

The Jesus Accounts: Fact or Fiction?

The Evidence of Eyewitnesses

The early church was made up of groups of Christians in cities and towns across the Roman Empire. Some of these first Christians wrote down stories about Jesus.

Think about a recent news story you have seen online or in a newspaper. How do you know it is true? What questions do you need to ask in order to decide whether it is a true account of what happened or not?

*Write down two questions you would ask the journalist who wrote the story. Write down two questions you would ask **about** the journalist who wrote the story? Who else would you need to interview and what questions might you ask them?*

At the beginning of the New Testament we have four accounts of Jesus' life, written probably 30 to 50 years after Jesus' death and resurrection by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Write down what you know about

- a) Matthew
- b) Mark
- c) Luke
- d) John



How would what you know about these men help you decide whether to trust them or not? Who would you trust the most?

Eyewitnesses are people who see what happens and are able to describe what they saw, heard and how they felt about what happened. Journalists often ask bystanders to say what they have seen and include what they say in the story they are reporting.

The documentary mentions Blind Bartimaeus as one of the people named in the Jesus accounts. Mark tells his story (Mark 10:46-52):

As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving Jericho, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. (NIV)

If you assume that Mark did not see this incident himself, he must have spoken to Bartimaeus, the disciples and/or members of the crowd to get the story. *Underline all the details in the story which **Bartimaeus** may have told Mark. Put a ring around any details that **the disciples or the crowd** may have told Mark. According to your opinion did Bartimaeus tell Mark more of the story or the disciples/crowd members? Are there any details that Mark could not have taken from Bartimaeus or the disciples/crowd members? According to your analysis of the story, do you think this story is more likely to be true or false?*

The documentary provides several pieces of evidence (not always in detail) to establish that the stories of Jesus are reliable.

- a) There were books written about him. The authors of these books knew Jesus or knew people who knew him.
- b) These stories include information about ancient customs of the Jews which we can check.
- c) These stories include information about people we know existed at the time, like Pilate and Caiaphas.
- d) These stories include information about places that we can visit in Palestine today.
- e) These stories of Jesus include eyewitness accounts of what Jesus did.
- f) We have ancient books or parts of ancient books which we can read today, showing that our Bible stories are the same as those written nearly 2000 years ago.



Discuss with your neighbour in class which of these you think is the best evidence that the accounts of Jesus' life are reliable and why. Which is the least convincing piece of evidence?