

The Life and Times of Jesus Christ

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A Portrait of the Messiah

If we were to choose one person who has impacted world history more than any other, it would have to be Jesus Christ. His singular importance can be gauged from the article on him in *Encyclopedia Britannica*,¹ which totals over 20,000 words, more space than that given to Aristotle, Plato, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed and Napoleon combined. And it doesn't take much study of these historical figures, as impressive and influential as they may be, before you see something starkly different about the person of Jesus. As Xavier Leon-Dufour points out:

“The life of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be discussed in the same way as the life of any other man, however famous. Men like Caesar or Napoleon, for example, had a profound effect on their own age and may properly be said to have altered the course of history, but none of them ever claimed to give the final and definitive explanation of all that has happened, or will happen, in the course of time. Other men, like the Pharaohs of Egypt, have insisted on being worshiped as gods during their lifetime; but no one takes their claims to divinity seriously today. Quite the contrary is true when we consider the life of Jesus.”²

Jesus towers above every other historical figure. He has attracted more scholarly debate than any other person in history. If all the books that have been written about Jesus were to be collected under one roof, they would not merely line shelves but entire walls. In fact, more was written about Jesus in the last quarter of the twentieth century than in all the nineteen centuries preceding. John's hyperbolic statement, in **John 21:25**, holds amazing foresight:

A Portrait of the Messiah

The Divinity of the Messiah

The Birth of the Messiah

The Childhood of the Messiah

The People of the Messiah

The Inauguration of the Messiah

The Opposition to the Messiah

The Last Week of the Messiah

The Trial of the Messiah

The Death of the Messiah

The Resurrection of the Messiah

The Ascendancy of the Messiah



“Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”

Yet Jesus refuses to be imprisoned in scholarly texts, like a lab specimen awaiting dissection. He is not a dead-and-gone historical figure, but continues to interact with humanity even today. His life is somehow larger than life, jumping out from the pages of history and making demands upon people’s lives in the here and now. This is because, unlike any other historic figure, Jesus leaves his imprint upon our world on three levels:

His life is historically significant

“The name of Jesus,” as Ralph Waldo Emerson once observed, “is not so much written as plowed into the history of the world.”³ It is hard to escape his influence. Our calendar is based upon the estimated year of his birth. In fact, if you look at the date displayed by your computer, you will see that it neatly divides world history into two halves – everything that happened *before* Christ came, and everything that happened *after*.

Who could have foreseen that one single man, born 2000 years ago, would act as a pivot upon which the whole history of mankind would turn? As he grew up in an obscure village, there was nothing about him that apparently set him apart as one who would change the world. For sure, Luke records that “the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him” (**Luke 2:40**). Yet his own fellow villagers had difficulty coming to grips with his ministry. **Matthew 13:54-47** records their reaction:

“‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?’ they asked. ‘Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?’ And they took offense at him.”

So how did this first century carpenter's son from a small rural village at the edges of the Roman empire come to change the world? It all begins with the man, Jesus. There was something about him that sparked a chain reaction that continues to this day. As Philip Yancey expressed it:

“You can gauge the size of a ship that has passed out of sight by the huge wake it leaves behind.”⁴

Jesus stands alone in his impact upon world history. He simply has no peer on the historic stage. Even his detractors admit that there is something very different about him. At the beginning of the last century, H G Wells had this to say:

“More than 1900 years later, a historian like myself, who doesn't even call himself a Christian, finds the picture centering irresistibly around the life and character of this most significant man...The historian's test of an individual's greatness is ‘What did he leave to grow?’ Did he start men to thinking along fresh lines with a vigor that persisted after him? By this test Jesus stands first.”⁵

His life is culturally significant

The life of Jesus isn't just of distant historical significance. We can't look at Jesus, as we might at Julius Caesar, and say, “Yes, here is a man who changed the course of history. But that is all he did.” Jesus *continues* to impact our world today in both subtle and obvious ways. As Kenneth Woodward observes:

“By any secular standard, Jesus is...the dominant figure of Western culture. Like the millennium itself, much of what we now think of as Western ideas, innovations, and values finds its source or inspiration in the religion that worships God in His name. Art and science, the self and society, politics and economics, marriage and family, right and wrong, body and soul – all have been touched and often radically transformed by Christian influence.”⁶

The paradox of Jesus Christ is that he has such universal appeal. In itself, this is an amazing tribute. For Jesus was very much a person of his times. He spoke with a notoriously coarse Galilean accent. His parables drew upon imagery familiar to his Galilean audience, and his teaching addressed the political and religious conditions of his day. Yet twenty centuries later, this rustic Galilean still speaks to us.

Rabbi Hyman Enelow, former president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, voiced a growing appreciation in the Jewish community for the life and teachings of Jesus. In his book, *A Jewish View of Jesus*, he writes:

“Jesus has become the most popular, the most studied, the most influential figure in the religious history of mankind...No sensible Jew can be indifferent to the fact that a Jew should have had such a tremendous part in the religious education and direction of the human race...Who can compute all that Jesus has meant to humanity? The love he has inspired, the solace he has given, the good he has engendered, the hope and joy he has kindled – all that is unequalled in human history...The Jew cannot help glorying in what Jesus has meant to the world; nor can he help hoping that Jesus may yet serve as a

bond between Jew and Christian, once his teaching is better known and the bane of misunderstanding at last is removed from his words and his ideal.”⁷

The ordinary citizen of the twenty-first century – Jew and Gentile – is beginning to rediscover the man called Jesus. People are re-acknowledging the impact he has made upon their culture. But these two levels of impact – the historical and the cultural – do not exhaust the significance of Jesus today. For Jesus reaches beyond history and culture to touch the heart of the individual man, woman and child.

His life is personally significant

At last count, close to two billion people consider Jesus Christ to be their Lord. Of these, over 550 million call themselves “born again,” based on Jesus’ own words in **John 3:3**. How can a first century man command such widespread allegiance in the twenty-first century?

Even Albert Einstein, a deist and non-Christian, regarded Jesus with awe. “As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud,” he said. “I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene.”⁸ Yet millions of people today are more than just “enthralled” by Jesus. They have been so impacted by the man and his message that they have committed their lives to him – their hopes, their plans, even their eternal destiny. Sholem Asch, a twentieth century Jew, describes his own personal encounter with this first century Jew.

“I couldn’t help writing on Jesus. Since I first met Him, He has held my mind and heart...I floundered a bit, at first; I was seeking that something for which so many of us search – that surety, that faith, that spiritual content in my living which would bring me peace and through which I might help bring some peace to others. I found it in the Nazarene...Everything He ever said or did has value for us today, and that is something you can say of no other man, alive or dead...He became the Light of the world. Why shouldn’t I, a Jew, be proud of it?”⁹

Take any other historical figure, stand him next to Jesus, and see if he measures up. Napoleon conquered Europe in his day, but this is what he had to say about Jesus of Nazareth:

“I think I understand somewhat of human nature and I tell you...Jesus Christ was more than a man. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but upon what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love, and at this hour millions of men would die for him.”¹⁰

“Is anyone in history more famous than Jesus of Nazareth?” asks Donald Senior. “Probably not. The power of his reputation over the past two thousands years has left profound imprints on peoples and cultures. It has built Gothic masterpieces, ignited wars, motivated heroic leaders, and even put fluorescent bumper stickers on cars. By far the most significant tribute to the power of Jesus’ fame is that countless people claim him as the center of their lives, as the inspiration for

their best moments.”¹¹ Maybe his significance can be summed up in the words of one anonymous writer:

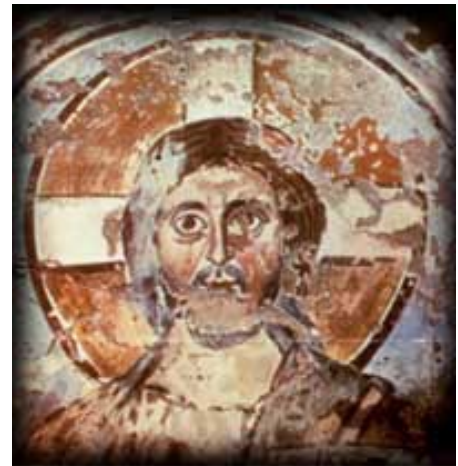
“All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has this one solitary life.”¹²

In this module, we will investigate the life and times of this singular man. We will explore his life through both a biblical lens and a historical lens and discover that this binocular view is not only compatible but also complementary.

The Jesus Phenomenon

The starting point for any investigation into the life of Jesus is not the Gospel accounts themselves, but the historic knock-on effects of Jesus’ life as expressed through his Church. Scholars can argue as much as they may over the historicity of Jesus, as presented in the biblical record, but what no one can dispute is the explosive appearance of Christianity on the world scene in the first century.

Within 20 years of the crucifixion of Jesus, when Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, there was already a sizeable community of Christians in Rome. In **Philippians 4:22**, Paul claimed that the Gospel had even reached Caesar’s household. The strategy of **Acts 1:8** was being rapidly fulfilled, but the question is: What started all of this off? If there was no Jesus as described in the Gospel accounts, how can you account for such a proliferation of believers in such a short space of time? As C F D Moule explains it:



A catacomb painting of Christ.

“Whoever tries to account for the beginnings of Christianity by some purely historical non-transcendental event, runs up against the difficulty that there seems to be no such event of sufficient magnitude...”¹³

Paul Barnett calls this “the logic of history.” He writes:

“The phenomenon of the coming into existence of early Christianity is well attested. Its sudden emergence is as historically secure as any event in Palestine in that century. So the historian asks: what plausible explanation or explanations can be found for this event?”¹⁴

Skeptical scholars, starting in the nineteenth century, have sought to “demythologize” and “reconstruct” Jesus, divesting him of his divine status and supernatural mode of operation. The result is a mere ghost of a figure, with few attributable deeds or words. Yet how can such a severely “demythologized” Jesus account for

the amazing growth of the early Church? For without the Jesus of the Gospel accounts, we are left bewildered as to how the Church got started in the first place. Paul Barnett goes on to explain:

“There is a historical connection between the Christians and Christ; they were given their name on account of his name and their devotion to the one who had that name. The Christians were devoted to Christ, confessed him, worshiped him, proclaimed him and took their impetus from him. But this Christ-impetus, this connectedness between Christ and the early Christian, so often observed then by non-Christian and Christian alike, is absent from many enquiries into the historical Jesus today. Thus an important element in getting back from the Christ of early Christianity to the historical Jesus, namely his impact or ‘knock-on effect,’ tends to be ignored.”¹⁵

The student of history demands that there be an identifiable cause and effect in historic events. A continuity must be established between the early Christians and the Christ they worshiped. Either the early believers invented Christ, or their faith is in a real person. According to C F D Moule, the original “Christ-impetus” requires two things:

- A “most powerful and original mind”
- A “tremendous confirmatory event”

Paul Barrett goes on to expound upon the nature of this “most powerful and original mind” and the “tremendous confirmatory event”:

“The early rise of Christianity as a moment close in time to Jesus is a fact of history. *Someone* gave impulse to the rise of that movement in the immediately preceding weeks and months. Only a quite remarkable figure could have provided that percussive impulse. Historical probability, what I am calling the ‘logic of history,’ demands nothing less...[It] means that the existence, momentum and direction of the early church are most plausibly explained by a powerful teacher who had a close relationship beforehand with his immediate circle, an influence radically reinforced by the confirmatory event of his resurrection from the dead.”¹⁶

As we study this module, we will be exploring the extraordinary character of the One who started the whole thing off. We will examine this “powerful and original mind” and look at the “Christ-impetus” that impacted the first generation, and continues to impact our generation today.

The Double Lens

Let’s now begin our investigation of the historical person of Jesus Christ. And what better place to start than with one of his modern critics.

“The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith are two separate beings, with very different stories. It is difficult enough to reconstruct the first, and in the attempt we are likely to do irreparable harm to the second.”¹⁷

With these words, A N Wilson opens his book, *Jesus*, voicing the stand that a small but vocal group of scholars have taken in recent years. But is this true? Do we really have two separate people – an historical rabbi totally divorced from the mythical savior upon whom the Christian faith is based? To this question, John shouted an unequivocal “No!” In **1 John 1:1-2**, he declared the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith to be one and the same person.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen with our eyes*, which we have *looked at* and our hands have *touched* – *this* we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have *seen it* and *testify to it*...We proclaim to you *what we have seen and heard*...”

Peter was equally adamant that the historical accounts of Christ’s life were true and accurate when he wrote in **2 Peter 1:16**:

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

Are the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith one and the same? According to Peter and John (who both claim to be eyewitnesses to the Jesus of History), they are identical. In **1 John 5:10**, John even goes as far as to say this:

“Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.”

A person may choose not to believe the Gospel accounts, but John makes it clear that to do so is to call God a liar. In **1 John 2:22-23**, he expands on this:

“Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”

God has spelled out the issue of Jesus Christ in black and white. You either accept him or reject him. There is no scholarly middle ground where faith in Christ can be embraced but the historicity of Christ denied. As Everett Harrison explains it:

“Some religions, both ancient and modern, require no historical basis, for they depend upon ideas rather than events. Christianity is not one of these.”¹⁸

The Christian faith is grounded in history. But more than that, it is grounded in an historical *person* – Jesus Christ, the subject of history and the object of faith. In the second century, Ignatius declared his conviction that the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith are one and the same. He wrote:

“Jesus Christ who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was *truly* born and ate and drank, was *truly* persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was *truly* crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was *truly* raised from the dead...”¹⁹

Historical and biblical records both converge to provide an accurate image of Jesus Christ. Let’s take a look, then, at Jesus through these two perspectives.

The historical lens

In **ES108-07**, we established a compelling case for the historical Jesus.* In that lesson, we discovered that the existence of Jesus was confirmed by pagan writers, by Josephus (a first-century Jewish historian) and even by the Jewish enemies of the young Church.

Even if we do not take first and second century Christian writings into account, the picture that emerges of the historical Jesus is remarkably consistent with the Gospel record. In fact, some of the best extra-biblical support for Jesus' existence comes not from Christian but from anti-Christian voices. "Non-Christian evidence... substantiates the fact of Jesus' existence, his popular following, his execution and the rough date."²⁰ Even *Encyclopedia Britannica* concludes that these "independent accounts prove that in ancient times even the opponents of Christianity never doubted the historicity of Jesus..."²¹

Howard Clark Kee summarizes the wealth of evidence.

"The result of the examination of sources outside the New Testament that bear directly or indirectly on our knowledge of Jesus is to confirm his historical existence, his unusual powers, the devotion of his followers, the continued existence of his movement after his death at the hands of the Roman governor in Jerusalem, and the penetration of Christianity into the upper strata of society in Rome itself by the later first century."²²

On the basis of this evidence, Kee brings his conclusion:

"In spite of this range of ways in which the tradition of Jesus has been transmitted, we have available a clear and remarkably consistent array of evidence about this figure whose life, teachings, and death have continued to have such a profound impact on the subsequent history of the human race."²³

It is therefore with confidence that we can explore the life of Jesus from extra-biblical sources, looking through the historical lens of archaeology and contemporary writings.

The biblical lens

If all we had were the writings of those opposed to Jesus, however, we would have only the barest outline of what he said and did. "The simple fact is that unless we had the [Gospel accounts], our knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth would be dim rumor in the corridors of history."²⁴

And so, to fill in the details we must look to the biblical record, which is comprised of the four Gospel accounts and the apostolic epistles, written to the young churches of the first century. But before we can examine the biblical record, we must first understand how that record came to be compiled.

* We encourage you to review **ES108-07**, for this lesson provides an important foundation for any study of the life of Jesus.

The Compiling of the Gospel Record

Throughout the epistles we find two words used to describe the evangelistic mission of the early Church:

- **Proclamation** – this was the *evangelistic* component of their mission
- **Tradition** – this was the *discipling* component of their mission

Paul continually uses expressions such as “I handed over” and “you received” to remind his converts of what they had been taught. These expressions are standard Jewish rabbinic terms and describe the process by which a rabbi would train his disciples, passing on the traditions of the rabbinic elders (note **Galatians 1:14**). As Paul Barrett explains, Paul “uses the technical language of rabbinic ‘traditioning’ – the handing over not of an impersonal body of information, however, but of a person, ‘Christ.’”²⁵ We see this “traditioning” emphasis throughout Paul’s writings:

- **1 Corinthians 11:2** (NKJV) – “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions *just as I delivered them to you.*”
- **1 Corinthians 11:23-25** – “For I received from the Lord *what I also passed on to you*: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”
- **1 Corinthians 15:1-5** – “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, *which you received* and on which you have taken your stand...For *what I received I passed on to you* as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.”
- **2 Thessalonians 3:6** (NKJV) – “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not *according to the tradition which he received from us.*”

The writers of the New Testament also used the term “the faith” to describe the total body of revelation that was passed on in the discipling process.

- **Acts 6:7** – “So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to *the faith.*”
- **Acts 13:8** – “But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from *the faith.*”
- **Acts 14:21-22** – “They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to *remain true*

to the faith...”

- **Acts 16:5** – “So the churches were strengthened in *the faith* and grew daily in numbers.”
- **1 Corinthians 16:13** – “Be on your guard; stand firm in *the faith*; be men of courage; be strong.”
- **2 Corinthians 13:5** – “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in *the faith*; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?”
- **Galatians 1:22-23** – “I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: ‘The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching *the faith* he once tried to destroy.’”
- **Ephesians 1:13** – “...until we all reach unity in *the faith* and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”
- **Philippians 1:27-28** – “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man *for the faith of the gospel...*”
- **Colossians 2:6-7** – “So then, just as you *received* Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in *the faith as you were taught*, and overflowing with thankfulness.”
- **Jude 3** – “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for *the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.*”

This is the way the Gospel account was passed on to the first generations of believers. No one saw the need at that time to write it down. The original apostles were mostly all alive, as were the majority of more than 500 witnesses to the resurrected Christ (**1 Corinthians 15:6**).

But there came a time when the leaders of the Church realized that the first generation of believers – those who had personally witnessed the Lord Jesus Christ – were not going to be around for much longer. It was at that time that the Gospel accounts began to be compiled. Up till that point, the Gospel had been passed by word of mouth, but now it began to be passed in written form.

This, of course, was not a new thing to the early believers. They already had the teachings of the apostles in written form – the epistles. In **2 Thessalonians 2:15**, Paul wrote:

“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, *whether by word of mouth or by letter.*”

Although these letters had never attempted to record the entire story of Christ's life, we can still glean the outline of the life of Christ from them. Here are the facts that we discover in the epistles:

- Jesus was a descendant of Abraham (**Galatians 3:16**).
- Jesus was a direct descendant of David (**Romans 1:3; 9:5; 15:8; 1 Corinthians 15:3**).
- Jesus was "born of a woman" (**Galatians 4:4**). It is quite possible that Paul is here referring to the virgin birth of Christ (note **Matthew 1:16; Luke 3:23**).
- Jesus was born in poverty (**2 Corinthians 8:9**).
- Jesus was born under Jewish Law (**Galatians 4:4; Luke 2:42**).
- Jesus had a brother named James (**Galatians 1:19; 1 Corinthians 15:7**) and other unnamed brothers (**1 Corinthians 9:5**).
- Jesus lived a lifestyle of humility and meekness (**2 Corinthians 10:1; Matthew 11:29**).
- Jesus ministered primarily to the Jews (**Romans 15:8; Matthew 10:6; 15:24**).
- Jesus washed the feet of his disciples (**1 Timothy 5:10; John 13:1-17**).
- Jesus instituted a memorial meal on the night he was betrayed (**1 Corinthians 11:23-25**).
- Jesus testified before Pontius Pilate (**1 Timothy 6:13**).
- Jesus was crucified (**Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 1:16-2:2**).
- Jesus was buried (**1 Corinthians 15:4**).
- Jesus was raised on the third day and witnessed by many (**1 Corinthians 15:4-6**).

But sometime between Paul's latter missionary journeys and the fall of Jerusalem, a number of more formalized Gospel accounts began to circulate. Luke himself bears testimony to this at the beginning of his own "orderly" account:

"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, *just as they were handed down to us* by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty *of the things you have been taught*."

We are now recipients of this Gospel traditioning. It has now been passed on to us, this time not by word of mouth, but in written form. It has been "handed down to us" so that we might in turn hand it down to the next generation.

Rediscovering Jesus

This module, like every module in the Biblical Studies Course, is an exercise in discovery. As we open the life of Jesus, layer by layer, we will discover new and amazing things about the Lord we love and serve. And some of our discoveries

may make us uncomfortable, for you cannot discover Jesus without discovering the challenge he brings to your life.

Our aim in the next eleven lessons is to challenge your concept of Jesus Christ. We have all grown up with familiar images from the Christmas and Easter stories, but these images do not always correspond with the Gospel reality. This is because we have all too often shaped Jesus into someone culturally acceptable, someone who is a reflection of our own social ideals.

Tony Campolo makes this cutting observation:

“Our society has taken Jesus and recreated him in our own cultural image. When I hear Jesus being proclaimed from the television stations across our country, from pulpits hither and yon, he comes across not as the biblical Jesus, not as the Jesus described in the Bible, but as a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Republican...God created us in his image, but we have decided to return the favor and create a God who is in our image.”²⁶

At one stage, the Cuban government distributed posters of Jesus with a carbine slung over his shoulder, seeking to recruit the power of his image and name to the revolutionary cause. But in our own ways, we often unwittingly do exactly the same thing. Norm Evans, former Miami Dolphins lineman, made this comment:

“I guarantee you Christ would be the toughest guy who ever played this game... If he were alive today I would picture a six-foot-six-inch 260-pound defensive tackle who would always make the big plays and would be hard to keep out of the backfield for offensive linemen like myself.”²⁷

Evans, sadly, has got it wrong. Not only is Jesus actually alive today, his priorities would not necessarily be on the football field. For sure, he would laugh and enjoy life with us. But his agenda would not be our own. And he would refuse to be put in the box we neatly make for him.

Evans’ intentions were good. He was seeking to break the traditional image of a “holier than thou” Jesus somehow removed from real life. But without realizing it, Evans addressed this misconception by re-modeling Jesus in his own image. We can all do this. A former baseball player, Fritz Peterson, imagines Jesus in this way:

“I firmly believe that if Jesus Christ was sliding into second base, he would knock the second basemen into left field to break up the double play. Christ might not throw a spitball, but he would play hard within the rules.”²⁸

Yes, we do need to shatter some preconceived ideas about Jesus. But the way we do this is by digging into history and into the Word of God. As Donald Senior points out:

“To learn about Jesus may not always be so comforting. The image of Jesus with which we begin may not be totally accurate. Sometimes too much of ourselves is reflected in the portrait. Thus our Jesus may be too familiar, too middle class, too white, or too revolutionary.”²⁹

Over the rest of this module, we will be discovering the rich textures of the life of Christ, as seen through the twin lenses of history and the Bible. You will find that many of your preconceptions will be challenged. But we trust that at the end of this module, you will agree with Charles Spurgeon when he said:

“The more you know about Christ, the less you will be satisfied with superficial views of him.”³⁰

¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition, “Jesus Christ” (New York: University Press, 1970).

² Xavier Leon-Dufour, quoted by Edythe Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, extracted from QuickVerse 6.0.

³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted by Edythe Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, extracted from QuickVerse 6.0.

⁴ Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Sydney: Strand Publishing, 2000), p.17.

⁵ H G Wells, quoted by Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Sydney: Strand Publishing, 2000), p.17.

⁶ Kenneth Woodward, “2000 Years of Jesus,” *Newsweek*, March 29, 1999, p.54.

⁷ Hyman Enelow, *A Jewish View of Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1920), pp.4-5.

⁸ Albert Einstein, quoted from an interview by George Sylvester Viereck, “What Life Means to Einstein,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1929.

⁹ Sholem Asch, *One Destiny* (New York: Putnam Publishing Company, 1945).

¹⁰ Napoleon Bonaparte, *Bertrand’s Memoirs* (Paris, 1844).

¹¹ Donald Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1992), p.7.

¹² Anonymous, quoted by Edythe Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, extracted from QuickVerse 6.0.

¹³ C F D Moule, quoted by E L Mascall, *Jesus: Who He Is And How We Know Him* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), p.6.

¹⁴ Paul W Barrett, *Jesus and the Logic of History* (Guernsey, UK: Apollos, 1997), p.19.

¹⁵ Paul W Barrett, *Jesus and the Logic of History* (Guernsey, UK: Apollos, 1997), p.29.

¹⁶ Paul W Barrett, *Jesus and the Logic of History* (Guernsey, UK: Apollos, 1997), p.35.

¹⁷ A N Wilson, *Jesus* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson Limited, 1992), p.vii.

¹⁸ Everett F Harrison, “Are the Gospels Reliable?” *Moody Monthly*, February 1966.

¹⁹ Ignatius, *Trallians*, 9, quoted by Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p.131.

²⁰ R T France, “Life and Teaching of Christ,” *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd edition, ed. I Howard Marshal et al (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p.564.

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²⁶ Tony Campolo, quoted by Edythe Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, extracted from QuickVerse 6.0.

²⁷ Norm Evans, quoted by Philip Yancy, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Sydney: Strand Publishing, 2000), p.19.

²⁸ Fritz Peterson, quoted by Philip Yancy, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Sydney: Strand Publishing, 2000), p.19.

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³⁰ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoted by Edythe Draper, *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, extracted from QuickVerse 6.0.

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