

# Non-Christian Evidence of Historical Jesus

## Josephus (Antiquities)

c. AD 93

20.200

*He convened a meeting of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of **Jesus, who was called the Christ**, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned.*

'Testimonium Flavianum' 18.63-64

*About this time **there lived Jesus, a wise man**, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For **he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly**. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. When Pilate, upon hearing him **accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified**, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And **the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared**.*

## Tacitus (Annals Book 15. Ch. 44.)

c. AD 115

*Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. **Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate**, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome...Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty: then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.*

## Pliny the Younger (Letters 10.96)

c.111

*I have asked them if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution; for, whatever the nature of their admission, I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished...*

*They also declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: **they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honour of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery...***

*This made me decide it was all the more necessary to extract the truth by torture from two slave-women, whom they called deaconesses. I found nothing but a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths.*

## Rabbinic Talmud: Sanhedrin 43a

**On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged.** For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, "He is going forth to be stoned because **he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy.** Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf." But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!

## Mara bar Serapion

c. AD 73-300

What else can we say, when the wise are forcibly dragged off by tyrants, their wisdom is captured by insults, and their minds are oppressed and without defense? What advantage did the Athenians gain from murdering Socrates? Famine and plague came upon them as a punishment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did **the Jews gain from executing their wise king? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished.** God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea and the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates is not dead, because of Plato; neither is Pythagoras, because of the statue of Juno; nor is the wise king, because of the "new law" he laid down.

## Suetonius

c. AD 122

...Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of **Chrestus**, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome...

## In Conclusion

'Let's pretend we didn't have any of the New Testament or other Christian writings... Even without them, what would we be able to conclude about Jesus from ancient non-Christian sources, such as Josephus, the Talmud, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and others?'

'We would still have a considerable amount of important historical evidence; in fact, it would provide a kind of outline for the life of Jesus... We would know that:

first, **Jesus was a Jewish teacher** [cf. Josephus 18.63];

second, **many people believed that he performed healings and exorcisms** [cf. Josephus 18.63];

third, **some people believed he was the Messiah** [cf. Josephus 20.200];

fourth, **he was rejected by the Jewish leaders** [cf. Josephus 18.63, Mara bar Serapion, Talmud];

fifth, **he was crucified under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberias** [cf. Tacitus; Josephus 18.64];

sixth, **despite this shameful death, his followers, who believed that he was still alive, spread beyond Palestine so that there were multitudes of them in Rome by AD 64** [cf. Tacitus, Suetonius];

and seventh, **all kinds of people from the cities and countryside—men and women, slave and free—worshipped him as God** [cf. Pliny].'

Lee Strobel, The Case For Christ, p.87 (I've added the references.)