture by Pilate (Luke 23: 13-25, John 18:38-4.0 and Mark 15:6-15).



Caiaphas The High Priest

Caiaphas was the high priest with Annas at the time of Jesus and was instrumental in his arrest, trial and death. As Jesus began to speak out against the Pharisees and religious leaders they looked for ways to dispose of him. Caiaphas was worried about Jesus' popularity and plotted against him (John 11 :45-47).

He was the one who ripped his clothes at the trial after hearing what he considered to be blasphemy. This was punishable by the death penalty in Jewish law, but as Palestine was under Roman law, only Pilate could have passed that sentence (Matt 26:57-68).



Nicodemus

Nicodemus was a Pharisee ([see The Pharisees](#)) but was challenged by what Jesus said. He met Jesus secretly and asked him a genuine question about being born again (John 3: 1- 21).

He is mentioned by name on two other occasions. Firstly after the Pharisees had tried to arrest Jesus, he pointed out that they should not condemn anyone without a hearing. (John 7:45-52). Secondly he is mentioned with Joseph of Arimathea after Jesus' death when they asked for his body for burial (John 19:38-42).

It is also very likely that Nicodemus would have been present at the illegal night time trial of Jesus before Caiaphas the High Priest (Matthew 26:57-68).



John the Baptist

John the Baptist was the long-awaited son of Elizabeth and Zachariah. He was Jesus' cousin. The story of his birth is in Luke 1, but it was predicted four hundred years earlier in Malachi 4:5 which said that before the Messiah came a prophet like Elijah would come to prepare the way for him. Jesus himself said that John was this prophet (Matt 11: 14). He also said that John was the greatest of all Israel's prophets (Luke 7:18-35).



John's message was one of repentance. He told people to give up sinning and return to God. He was a formidable man who lived rough in the desert, eating wild honey and locusts. John baptised people in the river Jordan; he even baptised Jesus! (Luke 3)

John was a fiery man who always spoke his mind and did not make himself popular with the authorities. He called the Pharisees 'snakes' and attacked the corruption of Herod Antipas. He was thrown into prison and beheaded (Matt 14:1-12).

John was important in pointing people to Jesus as the Messiah. After John was imprisoned, Jesus began his ministry.

Herod Antipas

The Herod who ruled during the ministry of Jesus was Herod Antipas son of the Herod who tried to kill Jesus as a baby. Although he was king in name he had a few real powers and was merely a puppet of Rome. Like most of his family Herod Antipas was an unstable, violent man, who was superstitious. (Mark 6: 16).

Herod Antipas comes into the story of Jesus at two important points. Herod had John the Baptist arrested and eventually put to death for criticising him for marrying his brothers wife. (Mark 6: 14-29). Jesus refers to him as 'that fox' (Luke 13:31,32).

Herod also comes into the story at Jesus' trial in (Luke 23:6-12) Pilate had offended Herod a year earlier by putting to death some of Herod's subjects without consulting him. (Luke 31: 1). So he sent Jesus to him as a diplomatic gesture. Herod was delighted as he wanted to see a miracle, but Jesus refused even to speak to him. Herod sent him back to Pilate dressed as a king in order to humiliate Jesus and to antagonise the authorities.



Pontius Pilate

Pilate was one of a series of governors who ruled Palestine when it became part of the Roman Empire in 63 BC. He was appointed in 26 AD but like most Romans did not understand the importance of religion to the Jews. He upset the Jewish authorities as soon as he became governor by parading the army's standards in Jerusalem. This was blasphemy for the Jews and they rioted.

Pilate is best remembered as the man who sentenced Jesus to death. As governor he was the only person who had the power of life over death and so the High Priests had to persuade him that Jesus deserved to die. In the gospels Pilate came across as a weak character who was easily swayed against his better judgement. He believed Jesus was innocent, but he did not want a riot. He agreed to Jesus' death when the crowd shouted 'if you let this man go you are no friend of Caesar!', (John 19:12). Pilate did not want bad reports to get back to Rome so he agreed to have Jesus whipped, perhaps hoping that this would appease the mob.

However in the end to keep the peace, Pilate had Jesus crucified and Barabbas released. We are told he symbolically washed his hands of the whole affair, but had his way by putting the words 'the king of the Jews' above Jesus' cross. (see Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, and John 18-19).



The Pharisees

The word Pharisee means ‘the separated ones’. In the Gospels they are presented as a fanatical group of religious men who stressed the importance of obeying Gods’ law in minute details. They developed a huge system of rules that specified exactly what you could and couldn’t do. Jesus disagreed with the Pharisees about their interpretation of the Sabbath. He helped people on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were furious but Jesus said that human need should come before rules (Matt 12:6-14).



Jesus also offended the Pharisees by ignoring their religious traditions and going back to the old testament teaching. His attitude angered them. (Matt 23 and Mark 3-6). Jesus attacked and humiliated them. so much that they began to plot together to put him to death (Matt 26:2-5 and John 11:45-47).

Jesus told a parable which criticised the Pharisees (Luke 18:9-14). Some of the Pharisees however were sympathetic to Jesus, see Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) and Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50-54, John 19:38-42).

Other Characters Who Encountered Jesus

Below is a list of some of the many people who met Jesus during the three years of his ministry. It is not exclusive and there are lots more who could be on the list. Just flick through the Gospels to find them.

- The man with the paralysed-hand (Mark 3: 1-6)
 - Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-56)
 - The deaf mute (Mark 7:31-37)
 - The boy with the loaves and fishes (John 6: 1-15)
 - The rich man (Matt 19:16-30)
 - Blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)
 - Zacchaeus (Luke 9:1-10)
 - Woman healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13: 10-17)
 - The Leper (Luke 17:11-19)
 - The woman caught in adultery (John 8: 1-11)
 - The man born blind (John 9:1-41)
 - The Roman Officer (Matt 8:5-13)
 - The paralysed man (Mark 2: 1-12)
 - The Samaritan woman at the well (John 4: 1-42)
 - The soldiers who crucified Jesus (Matt 27:27-54)
 - The guards at the tomb (Matt 27:62-28:4)
 - Cleopas on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13-35)
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- I wonder what they thought when they encountered Jesus?
 - I wonder how Jesus changed their life?