

The big story of the Bible



An easy read journey
through God's special book

Jo Acharya

Contents

About this book	Page
How to read this book	Page
If you need help	Page
1 God makes the world	Page
2 People turn away from God	Page
Zoom in The problem of sin	Page
3 God chooses a family	Page
4 God saves his people	Page
Zoom in Laws and offerings	Page
5 A land for God's people	Page
6 The first kings of Israel	Page
Zoom in Stories, poems, letters	Page
7 Wisdom from God's people	Page
8 God's people split apart	Page
Zoom in Word-pictures	Page
9 Messengers from God	Page
10 God punishes his people	Page
11 God's people come home	Page

Zoom in	The silent years	Page
12	God becomes human	Page
13	Jesus teaches God's people	Page
Zoom in	What did Jesus say?	Page
14	Jesus dies for everyone	Page
15	Jesus comes back to life	Page
Zoom in	Why did Jesus die?	Page
How can I follow Jesus?		Page
16	The Holy Spirit comes	Page
17	Good news for the world	Page
Zoom in	The Trinity	Page 211
18	Letters to God's people	Page
19	God's promise for the future	Page
About Jo		Page
Thanks		Page
Indexes of people and books		Page
Word meanings		Page

You can read this page any time!

Before Israel and Judah lost their land, God sent prophets to warn them. The people did not listen. But one day a saviour king would come to help them.



Isaiah

Jeremiah chapters 1-36

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah



Hosea

Isaiah

Jonah



Quick look



God sent prophets to warn his people that he would punish their sin.

The people did not listen. But what the prophets said was true.



God said the people had stopped loving God. And they had stopped loving each other.



God sent prophets to warn Israel to treat each other fairly.



God sent prophets to warn Judah to come back to him.



God sent prophets to other places too.



The prophets had some good news too.

One day God would send a saviour king to help his people.

God's prophets

Before Israel and Judah lost their land, God sent prophets to give them messages, called prophecies.

“Before you were born, I chose you for a special work. I chose you to be a prophet... You must go everywhere I send you and say everything I tell you to say.”

(Jeremiah chapter 1 verses 5 and 7, ERV)



The prophets warned the people that God was angry with them. The people had turned away from God. They had broken their promise to him.

The prophets told the people to come back to God and live his way. If they did not live God's way, things would go wrong for them.



Being a prophet was hard. The people did not like what the prophets said! So the prophets did not have many friends. Some of the prophets were killed.

But the things they said were true. In the end, God's people lost their land because of their sin.



What was hard about being a prophet?

What was good about it?

Different sorts of prophecies

Some of the books in the Bible were written by God's prophets. They wrote about what God said to them and what he told them to do.

Some of the prophecies had 2 meanings. One meaning was about what was happening at the time. The other meaning was about what would happen in the future.

God gave his prophets different sorts of prophecies to help the people understand his message.

→ Stories and word-pictures

In one prophecy, God said the people were like a garden where he had planted fruit trees.

God wanted his people to grow good fruit like kindness. But they had grown bad fruit like greed and selfishness. This was because they did not live God's way. (Isaiah chapter 5 verses 1-7)

→ Dreams and visions

God talked to the prophets in dreams and visions. A vision is like a dream you have while you are awake.

In dreams and visions, the prophets saw things the way God sees them. Sometimes God gave them visions of heaven.

→ Actions

Sometimes God told his prophets to do something strange for the people to see. This was a way of acting out the message.

2 important messages

Long ago, God had given his people laws. The laws told God's people how to love him and how to love each other. They had promised to keep these laws. (Page xxx)

Now, God's people had stopped keeping his laws. So he gave his prophets 2 important messages for them.

→ Stop worshipping other gods

God's people had promised to only worship God. But now they worshipped other gods that were not real.

God said they were like a wife who cheated on her husband. He told Hosea to act out this message. Hosea married a woman who cheated on him. This was a picture of what God's people had done.



Hosea said, "Come back to the LORD... The Lord says, 'I will forgive them for leaving me. I will show them my love.'" (Hosea chapter 14 verses 1 and 4, ERV)

→ Stop treating each other badly

God's people had promised to be kind to each other and help poor people. But now they treated each other badly.

God told Isaiah the people were like fruit trees he had planted. He wanted them to grow good fruit like kindness. But they had grown bad fruit like greed and selfishness.



God said, "Learn to do good. Treat people fairly... Speak up for the widows and orphans. If you listen to what I say, you will get the good things from this land.." (Isaiah chapter 1 verses 17 and 19, ERV)

Jonah runs away from God

(Jonah chapters 1-4)

God sent Jonah to take a message to a place called Nineveh. This city was in the land of Assyria. The people there did not know God. They were doing bad things. God was going to punish them.

Jonah did not want to take God's message to the people of Nineveh. He thought they might say sorry. They might stop doing bad things. Then God might forgive them!

Jonah did not want this to happen. He did not like the people of Nineveh! He wanted God to punish them.

So Jonah ran away from God. He got on a boat to go away from Nineveh.

God sent a bad storm. Jonah ended up in the water. Then God sent a big fish to swallow Jonah!

Inside the fish, Jonah said sorry to God. He said he would do what God wanted. God made the fish throw Jonah up onto land.

So Jonah took God's message to Nineveh. The people said sorry. They stopped doing bad things. And God forgave them.

This made Jonah very angry. He complained to God. But God said he loved the people of Nineveh. God wanted to help them, just like he helped the people in Israel and Judah.





God loves everyone. He loves people who do bad things. He even loves people I do not like.

God wants me to try to love people like he does.

Is there anyone you do not like? Ask God to do good things for them. Ask him to help you love them like he does.

Remember, this sort of love means wanting good things for someone. It does not mean you have to be friends with them.

Messages for different places



Messages for Israel

God sent Hosea and Amos to be his prophets in Israel. He also gave Micah some messages for Israel.

Amos said the people gave offerings to God but treated poor people unfairly. God would punish them for this. The offerings did not mean anything if the people were not trying to live God's way.



Messages for Judah

God sent Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah to be his prophets in Judah. He also sent Micah, Joel, Zephaniah and Habakkuk.

After Israel lost their land, Jeremiah warned Judah to come back to God. He said if they kept worshipping other gods, they would lose their land too.

Micah reminded the people what it meant to live God's way. He said people should act fairly and always want to be kind. They should not worry about being important. And they should stay close to God. (Micah chapter 6 verse 8, ERV)



Messages for other places

God gave Jonah, Nahum and Obadiah messages for the enemies of Israel and Judah.

When Jonah took God's message to Assyria, the people there were sorry. But later they started doing very bad things again. Then their army attacked Israel in the north.

After this, God gave Nahum a new message for Assyria. God said he would punish them for these things.

The people who lived in Edom were happy when God's people lost their land. God told Obadiah he would punish them for this.

Good news!

Most of God's prophecies were warnings. But he gave the prophets some good news too.

God said that one day, he would send a saviour king to help his people. He would make a way for them to come back to him.



Isaiah wrote down what God told him about the saviour king. He wrote, “He carried our pain for us.. It was our sins that caused his wounds... The punishment that he received has brought peace to us.” (Isaiah chapter 53 verses 4-5)

This meant that the saviour king would die to take away the bad things everyone had done. He would fix the problem of sin for good.

When everything went wrong, this message gave God's people hope. Even though they had turned away from God, God still loved them. He still had a plan to fix the world.



Why do you think this message gave God's people hope?
Do you know who the saviour king is? Can you guess?



God's people did not like all his messages to them. But God gave these messages because he loved his people. He wanted to help them live his way.

I read God's messages in the Bible. I hear them in talks at church and in other ways too.

Some of God's messages are hard to hear. But if I listen, they help me live his way.

Ask God to help you listen to him even when his message is hard.



The big story...

God was starting to show people more of his plan.

A saviour king would come from David's family. He would live God's way and die to take away all the bad things everyone had done.

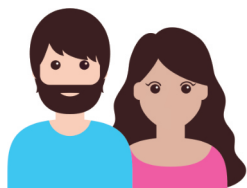
These prophecies did not tell people the name of the saviour king. But they were talking about Jesus.

From the start, God had planned for Jesus to come and save us. Jesus was the only person who could fix the problem of sin.

Many of the people of Judah were taken to Babylon. They had lost their land. But God was still with them.



Jeremiah chapters 37-52
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel



Ezekiel
Daniel



Quick look



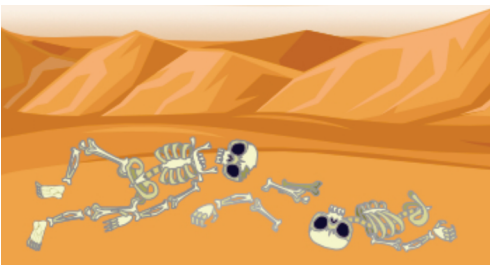
Israel and Judah had turned away from God. Now they had lost their land.

God had warned them this would happen.



The people of Judah were called Jews. Some of them were taken to Babylon.

The Jews knew this had happened because of their sin. They were very sorry. They wanted to change.



The Jews thought God had left them. But God gave Ezekiel a vision of dry bones coming back to life.

This meant God would make a way for the Jews to come back to him.

God's people lose their land

Long ago, the Israelites had agreed to live God's way. (Page xxx)

Then God had given them a land to live in. And he had given them a promise and a warning. (Page xxx)

God said if the Israelites lived his way, he would keep them safe. But if they did not live his way, he would not keep them safe. They would lose their land.

The Israelites did not live his way. They split into 2 kingdoms. And they turned away from God again and again.



God was patient for a long time. He kept his people safe. And he sent prophets to warn them to come back to him.

But in the end, God did what he said he would do. He stopped keeping his people safe. He let enemies attack them. They lost their land.

Now, the king of Assyria had taken over Israel. Some of the people of Israel were taken to Assyria.

The king of Babylon had taken over Judah. Some of the people of Judah were taken to Babylon. The people of Judah were called the Jews.

Life in Babylon

Living in Babylon was hard for the Jews. They had to do what the king of Babylon said. They were not free. They could not go home.

The Jews had lost God's Temple too. They could not worship God in the way he wanted.

The Jews knew all this had happened because of their sin. They were very sad.



The Jews lived in Babylon for 70 years. They thought about the bad things they had done. They were very sorry. They wanted to change. They wanted to live God's way.



How did the Jews end up in Babylon?

How did living in Babylon change them?

Daniel and the lions

(Daniel chapter 6)

One of the Jews who was taken to Babylon was called Daniel. Daniel was young and strong. So the king of Babylon gave him an important job.

Daniel was very good at his job. This made the king's other workers jealous. They wanted to get rid of him.

The workers knew Daniel prayed to God 3 times every day. So they said to the king, "We think everyone should only pray to you for 30 days. If they pray to anyone else they should be thrown to the lions!" The king liked this idea. He made it the law.

Daniel heard about the new law. But he loved God. He knew God did not want him to pray to the king. So Daniel kept praying to God. And the other workers saw him. They told the king.

The king was very sad. He liked Daniel. But he followed his law. Daniel was thrown to the lions. He was in the lions' den all night.

In the morning, Daniel was still alive! He said to the king, "It is okay! God kept me safe because he knew I had done nothing wrong."

The king was very happy. He made another new law. He told all the people to worship Daniel's God!





The law told Daniel to do something bad. Sometimes people tell me to do bad things too.

But God wants me to keep doing the right thing, like Daniel. I can trust God to look after me.

Has anyone ever told you to do something bad? Talk to God about this. Ask him to help you do the right thing.

Hope for the Jews

The Jews thought God had left them. But God still loved his people. He had not given up on his plan.

God gave a message to a prophet called Ezekiel. God showed Ezekiel a vision of dry bones.

The bones were from people who had been dead for a long time. But God told Ezekiel to tell the bones to come back to life.

Ezekiel did what God said. The bones became living people again!



This vision had a special meaning for the Jews. They had lost everything. They felt like those dry, dead bones.

But God wanted the Jews to know he was still with them. God said that one day he would bring them home to Judah. He would save them from their sin. And he would make a way for them to come back into his goodness and life.

“I will make you completely pure and ‘clean’... I will give you hearts that obey me. I will put my Spirit in you... You will be my people. And I will be your God.”

(Ezekiel chapter 36 verses 25-28, NIV)



Ezekiel’s vision gave the Jews hope. What gives you hope when life is hard?



When I do bad things, it hurts me and other people. Even when God forgives me, the hurt does not always go away.

But it is never too late to start again. When I say sorry, God helps me move on and make better choices.

Every day I have a new chance to live God's way. Living God's way is good for me and good for the world!

Thank God for giving you a new start. Ask him to help you live his way today.



The big story...

The Jews really wanted to change. But God knew they could not change themselves. They could not beat sin on their own.

That is why they needed Jesus, the saviour king. But there was more to God's plan!

God told Ezekiel his Holy Spirit would come to live inside people. The Holy Spirit would change their hearts. He would help them live God's way.

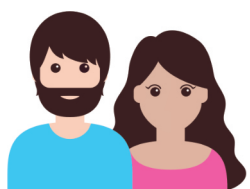
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God's people come home

After 70 years, the Jews were allowed to go home.
Later, Nehemiah started to build Jerusalem again.



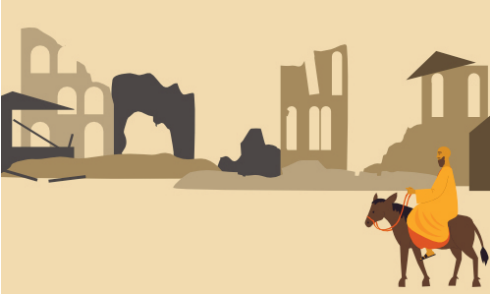
Nehemiah
Ezra
Haggai
Zechariah
Esther
Malachi



Haggai
Zechariah
Ezra
Esther
Nehemiah



Quick look



After 70 years, the Jews were allowed to go home. Some went home, but some stayed.

Some Jews went to Jerusalem. They started to build the Temple again.

Haggai and Zechariah told the Jews to come back to God. Ezra led them in worship.



Later, Nehemiah went to build the walls of Jerusalem again.

In the end, lots of Jews went home to Judah.

The Jews promised to live God's way.

Some Jews go home

After 70 years, the king of Persia took over Babylon. He said the Jews could go home!

King Cyrus... said: 'The Lord, the God of heaven... has said that I must build a temple for him in Jerusalem... Any of God's people who live among you may now return to Jerusalem.'



(2 Chronicles chapter 36 verses 22-23, EASY)

By then, most of the Jews who had been taken to Babylon had died. Their children had lived in Babylon all their lives. Some went to live in the land of Judah. But some stayed.

Jerusalem was still broken down. This was God's special city where the Temple had been. But there was no Temple any more.



Haggai and Zechariah were prophets. They went to Jerusalem. They told the people that God still loved them. If they came back to God, he would do good things for them.

Later, Ezra the priest went to Jerusalem. He led the Jews in worship. He read the book of God's laws to the people.

Other Jews went to Jerusalem too. They started building the Temple again.

Esther saves God's people

(Esther chapters 3-10)

Later, there was a new king in Babylon.

This king chose a woman called Esther to be his wife. He did not know Esther was a Jew. So Esther became queen.

A man called Haman hated the Jews. He lied to the king. He said the Jews were making trouble. He told the king to have them killed. And the king agreed to Haman's plan.

Queen Esther heard about Haman's plan. She was very sad. She wanted to help her people. She wanted to talk to the king.

But Esther was not allowed to talk to the king unless he called for her. So if she went to see him, he might have her killed!

Esther trusted God. She asked all the Jews to pray for her. Then she went to see the king. He was happy to see her!

Esther asked the king and Haman to come to a party. At the party, she told them she was a Jew. And she told the king that Haman had tricked him.

The king was very angry. He had Haman killed! And the Jews were saved! They thanked God. Every year, they remembered Esther at a festival called Purim. Purim is still a festival today!





Lots of people have done brave things to help other people, like Esther did. Can you think of any? If not, ask someone about this.



Esther was only one person. But God worked with her to save lots of people.

God wants to work with me too. He wants me to help him do good things in the world, like Esther did.

Ask God how he wants to work with you. Ask him to show you some good things you can do this week.

Nehemiah builds the walls

Later, a Jew called Nehemiah lived in Babylon. He worked for the king.

Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem was still broken down. This made him very sad.

The king asked Nehemiah why he was sad. So Nehemiah told him about Jerusalem. He asked the king to let him go and build the walls of Jerusalem again.

The king said yes. So Nehemiah went to Jerusalem. Some other Jews went with him. They worked together. They started to build the walls again.



In the end, lots of Jews came back to Judah. They still had to do what the king in Babylon said. But they were home!

God had promised Ezekiel that he would bring the Jews home. (Page xxx) Now it had happened. God had given them a new start.

The Jews were very happy. They promised to keep God's laws and live his way.



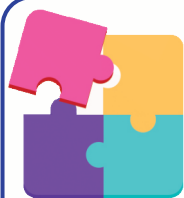
All the people who went to Jerusalem were good at different things. How did each of them help the Jews?



God has made lots of promises in the Bible. He says he will always be with me. He says he will always forgive me when I say sorry. He says if I trust him, I will live forever with him after I die.

My life is not always easy, but God has done lots of good things for me. And I know I can trust him to keep all his promises.

Think about some of the promises God has made. Thank God for keeping his promises.



The big story...

The Jews were home. But they were still waiting for God to keep his biggest promises.

400 years later, Jesus the saviour king would come. He would die to take away all the bad things everyone had done. This would change everything.

People could not keep all God's laws. So Jesus would make a better way to be friends with God.

People could not change themselves. So God's Holy Spirit would come and change their hearts.

God was going to give everyone a wonderful new start.



Quick look



When the Jews came home, people called Samaritans were living in Israel.

Jews did not like Samaritans.



The Jews were now ruled by the Romans.

Life was hard for the Jews.



The Jews tried to live God's way.

They were led by 2 groups called the Pharisees and Sadducees.



The Jews were waiting for the saviour king.

They did not know the saviour king would be God himself!

The Bible and history

The Old Testament of the Bible ends with the Jews coming home.

The New Testament starts with Jesus being born.

But there are 2 questions the Bible does not answer.

→ What happened to the people of Israel while the Jews were in Babylon?

Israel in the north was taken over by Assyria. But the Bible does not tell us what happened next.

→ What happened after the Jews came home?

There were 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the start of the New Testament.

These are sometimes called ‘the silent years’, because the Bible does not talk about them.



History tells us the answers to both these questions. This helps us understand the New Testament better.

Jews and Samaritans

Israel in the north had been taken over by Assyria. (Page xxx) The king of Assyria had moved some people out of Israel. And he had moved people from other places into Israel.

All the people who lived in Israel had mixed together and had children. They lived in a part of Israel called Samaria. They were called Samaritans.



The Jews did not like the Samaritans. They thought the Samaritans were not Israelites because they were mixed with people from other places.

The Samaritans also believed some different things about God. And they worshipped God in a different place.

But when Jesus came, he would be kind to the Samaritans. He would make a way for them to be part of God's people again.

Jesus said to her, 'You people from Samaria do not know the one that you worship... But people will soon have a new way to worship the Father.'

(John chapter 4 verses 22-23, EASY)



Romans take over Israel

The big armies of the world kept fighting each other. While the Jews were in Babylon, Babylon and Assyria were taken over by Persia.

Later, Persia was taken over by Greece. Then Greece was taken over by the Romans. Now the Romans ruled Israel and Judah.

The Jews were back home, but they had to do what the Romans said. The Romans treated the Jews badly. They made the Jews pay lots of money in taxes.



The Romans made a man called Herod king of Judah. King Herod made the new Temple bigger. But he was a bad king. He worked with the Romans.

Life was hard for the Jews. They hated being ruled by the Romans.

The Jews try to live God's way

The Jews had done bad things in the past. That was why they had lost their land. But now they were home, they wanted to change. They wanted to live God's way.

The Jews started to meet in buildings called synagogues. Here they prayed and learned about God. They set up schools so children could learn God's laws.



There were teachers who taught people how to live God's way. Sometimes these teachers had students, called disciples.

Disciples followed their teacher and learned from them. Later they might become teachers themselves.

The leaders of the Jews

A group called the Sanhedrin were the leaders of the Jews.

The Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees, Sadducees and teachers of the law.

→ Pharisees

The Pharisees believed God was close to his people. They said all the books about God were important. (These books are now the Old Testament.)

The Pharisees tried to keep all God's laws. They made lots of extra rules too. They said everyone must follow their rules.

→ Sadducees

The Sadducees believed God was far away. They said only the first 5 books about God were important.

The Sadducees were rich and powerful. Some were priests who led worship at the new Temple. They wanted to keep their power. So they worked with the Romans.

→ Teachers of the law

Teachers of the law helped people make agreements, like getting married or working together. They made sure these agreements followed God's laws.

The people in the Sanhedrin did not always agree. But together they led the Jews. They were still leading the Jews when Jesus came.

God's big surprise

The Jews remembered the promise God had given to the prophets. One day God would send a saviour king to help his people.

The Jews hoped the saviour king would come soon. They hoped he would save them from the Romans.

Soon it would be time for God to keep his promise. But this would happen in a surprising way.

The saviour king was going to be God himself!

God was going to come into the world as a baby. He was going to live with his people as a man called Jesus.

But Jesus was not going to save the Jews from the Romans. He was going to do something much bigger and better. Jesus was going to beat the devil and save everyone from sin.

Jesus would fix the problem of sin. And then God would fix the world!



God was born as a baby called Jesus. When Jesus grew up, he started teaching the Jews about God.

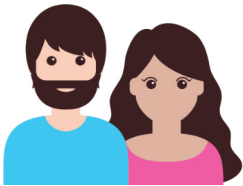


Matthew chapters 1-4

Mark chapters 1-3

Luke chapters 1-5

John chapter 1



Mary

Joseph

Jesus

John the Baptist

Matthew



Quick look



God came into the world as a baby called Jesus.

Jesus was the saviour king! He was going to fix the problem of sin.



John the Baptist told the Jews to get ready for the saviour king.

He baptised people who wanted to live God's way.

John even baptised Jesus!



Jesus chose 12 men to be his disciples. They went with him everywhere.

Jesus started teaching all the people about God.

Jesus is born

God sent an angel to a woman called Mary. The angel told her she would have a baby boy.

Mary was confused. She had never had sex! But the angel said this baby was from God. He was the saviour king God had promised!

Mary was about to marry a man called Joseph. God sent an angel to him too. The angel told Joseph about the baby. He told Joseph to call the baby Jesus. This name means 'saviour'.

This baby would change everything for Mary and Joseph. But they trusted God. They did what he asked them to do.



How did Mary and Joseph show they trusted God?

What helps you keep trusting God when things change?



When Jesus was born, wise men came to worship him. They had seen a special star that meant a king had been born.

Shepherds came to worship Jesus too. God had sent angels to tell them the saviour king had been born.

When King Herod heard about Jesus, he was worried. He did not want a new king! He wanted to get rid of Jesus. So he told his soldiers to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem.

God warned Joseph in a dream. He told Joseph to take Mary and Jesus far away. They did not come home until King Herod died.

John the Baptist

Mary's cousin had a special baby too. His name was John. God told his family that John would be a prophet. He would tell people to get ready for the saviour king.

When John grew up, he told everyone that the saviour king was coming soon. He said they must come to God and say sorry for the bad things they had done.

John baptised the people by dipping them in water. This was to show they had promised to live God's way.



Jesus had grown up. He was now a man. And he came to be baptised by John.

John did not want to baptise Jesus. He knew that Jesus had not done any bad things. He was the saviour king! But Jesus said this was what God wanted. So John baptised Jesus.

Then God's Holy Spirit came to rest on Jesus's head. The Holy Spirit looked like a white bird called a dove. The people there heard God say that Jesus was his son.

So Jesus was baptised. As soon as he came up out of the water, the sky opened, and he saw God's Spirit coming down on him like a dove. A voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the one I love. I am very pleased with him."

(Matthew chapter 3 verses 16-17, ERV)



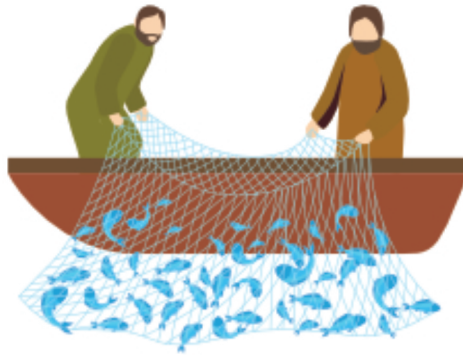
Jesus's disciples

It was time for Jesus to start his special work. He started to teach people about God. And he healed people who were sick.

Jesus chose 12 men to be his disciples. Most teachers chose disciples who were very clever and knew a lot about God. But Jesus chose normal people.

Some of Jesus's disciples were fishermen. One was a man who wanted to fight the Romans. And one was a man who worked for the Romans!

They were all different. But Jesus chose them all to be his disciples.



Some other men and women followed Jesus too. They went with him wherever he went.

All these people wanted to learn from Jesus. And they helped him tell people about God.



Why do you think Jesus chose normal people to be his disciples? Is this a surprise?

Jesus chooses a tax man

(Matthew chapter 9 verses 9-13)

Some Jews worked for the Romans. Their job was to get tax money from other Jews. Everyone hated tax men.

Matthew was a tax man. One day he was doing his job. Jesus walked past with his disciples. Then Jesus stopped.

Jesus said to Matthew, “Come and follow me.” He wanted Matthew to be one of his disciples! Matthew was very surprised. He left his job and followed Jesus!

Later, Jesus and his disciples had dinner at Matthew’s house. There were lots of people there who had done bad things.

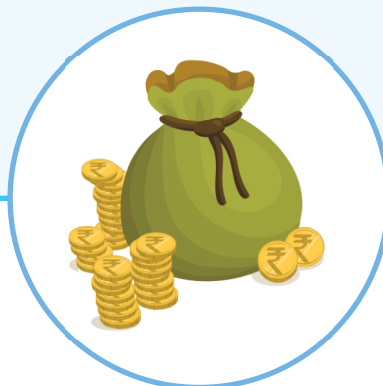
The Pharisees were very upset. They thought Jesus should stay away from people who had done bad things.

But Jesus said, “People who are well do not need a doctor. It is people who are ill that need a doctor.”

Jesus meant that sin was like an illness. It stopped people living God’s way. They could not get better on their own. But Jesus was like a doctor who could help people get better. He could help them live God’s way.

Jesus said, “Some people know that they have done wrong things. I am asking those people to come to me for help.”

(Matthew chapter 9 verse 13)





The Pharisees thought they were good people. They did not think they needed help. But the people who had done bad things knew they needed help.

Jesus loves everyone. He even loves people who have done lots of bad things.

Jesus knows we cannot live God's way on our own. He helps everyone who comes to him for help.

Do you need help to live God's way? Jesus wants to help you too. Ask him to help you now.



Jesus chose his disciples. And he chooses me too.

It does not matter how much I know about God. It does not matter how clever I am. Jesus chooses me as I am.

Jesus wants me to follow him and learn from him. He wants me to try to be like him. And he promises to help me do this.

Tell Jesus how you feel about him choosing you.



The big story...

God had told the prophets some things about the saviour king. These were clues so people would know the saviour king when he came.

God told Isaiah that the mother of the saviour king would be someone who had never had sex. He was talking about Mary!

Then God said the saviour king would be called Immanuel. This means 'God with us'. (Isaiah chapter 7 verse 14) This was a clue that the saviour king would be God himself!

Jesus was God, and he was human too. He was the saviour king God had promised!