

The Jesus Accounts: Fact or Fiction?

The First Christians

A piece of evidence provided by the documentary to show that the stories of Jesus are real accounts of Jesus' life is the expansion of Christianity from Israel into the rest of the world. Christianity, in other words, could not have existed without a founder, Jesus.

Write down the number of believers given in these passages in Acts.

Number of Christians				
Acts 1:15	Acts 2	Acts 4		
~40 days after Jesus' resurrection	50 days after Jesus' resurrection	No exact time given; shortly after the events of Acts 2	~100AD	Today
~33AD	~33AD	~33AD		
			Estimated 1 Million*	Estimated 2 Billion worldwide

*World Christian Encyclopedia 1982

Why do you think that Christianity spread so rapidly in the years after Jesus death and resurrection? Think about

- a) *The message Christians had about Jesus and the importance of this message to them.*
- b) *The possibility of travel and communication across the Roman Empire.*

The early church grew very rapidly from Jerusalem into Europe and North Africa, and down towards India in the first three centuries after Jesus' death and resurrection. Imagine that you and a friend went to a church in Rome to meet Christians three hundred years after the death of Jesus. None of them could have known Jesus personally, nor could they have met anyone who had. They say that they worship Jesus, calling him the Son of God, and believe he rose from the dead after being crucified. They are willing to die for their belief in him. Your friend says they are either mad or just have a blind faith (they have no good reasons for their belief) in something they cannot prove.



One of the Christians provides reasons for his faith:

- a) Although he has never been to Palestine where Jesus lived he has studied the geography of the region. In the accounts of Jesus' life he has found the names of many cities, towns and villages that he knows are real places.
- b) He says that the Latin copy of the Jesus accounts he has is a good translation from a Greek copy, the original language.
- c) In his library he has history books that show that Pontius Pilate was the Roman leader in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified.
- d) In Rome there are many others who believe the same things as he does.
- e) Since he believes Jesus rose again from the dead and is alive, it is possible to have a relationship with Jesus (he describes this as a spiritual experience) and he has that relationship.
- f) Since people become Christians through being told about Jesus, there must be an unbroken line of Christians from himself back to the first Christians and to Jesus.
- g) Something must have happened in Jerusalem three hundred years ago or else there would be no Christians and no churches.
- h) The accounts of Jesus' life were written close to the time that Jesus lived by people who knew Jesus.

Decide which of these, if any, are reasonable arguments for the Christian to make. Which do you think are the most convincing and which do you think are bad or poor reasons for believing?

Whatever your own belief about Jesus – whether you believe the Bible stories or not – write a paragraph stating what you believe about Jesus and give two or three reasons why you believe this.

When you have finished give your reasons to your neighbour in class and ask her/him for her/his beliefs about Jesus. Are these the same or different? Whether you agree or not, why is it important to respect the other person's views?

Christianity has now spread across the whole world and the Bible has been translated completely or in part into over 2500 languages.

Does it surprise you to know this? Why do you feel this is a surprise or not a surprise to you?

Rather than print the Bible as a book what modern methods of communication would you use to make the accounts of Jesus life more available to people in Britain today?