

# life

module

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## Consider

### The Story so Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality. Rebellion continued at Babel, where God was rejected; the people were spread all over the world and began their own religions. In his love for the peoples of the world, God decided to reach out for them. To do this, he chose Israel as his special people and put them in a special place for the special purpose of representing him to the nations.

### Continuing the Story...

God had set up his special nation, Israel. Through that nation, God would reveal himself and send the promised deliverer, who would fix all the problems that sin had created.

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## Day One: Believe It or Not...

In the 1920s Robert Ripley began writing a fun daily 'Believe It or Not' column for the *New York Globe*. After that, 'Ripley's Believe It or Not' went viral. It's now a huge global franchise – radio programmes, television series, websites, books, comic books, and even an international chain of museums and aquariums. Ever since he began, Ripley has been putting everything odd, weird and plain unbelievable right under our noses! – things so bizarre, fascinating, strange and unusual, we always find ourselves questioning the claims. But, as Ripley puts his stories together, the unbelievable becomes undeniable... right in front of our eyes!

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At first glance, the story of Jesus can sound quite unbelievable too. A virgin birth with angels in attendance! Miracles galore. Demons by the dozen. Graphic predictions of the end of the world. Promises of a heavenly utopia for those who follow him. A crucifixion followed by a physical resurrection. The promise of a 'Second Coming'! All a bit unusual to say the least? Sure! Is Jesus real? Did he really live? Did he really say and do what the Bible says? Or does he belong to the imaginary world?

Ever noticed how the Bible repeatedly connects Jesus to real history? By constantly connecting Jesus to real people and real places in history, the Gospel writers showed that Jesus was not a legend – he was a real person (see the table below).

In fact, the Bible has connected Jesus to history so well that, despite various opinions about him, historians have no doubt he existed. Reputable encyclopaedias all have articles about Jesus and treat him as they do any other real person of history. Actually, our whole civilisation is dated in relation to Jesus Christ – check the coins in your pocket.

The genealogies connect Jesus to real people	Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38
Jesus was born during the time of Caesar Augustus	Luke 2:1
Jesus was born in Bethlehem	Luke 2:4–7
King Herod the Great ruled at the time Jesus was born	Matthew 2:1; Luke 1:5
Jesus lived when Quirinius was governor of Syria	Luke 2:2
Jesus was raised in Nazareth	Matthew 2:23
Jesus began his teaching during the time of Caesar Tiberius	Luke 3:1
Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea	Matthew 27:11–13; Luke 3:1
Herod the Great’s son, Herod Archelaus, took over Judea	Matthew 2:22
Herod the Great’s son, Herod Antipas, took over Galilee	Luke 3:1
Herod the Great’s son, Herod Philip, took over north-east Palestine	Luke 3:1
Jesus lived in the reign of Jewish High Priest Annas	Luke 3:2
Jesus lived in the reign of Jewish High Priest Caiaphas	Matthew 26:3

What does all this mean for us? Just this: whatever we might think of Jesus, we can’t call him Mr Imaginary.

Explore the Bible

Read Luke 3:1–3.

How many historical and geographical references can you find?

## Day Two: Everyone Talks About the Weather...

Mark Twain, the witty American author, once said: “Everybody talks about the weather but nobody does anything about it”. We smile – because it’s true! It’s either too hot, too cold, too wet, too dry or too windy. In their song, *Weather With You*, the band Crowded House put it so well...

*Julius Caesar and the Roman Empire couldn’t conquer the blue sky.*

Even powerful political rulers can’t conquer the weather! Sometimes the weather goes out of its way just to prove we can’t do anything about it. Massive storms lash huge cities around the world, leaving them in tatters.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus is the one person in all history who could literally do something about everything – including the weather! He made the deaf hear, the dumb speak and cripples walk. The hungry were fed to their fill. Empty nets were suddenly bursting with fish. Empty water jars overflowed with the best wine. Dead people were raised to life. The demon-possessed were set free. The blind were given sight. He calmed life-threatening storms with just one word. For everything that was a problem, he had an answer.

How could he do it? The Bible says that he was the Messiah, the promised deliverer. Why wouldn’t he have an answer for everything?

Explore the Bible

Read Luke 8:22–25.

What does this miracle tell us about Jesus’ ability to change the world?

## Day Three: Jesus Who?

It seems the Chinese were the first to use surnames around 2852 BC when Emperor Fushi decreed everyone had to have three names... a surname, a generation name and then (lastly!) a first name. The Romans eventually 'followed suit'. Then, it seems, surnames went out of fashion and disappeared – until around the 11th or 12th century AD.

This time, people were known more by their occupation... the Bakers, Smiths, Knights, Archers, Farmers, etc. Some were known by where they lived... the Hills, Woods, Fields, Lakes and the Stones. Even the most curious of names had a logical explanation – Mr Sidebottom (some prefer to pronounce it 'Sid-e-bot-tom') came from the bottom side of the valley!

The Jews didn't have surnames, either. So, looking for Jesus in the local Nazareth telephone directory would have been a bit of a mission. First, no telephones. Then, no directories. And then, no surnames! Jesus was known simply as 'son of Joseph', 'son of Mary' or just plain 'Jesus of Nazareth'. Some people mistakenly think 'Christ' was Jesus' surname – because the Bible refers to him a lot as "Jesus Christ".

But the Greek word 'Christ' (or 'Messiah' in Hebrew) is actually a title that means 'anointed one'. So really, Jesus is "the Christ" – the anointed deliverer predicted all through the Old Testament.

Jesus once put his disciples right on the spot and asked them who he was: "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah [Christ], the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15–16). Jesus wasn't shocked at his answer, nor did he correct him. In fact, he congratulated him! Peter had never got anything more right in his life!

If he asked you, would you have an answer?

Explore the Bible

Read Matthew 26:63–68.

What is so significant about this encounter?

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## Day Four: Could We Have a Fair Religion Act?

Every day, businesses are fighting for our attention so we will buy their products. We all know some of that advertising stuff is just a plain con – supposedly cheap deals spiked with hidden fees... endless ‘Hurry... Last Days... going out of business’ sales – that are still there two years later! Thank goodness for ‘truth tests’ like the Fair Trading Act that make it illegal for traders to mislead consumers through unfair trading practices. I can hear you thinking... “We could almost do with that in religion!” And you’d be right – A Fair Religion Act – something to protect us from all the ‘shonky’ religious claims out there.

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But didn’t Jesus make some outrageous claims of his own? Yes he did. He claimed that he was the Messiah which the Old Testament taught would be fully human and... fully God (Isaiah 9:6)! So, while Jesus never exactly waved a banner that said “I am God”, he claimed to be equal with God:

- In person – he called God his Father (John 5:17–18), which is why the Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy and sought to have him killed!
- In power – that whatever God could do, he could do too (John 5:19–21) – including raising the dead!
- In authority – that he would be the judge of all human beings (John 5:22, 27)!
- In honour – Jesus said that he should be honoured in exactly the same way God the Father is honoured (John 5:22–23)!

If these outrageous claims were not true, God would have distanced himself from Jesus... but he didn’t! Instead, he called Jesus his beloved Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5) and then confirmed his claims through countless miracles (John 3:2; 20:30–31; 21:25). These really were outrageous claims – but shonky? What do you think?

Explore the Bible

What is John 5:17–21 all about?

## Day Five: Nobody's Perfect...

Someone once said: "Nobody's perfect. We're all just one step up from the beasts and one step down from the angels." The singer Miley Cyrus put it this way:

*Everybody makes mistakes...  
everybody has those days...  
everybody knows what, what I'm talkin' 'bout...  
everybody gets that way  
Nobody's perfect! I gotta work it!  
Again and again 'til I get it right!  
Nobody's perfect! Ya live and ya learn it!  
And if I mess it up sometimes...  
Nobody's perfect!*

The Bible would almost agree but there's one exception – Jesus.

People tend to look at Jesus' life in one of two ways. Some say, "It's too good to be true" and they write Jesus off. But others say, "It's so good it has to be true!" Who could (or even would) invent a life that good when it makes the rest of us look so bad?

Someone once said that Jesus must have been the only human being in the world who claimed to be perfect and was taken seriously by his friends as well as his enemies. His friends found no fault in him (1 Peter 2:22). His enemies had no case against him (Matthew 27:3–4; Luke 23:4, 14). Jesus asked the one question a flawed person would never ask... "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (John 8:46).

It's quite amazing. He taught about wrong but never did it. He taught about repentance but never needed it. He taught about forgiveness but never experienced it. He never had to apologise. When he reached the end of the day, he had no regrets.

Explore the Bible

Read Luke 23:39–43.

What did the second criminal think?

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## Explore

Discussion starter

Q – What do your family, friends and work colleagues think about Jesus?

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Mark 2:1–12.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this story.

Q – The teachers of the Law knew that only God could forgive sins (verse 7). What was Jesus claiming by forgiving sins?

## View

Video episode 8 – life

Five things God tells us about Jesus:

1. Jesus was a ..... person.
  2. Jesus made incredible .....
  3. Jesus lived a ..... life.
  4. Jesus worked amazing .....
  5. Jesus was a great .....
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## Discuss

Questions I have

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