

= Son of God (TV series) =

Son of God (also known as Jesus : The Complete Story and Jesus : The Real Story) is an award winning British documentary series that chronicles the life of Jesus Christ using scientific and contemporary historical evidence . It was presented by Jeremy Bowen , and its first episode premiered in the United Kingdom on 1 April 2001 . The executive producer was Ruth Pitt and it was directed by Jean Claude Bragard ? it took a total of 16 months to produce and cost GB £ 1 @. 5 million . A full symphonic score was composed by James Whitbourn . Son of God featured interviews with 21 historians and other Biblical experts , live action reenactments of the life of Jesus with Leron Livo in the lead role , and computer generated images of what locations from Jesus 's time might have looked like . These images , created by design team Red Vision , were praised by critics and received an Outstanding Achievement Award at the 2001 Royal Television Society North Awards .

Son of God ran for a single series of three episodes , each of which focused on a different stage of Jesus 's life . The first episode , " The Real Man " , looked at the historical evidence for the existence of Jesus , and documented his life from his birth to his temptation . Episode two , " The Mission " , discussed how Jesus became popular among Jews and Greeks , and why the Pharisees of the area might have seen him as a threat . " The Final Hours " , the third and final episode of Son of God , looked at Jesus 's crucifixion , and presented some ideas as to how the traditional views of the crucifixion may conflict with how it really occurred . The episode concluded with the construction of a computer generated animation of how Jesus may have appeared .

Critical reaction to the series was mixed . While some reviewers praised the programme for being worthy of its publicity by focusing on history rather than spirituality , others remarked that it was dumbed down and went off on strange tangents . The reliability of the facial reconstruction was also questioned . Son of God first aired in the UK on BBC One during April 2001 , where it received a viewership of six million and an audience share of 25 % . In the United States , the series was shown on the Discovery Channel under the name Jesus : The Complete Story as a single three @- hour programme , two weeks after its UK broadcast . The show was also licensed to countries including France , Denmark and New Zealand .

= = Production = =

Son of God was devised in 1999 , and was produced and joint @- sponsored by BBC Manchester and the Discovery Channel in association with France 3 and Jerusalem Productions . The show was directed by Jean Claude Bragard ? whose previous BBC work had included Kicking & Screaming ? A History of Football and the documentary series Panorama ? and the executive producer was Ruth Pitt , who had worked on documentaries such as 42 Up and Channel 4 's The State of Marriage . During its promotion , Pitt described Son of God as " the most complete biography of Jesus that [had] ever been done " .

Jeremy Bowen , a former Middle East correspondent for BBC News , was chosen to present the programme for its UK broadcast . Despite not being religious , he was drawn to the programme for its use of scientific and historical information . As well as presenting , Bowen also narrated and scripted large portions of the series . He stated that he brought a degree of scepticism to the show : before the first episode aired , he admitted that he did not think that you could " corroborate anything that was in the Gospels " . In the US version of Son of God , which was broadcast on the Discovery Channel and retitled Jesus : The Complete Story , the footage of Bowen was edited out and his narration was redubbed by American actor Avery Brooks . It was also released in this format under the name Jesus : The Real Story , with narration from Tom Hodgkins .

Son of God took 16 months to produce , and cost approximately £ 1 @. 5 million . It was featured as part of a £ 253 million season of new television programming on the BBC during the spring of 2001 . British conductor James Whitbourn was commissioned to write a complete symphonic score for the series , which was performed by the BBC Philharmonic . The completed programme featured more than an hour and a half of Whitbourn 's music . Whitbourn subsequently used the seminal

themes from his orchestral score as the basis of his popular choral work , Son of God Mass , for soprano saxophone , choir and organ . Computer graphic images were created by design group Red Vision , who employed techniques similar to ones used in the 2000 BBC series Walking with Dinosaurs . Speaking in September 2001 , a spokesman for Red Vision stated that their involvement in Son of God had been " incredibly successful " for them .

Promotional campaigns for both the British and American broadcasts of the series focused on the technology and science being used in the programme , and the special effects that Red Vision had created . In particular , a facial reconstruction during the final episode showing what Jesus might have looked like garnered significant media attention . In the lead @-@ up to episode one , several newspapers , including The Daily Mail and The Guardian , ran stories speculating whether the computer @-@ generated image could show the true face of Jesus . British television listings magazine Radio Times featured the reconstructed face on the cover of its 31 March issue under the headline " Is This the Face of Jesus ? " . This cover and its headline received criticism from some commentators for being sensationalist and misleading .

= = Episodes = =

Son of God consists of a single series of three episodes . Each episode lasts approximately 50 minutes and documents a different stage of Jesus 's life . The episodes take the format of Bowen visiting significant locations from the life of Jesus , talking head interviews with 21 historians and Biblical experts , and reenactments of Jesus 's life featuring Israeli actor Liron Levo . Locations from Jesus 's time ? such as Caesarea , Yatta and Sepphoris ? were recreated by archaeologists using evidence from buildings and street plans , and were then digitised into computer graphics by Red Vision .

= = = " The Real Man " = = =

The first episode of Son of God , " The Real Man " , documents Jesus 's life up to his temptation , and details the historical evidence for his existence . Bowen visits Jerusalem , where he calls Jesus 's death " one of the best attested facts in ancient history " . He cites the Romano @-@ Jewish historian Josephus as one of 80 sources that confirms that Jesus existed and that describes him as " a wise man who did surprising feats , ... won over followers from among Jews and Greeks , ... was accused by the Jewish leaders , [and] was condemned to be crucified by Pilate " . Bowen interviews James H. Charlesworth from Princeton University about the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 , then travels to Bethlehem to visit the Church of the Nativity , a structure built over a series of first @-@ century caves and grottos . While there , he speculates that Jesus may have been born in a cave rather than an inn , the more traditional image . Joe Zias , an archaeologist from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem confirms this , saying that the Greek word " katalyma " is usually translated into English as " upper room " rather than " inn " .

" The Real Man " also looks at the story of the Star of Bethlehem , which Bowen states would have been an " astrological " rather than " astronomical " phenomenon . According to astronomer Michael Molner , astrologers from around the time of Herod the Great would have believed that the constellation Aries symbolised his kingdom and the lands that he controlled ? during 6 BC , the year that some scholars theorise that Jesus was born , a rare planetary alignment meant that Jupiter , Saturn , the Sun and the Moon would have all appeared in this constellation . Bowen next looks at how Jesus would have been born out of wedlock : Mark Goodacre , a historian from the University of Birmingham , asserts that Jewish , pagan and Christian sources all confirm that Jesus was born out of wedlock , as do both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke . All four canonical gospels agree that the city of Nazareth was where Jesus grew up . Hanan Eshel , an archaeologist from Bar @-@ Ilan University , proposes that Jesus 's interest in religion and politics might have been sparked off during a family visit to the Temple Mount , the " headquarters of the Jewish faith " . The episode ends with Bowen spending the night alone at the Mount of Temptation just above Jericho , where Jesus is traditionally believed to have spent 40 days and nights being tempted by the devil .

== = " The Mission " == =

Episode two , " The Mission " , discusses how Jesus became popular and why the Pharisees might have seen him as a potential threat . Bowen visits the Dome of the Rock , the site of Jerusalem 's temple , and discusses how Jesus went to the Sea of Galilee to recruit his disciples . He speaks with Orna Cohen , a conservator of antiquities who led the excavation of the Sea of Galilee Boat , who suggests that the boat may have been similar to one owned by Saint Peter . Bowen then travels to Capernaum and visits the House of Peter , where he speaks to Mordechai Aviam , an archaeologist from the Israel Antiquities Authority . Aviam states that first @-@ century Greek " graffiti " in the house suggests that the house belonged to Peter . Bowen visits the tomb of a first @-@ century scholar and miracle @-@ worker named Hanina ben Dosa , and contrasts Hanina 's life with that of Jesus 's : for example , while Jesus was executed , Hanina was not .

" The Mission " then looks at how Jesus may have been viewed by the religious leaders of the time . The canonical gospels report over one hundred cases of Jesus healing or performing exorcisms , and " making the unclean clean again " . Jesus told lepers to go up to the Temple Mount , where they were usually excluded , and claimed that he could forgive sins without going through the ordinary channels . Jesus met and ate with sinners , the disabled and prostitutes , and fulfilled Old Testament prophecy by riding into the Temple Mount through the Golden Gate on a donkey at Passover . Bowen concludes that all these reasons would have meant that the Pharisees of the time would have seen him as threatening .

== = " The Final Hours " == =

" The Final Hours " , the third episode of Son of God , details Jesus 's last days alive . Bowen claims that the Last Supper would have been held in the guest room of a " well @-@ to @-@ do " house in Jerusalem . Writings by Josephus suggest that the Last Supper took place in a triclinium . As guest of honour , Jesus would have been at the end of the table with John the Apostle at his side , rather than at the centre , as proposed by more familiar depictions such as Leonardo da Vinci 's The Last Supper . Bowen then looks at whether or not Jesus could have sweated blood at Gethsemane . Leaving the Middle East for the first time , he travels to New York City and meets with Frederick Zugibe , a forensic pathologist at Columbia University . Zugibe states that Jesus may have been suffering from hematidrosis , a medical condition brought about by stress from knowing that one is about to die . He also says that he has seen similar symptoms in sailors and in men given death sentences . Zugibe experiments on volunteers in Rutland County , Vermont , by measuring their blood pressure while they are strapped to crosses with their arms outstretched and level with their shoulders . He concludes that the traditional view of Jesus 's crucifixion , with the nails of the cross driven through his hands rather than wrists , may have been possible if his feet were supported . The 1968 discovery of the skeleton of Jehohanan , a first @-@ century man who was put to death by crucifixion , also supports this theory . Next , Bowen questions whether the disciple Judas Iscariot truly did double @-@ cross Jesus . William Klassen , an historian at École Biblique in Jerusalem , theorises that the Greek word " paradidomi " was mistranslated , and that Judas simply " handed over " Jesus to the Romans , rather than betrayed him .

" The Final Hours " ends with a facial reconstruction suggesting what Jesus may have looked like . Using one of three first @-@ century Jewish skulls from a forensic science department in Israel , a clay model is created through forensic anthropology by Richard Neave , a retired medical artist from the Unit of Art in Medicine at Manchester University . The face that Neave constructs suggests that Jesus would have had a broad face and large nose , and differs significantly from his traditional depictions in renaissance art . Additional information about Jesus 's skin colour and hair is provided by Goodacre . Using third @-@ century images from the Dura @-@ Europos synagogue ? the earliest pictures of Jewish people ? Goodacre proposes that Jesus 's skin would have been " olive @-@ coloured " and " swarthy " , and much darker than his traditional Western image . He also suggests that Jesus would have had short , curly hair and a short cropped beard .

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical reception = = =

Critical reaction to Son of God was mixed . The series received praise from commentators such as Andrew Billen of the New Statesman for focussing on " history against spirituality every time " . However , Billen also contrasted the show with The Lives of Jesus , a similar series from December 1996 , remarking that it was flash and filmic , whereas The Lives of Jesus had been far more discreet . BBC News 's Michael Osborn acclaimed the series , saying that it was " worthy of all [its] publicity " and that Bowen was well placed in his role as presenter . The graphics created by Red Vision were well received : The Daily Record described the computer imagery as stunning , while Gareth McLean of The Guardian noted that the series was " visually , ... quite a treat " . McLean also commented that the programme itself was rather interesting , but that it contained " slightly odd , slightly irrelevant diversions " .

A review of a more critical nature came from Catherine Bennett , also writing for The Guardian , who questioned the facial reconstruction from the third episode and suggested that it was dismissive to imply that it was how Jesus truly appeared . Speaking about the study , Bennett remarked : " We must hope that ... future BBC controllers do not dig up , say , Robin Cook 's skull , drape it in Plasticine , and ask : ' Is this the real face of Tony Blair ? ' " . John Preston , writing for The Sunday Telegraph , also questioned the reliability of the reconstruction , and branded the series as dumbed down . The programme received criticism from theological scholars : following the broadcast of the first episode , Tom Wright , one of two consultants used during production of the series , felt that Jesus 's mission had been misrepresented by the show . Wright claimed that the BBC had elected to portray Jesus simply as " a politically correct social worker " .

Reviews of the American broadcast of Jesus : The Complete Story were also mixed . While some reviewers described the show as fascinating and reverent , others were more negative . Writing for The Orlando Sentinel , Hal Boedeker agreed that the computer imaging was spectacular , but that the rest of the show was a " hodgepodge " that " [went] off on some strange tangents " . Eric Mink of The Daily News stated that the show relied too heavily on exaggeration and that it was " sloppy with facts " , while Ann Rodgers @-@ Melnick of The Pittsburgh Post @-@ Gazette described it as " uneven but vivid " .

= = = Ratings and awards = = =

The first episode of Son of God shown in the UK gained six million viewers and an audience share of 25 % , which was considered high for a religious documentary . During its American broadcast on the Discovery Channel , the series was watched by 12 million . It was repeated in the US during March the following year , and gained a figure of 1 @.@ 5 million viewers per episode . The series was nominated for two awards , both for the computer @-@ generated images created by graphics team Red Vision : it was first nominated at the 2001 LEAF Awards , then won an Outstanding Achievement award at the 2001 Royal Television Society North Awards .

= = Distribution = =

Son of God was distributed by the BBC , who broadcast the show on BBC One . It premiered in the UK at 9 : 10 p.m. on 1 April 2001 , and ran for a single series of three episodes , with each episode being shown weekly on Sunday nights . As well as being shown in the UK , Son of God was also licensed to New Zealand and seven European territories , including France and Denmark . In the United States , the show was aired by the Discovery Channel under the name Jesus : The Complete Story , as a single three @-@ hour special at 8 p.m. on 15 April , two weeks after its UK broadcast . It was also repeated in the US on Christmas Day 2002 and 2003 .

In March 2002 , a year after the show was first broadcast in the UK , an accompanying book written by Angela Tilby was released . Tilby 's book , also titled Son of God , was a tie @-@ in to the documentary series , and featured an introduction from Bowen . As of 23 December 2011 , Son of God is not available on DVD in the UK , nor is it available on BBC iPlayer , the BBC 's on demand service . A VHS box set of Jesus : The Complete Story , produced by Warner Home Video , was released in the United States on 15 May 2001 . The set was rereleased on Region 1 DVD on 31 August 2004 .

= = Moses = =

Following the success of Son of God , a similar , single @-@ episode documentary was commissioned by the BBC in July 2001 . The programme , entitled Moses , documented the life of Moses in a style akin to Son of God ? it reunited Bowen and Bragard , who presented and directed @-@ produced the show respectively . Like Son of God , Moses featured live @-@ action reenactments , computer @-@ generated images of the period and interviews with historians and scholars . It was first broadcast in the UK during December 2002 .