

But what about now? Has Jesus carried his popularity into the third millennium since he died?

I decided to conduct an experiment to find out. I logged on to the Internet recently to search for information relating to Jesus. First though, I searched for ‘web pages’ relating to Michael Jordan and Madonna. I thought it would be interesting to compare Jesus’ popularity in cyberspace with two of the most popular people on the planet today. Here are the results:

- Mike Jordan clocked up a huge 921 sites.
- To my surprise, Madonna dwarfed Mike (so to speak) with 2121 sites.
- Then I typed in ‘Jesus Christ’. He outdid them both with 4515 sites—that’s more than both of them put together.

I kept running searches through the different search engines, just to make sure of the results. Every time I did it, Jesus more than doubled the ‘hits’ of Mike and Madonna. Not bad for a man born in an animal shed almost 2000 years ago.

Some of my more cynical mates might say that this simply proves there are more ‘computer nerds’ out there who are Christians than there are computer nerds who are Mike and Madonna fans. That might be true of course, but I think it still shows what I said before—whenever we come up with a new way to talk about life, Jesus is one of the biggest topics on our lips—and our web pages.

But how on earth did Jesus get to be so popular? How did he go from being a carpenter in his dad’s business, to having over 1,000,000,000 fans who think he’s in charge of the universe? How did he advance from the manger to such mega-stardom? That question is sort of what this book is about.

If you’d asked me when I was a teenager, “How come Jesus is so popular?”, I wouldn’t have had a clue. My first impressions of this carpenter-turned-megastar came from Hollywood movies—the ones they repeat every Easter on TV. I must admit, I was never very impressed. For starters, he wore what looked like a dress or ‘nightie’, which for a teenage bloke was pretty hard to cope with. I’d just reached puberty—deeper voice, girls on the mind, hair in new places—so someone who wore long



white robes in public was not my idea of a man's man! What's more, he never seemed to smile. I'm not saying he looked depressed, it's just that he seemed to be in a constant daze. I couldn't help thinking he must have been very boring to be around. For a Year 9 guy these were critical issues. At this age, I was *tough* and *into fun*. Jesus, on the other hand, seemed *weak* and *boring*. That settled it: Jesus was not for me.

The silly thing was, I had never read any of the biographies about Jesus in the Bible—I didn't even know there were any. It never crossed my mind that the Hollywood movies might have got him wrong. It was pretty sad really, a billion people in the world today worship this man, and I'd almost made up my mind about him from a couple of tacky 1970s films.

Things changed though. At the end of Year 9 I got a new 'Scripture' teacher. I had never been able to work out these religious people. They came to my school once a week to talk about God and weren't even paid for it. Why on earth would someone do that? Especially since 'Scripture' was even less popular than Maths.

This new Scripture teacher did an amazing thing one day. She invited the class to come to her home on Friday afternoons for Bible study, hamburgers, milkshakes and scones. We were 15 year old blokes, so this was not a hard decision to make. We may not have been keen on the ‘Bible’, but we were definitely keen on the food. So, one Friday afternoon we turned up to her place and made ourselves at home. Sure enough, she made as much food as six teenagers can eat. Then, when we were too full to make a move, she brought out the Bible.

To my surprise, she never threw a rule book at us or said, “Cut your hair, tuck your shirt in, go to bed by nine, and be good Christian boys”. Instead, she talked about Jesus, but in a way that sounded nothing like the man I’d seen in the movies or on Christmas cards. This was the Jesus straight out of the Bible, and he was amazing. He was funnier than I ever expected, tougher than I ever imagined, and stranger than anyone I’d come across. Within a couple of months of these Friday afternoon Bible studies I slowly became convinced that Jesus was at least as important as the hamburgers, milkshakes and scones, which for a 15 year old bloke was quite a step. Everything I had previously thought about him seemed ridiculous. Everything I began to learn about him captured my mind. “His was quite a life”, I thought to myself, “a hell of a life”.

If you had told me when I was a teenager that I would one day write a book about Jesus, I would not have believed you. But Jesus is like that—he has always had a way of attracting the most unlikely people. When he walked the dusty roads of ancient Palestine, it was not the “religious” people who flocked to him, but the “not-so-religious”. It’s my belief in this simple fact, that led to the writing of this book.

If you’re already among the billion or so people who think Jesus runs the world, this book isn’t really for you. It’s great to have you along, but I must admit, this book is written more for people who can’t quite see why there’s so much fuss about him.

- It’s for those who occasionally use his name—“ahh Jesus!”—but don’t know how it came to be a swear word.
- It’s for those who have seen a Jesus movie but, like me, thought he was a bit of a ‘sandal-and-nightie-wearing-fairy...tale’ from the past.

- It's for those who reckon Jesus was probably a 'good bloke' but wouldn't really count him among their mates.
- It's for those who list Jesus as one of the 'great teachers' but aren't real sure what he taught.
- It's for those who think Jesus was a lunatic, or a liar. It's even for those who doubt he ever existed.

If that sounds vaguely like you, thanks for reading. I hope you enjoy it.

J E S U S C H R I S T S U P E R S C A M

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS some very influential people (musicians, film directors and writers) have brought us ‘fresh’ looks at the life of Jesus. Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, gave us an angry, misunderstood Jesus. Director Martin Scorsese’s film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, gave us the self-deluded, sexually-repressed Jesus. And more recently, academic Barbara Thiering’s best selling book, *Jesus the Man*, gave us the married-with-three-kids-then-divorced Jesus.