

The Jesus Accounts: Fact or Fiction?

Papyrus and Parchment

Papyrus

The documentary shows how papyrus was made in Egypt. Writers were able to write on the papyrus with a kind of charcoal ink. The first copies of the accounts of Jesus life were written on papyrus. Archaeologists and researchers have found some of these copies. Some are very small pieces, others are substantial manuscripts with lots of pages.

The picture below shows what is written on one of these pieces of papyrus (translated into English from Greek). *What clues can you see in the words that may show that it is from the Bible?*

.....the Jews, "For us.....

.....anyone," so that the word.....

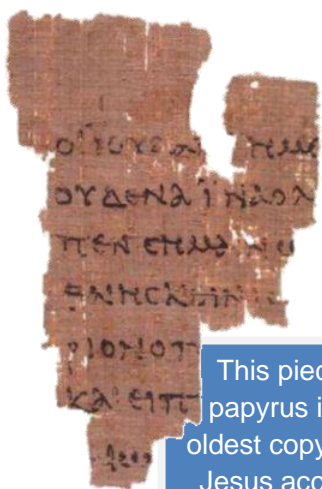
.....spoke signifying.....

.....die. Entered.....

.....Pilate.....

.....and said.....

.....Jews?"



This piece of papyrus is the oldest copy of the Jesus accounts that we have. It is around 1900 years old.

Read the Bible passage in John chapter 18 and write down the verses which are similar to the words here. Try rewriting the Bible passage so that it fits with the words above, filling out each line, so that when you have finished you can see what the original page looked like.

How do we know the papyrus is a page from a book, even though people in those days usually wrote on scrolls? What does this tell you about the first Christians?

Parchment

Three hundred years after Jesus lived parchment – animal skins – began to replace papyrus as the main material to write on. *Write down two reasons why people began to use parchment.*



The documentary tells the story of Constantin Tischendorf, a German researcher who lived from 1815 to 1874, going to St Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai in Egypt.

Imagine you are Tischendorf and write your account of finding the Codex Sinaiticus, an ancient copy of the whole Bible, either as a story or as a diary. Or write a short drama sketch to tell the story. How

would you feel when you (as Tischendorf) discovered this Bible? Why would this be so important to you?

At the beginning of the documentary the interviewer asks the question, 'Do you think we can trust what the Bible says about Jesus?'

One of the experts, Dr Simon Gathercole says,

We have hundreds of fragments and some complete manuscripts from very, very close to the time of the four accounts of Jesus' life having been written.

Bishop Nazir-Ali says,

There are over a hundred and twenty papyrus documents ... But in addition to these there are about three hundred or so parchment codices. And these range from the fourth century right up to the tenth or eleventh centuries.

Dr Peter Head says,

We have manuscripts of a good type of substantial material from every century. Good manuscripts from the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh, the eighth... every century. So what goes into a modern scholarly Greek New Testament is based not only on 500 years of study but actually on manuscripts that go back 1800 years to the second century.

Use the comments of Dr Gathercole, Bishop Nazir-Ali, and Dr Head, and what you learned from the documentary to write an answer to the interviewer's question - 'Do you think we can trust what the Bible says about Jesus?'

Finish your answer by saying whether you think the amount of papyrus and parchment evidence shown and talked about in the documentary is or is not enough to trust what the Bible says about Jesus.