

THE GOSPELS

Who are the players?

THE ROMANS

The Roman Empire, with its extensive road system and overwhelming military force, brought a measure of order in Judea, the province where Jesus conducted his ministry.

Pontius Pilate governed the region with a mixture of cunning and brutality and was widely hated by the Jews.

A **centurion** commanded 100 men in the Roman army. One of them, watching the crucifixion of Jesus, exclaimed, "truly this man was the Son of God."

TAX COLLECTORS

Tax collectors contracted with the Roman Government to collect revenue from the populace. Some of them, like Matthew, were Jews—traitors to their own people. In Jesus' day, the title "tax collector" was synonymous with "sinner." They were often corrupt and self-serving, but Jesus befriended them.

Matthew, one of the 12 apostles, left his job as tax collector to follow Jesus.

THE CROWDS

As Jesus' popularity grew, people crowded around him to hear him teach or to ask for healing. They saw Jesus as their new king and liberator. But when Jesus failed to rise to power, they turned on him and called for his crucifixion.

THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Pharisees – The Pharisees were a powerful religious party in Judaism and were Jesus' most vocal opponents. Jesus denounced them for observing human religious traditions that obscured the true intent of the Old Testament Law. Despite his attacks on the Pharisees, Jesus did share some beliefs with them, including his belief in the resurrection.

Sadducees – The Sadducees were associated with the priestly class and vied for power with the Pharisees. They recognized the authority of the written Law (Genesis – Deuteronomy), but not the prophetic books or other writings in our present Old Testament. Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees did not believe that the dead would be raised. The Sadducees and Pharisees often engaged in controversies with each other but were united in their opposition to Christ.

Scribes – The scribes were a group of highly educated men who earned their living by studying and interpreting the Law in the first five books of the Old Testament. Most of the scribes were Pharisees, but the Sadducees had their own scribes as well.

THE DISCIPLES

Jesus deeply invested in a trusted inner core of twelve men. They were: Simon (also called Peter), Andrew (Peter's brother), James (son of Zebedee), John (James's brother), Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew (the tax collector), James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon (the Zealot), and Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him). After his death and resurrection, Jesus commissioned the disciples as Apostles to take the good news to all the nations.