

## The Jesus Accounts: Fact or Fiction?

At the beginning of the documentary the interviewer asks five people for their answer to the question

'Do you think we can trust what the Bible says about Jesus?'

The narrator and the experts in the documentary look at the interviewer's question from several different angles

- a) Are there details in the accounts – internal evidence – that help us decide whether the stories are true or not?
- b) Is there any evidence from sources outside the Bible – external evidence – that help us decide whether the stories are true or not?
- c) What ancient papyrus and parchment manuscripts of the Jesus accounts do we have?
- d) Who wrote these accounts and where did they get the stories from?

*Which do you think is the most important factor in deciding whether we can trust the accounts of Jesus' life as reliable stories about Jesus? Explain why. Put these four questions in your order of importance.*

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At the end of the documentary the narrator says,

*'When we look at the evidence for the reliability of the four accounts of Jesus written by Matthew and John, Mark and Luke we find that we have more manuscripts, more translations into more languages and more quotations than any other first century writings. There are complete collections from every century back to the fourth and fragments and portions of books from a time when the original documents could still have been in existence. When we ask a simple question – the accounts of Jesus written 2000 years ago by Matthew and John, his close friends, and by Mark and Luke, his first followers – are they the same as those we read in the New Testament today? We can be confident they are.'*



The narrator concludes from the evidence that the stories in the Bible we read today are the same as those written 2000 years ago.

Compare these statements:

*'The Bible is ... anything but reality.'* Professor Richard Dawkins

*'[The Bible] has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book.'*

Sir Leigh Teabing, *The Da Vinci Code*

The narrator, clearly, would not agree with these views.

*Imagine a debate between Professor Richard Dawkins, Sir Leigh Teabing and the narrator. Bearing in mind their views, write down two questions Professor Dawkins could ask the narrator and two questions Sir Leigh Teabing might ask, challenging the narrator's views. Write down how the narrator might answer them.*