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Interview with Jago

Illustrator of The Jesus Storybook Bible

1. Why did you decide to take on the immense project of creating illustrations for *The Jesus Storybook Bible*?

A children's Bible is probably a once-in-a-career type opportunity for a children's book illustrator, I'd have been mad to turn it down! It was probably the equivalent of working on 10 normal pictures books one after the other... a great challenge!

2. How long did this project take?

In total, I worked on the illustrations for around 10 months pretty much full-time, although I did also manage to fit in buying my first house, moving house and having a baby (with some help from my lovely wife)... There are 180 illustrations in the book and I had to produce rough drawings for each of them before moving on to the final coloured artwork. I work digitally so each of the drawings was drawn initially in pencil, then again in ink and then scanned in to my Mac. I then created the colours and textures in Photoshop. The whole book fills up about 75Gb of space (150 CD's or 16 DVD's!) and I had to keep several backups while I was working on it so that I wouldn't lose it if something catastrophic happened to my computer. I think I created over 1,300 files in total while working on the book. Once each stage of the artwork was finished, Sally and the publishers had to approve it and suggest any changes that needed to be made.

3. In what ways did you prepare to create these illustrations?

Sally and the publishers wanted the characters in the book to look authentic, so I researched Biblical costume and found reference for buildings and landscapes. I also produced a lot of different sketches at an early stage to figure out what sort of look Sally and Zondervan were after for the book.

4. How did you come up with the vision for the illustrations? How would you describe the style of these illustrations?

I'm often asked this and the answer is very simple, but often surprising to some people: the text. This is where the inspiration always comes from first, I simply read the page and see what pops in to my head. Then I draw it and see if what I've drawn would look better viewed from further away or closer up, or from above (like the city of Jericho in the book), or from down low (like the spread with Goliath). That's it in a nutshell, the really tricky bit is getting the pictures on the paper (or screen) to look like the pictures in my head!

I'm not sure how to describe the style to be honest. I guess I always want my illustrations to not be obviously digital, and for the people and animals not to be too cartoony or too realistic either. There's more on style here:

<http://jagoillustration.blogspot.com/2008/10/interview-questions.html>

5. How did Sally's writing inspire your illustrations?

Sally's writing and her comments throughout the process of creating the book were incredibly useful in helping me figure out what the illustrations needed to look like. The book's fantastic designer, Julie Chen, deserves a mention here too. She produced small thumbnail sketches of every single page (or spread) in the book, which I then worked from when producing my rough drawings. Normally I would do this stage too but as the book was so big I'm glad that Julie was working on this or it might still not be finished.

6. Are you surprised that *The Jesus Storybook Bible* is impacting people of all ages, and not just children?

Not really. I think that labeling books as "children's" or "adults" is short-sighted, books should be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of age. I still read a lot of supposed children's books. I think the best books in any genre are those that appeal to all ages.



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7. Did creating these illustrations for *The Jesus Storybook Bible* inspire you in any way?

I still think of myself as relatively inexperienced as an illustrator, so being able to complete such an immense project has really taught me a lot about what I'm capable of. After I finished illustrating the JSB, I felt I was capable of anything!

8. Does your family, particularly your daughter, influence your illustrations?

My daughter was born whilst I was in the process of finishing the JSB, but she has certainly influenced my work since then, I take a lot (1000's) of photos of her and draw her whenever she stays still long enough (not often). Characters in some of my other books are based on my wife as well, particularly *Fig's Giant*, (Oxford University Press, UK) where the main character is based on her as a little girl.

9. When and why did you decide to become an illustrator? (instead of Superman, Indiana Jones, or King Arthur)

Well, to be honest I didn't, after realising I wasn't cut out to be an archaeologist (and that sadly King Arthur and Superman were impossibilities) I enrolled on an art course and discovered that I really enjoyed Fine Art AND Graphic Design, but had no idea how that would lead to a career... then a lecturer pointed out there was this thing called Illustration, which was almost a combination of the two.... I received my 1st Class Illustration Degree 3 years later (2003), and have been doing it ever since. I now also teach Illustration at my local college.

10. Do you have any upcoming projects that we can look forward to seeing?

I'm currently finishing a version of *The Goose That Laid the Golden Egg* (published by Mantra Lingua, UK) and my latest book to be published was *Nachshon Who Was Afraid To Swim* (Kar-Ben, US).

11. Where can we find more about you and your work?

I have a Website at: <http://www.jagoillustration.com> and a blog at <http://jagoillustration.blogspot.com> ...so come and say hello...

12. Is there anything else you would like to add about your involvement with this project?

I'm constantly amazed at the sheer volume of online commentary this book has produced, I receive Google Alerts about *The Jesus Storybook Bible* almost every day and it's very exciting to think that so many children are looking at the pictures I've drawn. Illustrating is quite a solitary business (particularly when you're working with clients on the other side of the world in different time zones and entirely by e-mail), so it's nice to be reminded that my work does actually get out into the big wide world...

For an extended interview with Jago about *The Jesus Storybook Bible*:

<http://grshortstop.blogspot.com/2008/10/jesus-storybook-bible-interview-with.html>

About the Illustrator

Jago is an accomplished illustrator with several prestigious awards to his credit, including a Macmillian "Highly Commended" Award for Children's Illustration in 2003, an AOI Silver Award in 2004, and the National Literacy Association Wow! Award. Jago lives in Cornwall, England, with his wife and daughter.



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