

THE GOSPEL... ACCORDING TO NON-CHRISTIANS

Exploring the Outside Historical Corroboration of the story of Jesus

Here is the criteria historians often use to evaluate historical documents:

1. Do we have early testimony?
2. Do we have eyewitness testimony?
3. Do we have testimony from multiple, independent, eyewitness sources?
4. Are the eyewitnesses trustworthy?
5. Do we have corroborating evidence from archaeology or other writers?
6. Do we have enemy attestation?
7. Does the testimony contain events or details that are embarrassing to the authors?

There is a passage in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain that expresses how some people feel about historical figures...

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers, and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him, because I don't take no stock in dead people.

But Jesus is not just a historical figure. He is the Risen, Living Lord.

Because of all the historical evidence, almost all scholars, whether they are Christians or not, believe that Jesus actually existed. There are 10 known non-Christian (some anti-Christian) writers who mention Jesus within 150 years of His life. (In contrast, over the same 150 years there are 9 non-Christian sources who mention Tiberius Caesar, the Roman Emperor at the time of Jesus.)

1. Josephus Jewish Historian (c. 37 – c. 100 AD) He was a young Jewish revolutionary who surrendered to the Roman army (General Vespasian) on the 47th day of a siege. He won favor with Vespasian and was later taken to Rome by General Titus, Vespasian's son, after Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish temple in 70 AD. Josephus became the greatest Jewish historian of his time. He served as a historian for Roman Emperor Domitian.

“At this time (the time of Pilate) there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”

- Josephus c. 93 AD
Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, Chapter 3, Section 3

“Festus was not dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he (Ananus the high priest) assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was

called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, (or some of his companions), and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned."

- Josephus c. 93 AD
Antiquities of the Jews, Book 20, Chapter 9, Section 1

Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar.
Jesus lived a virtuous life.
Jesus was acclaimed to be the Messiah
Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate
His disciples believed He rose from the dead.
He had a brother named James.

2. Tacitus Roman Historian (c.56- after 117 AD.) - Annals passage (15.44) follows a description of the six-day Great Fire of Rome that burned much of Rome in July 64 AD.

"Consequently, to get rid of the report, 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 Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. 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".

Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar.
He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
His disciples were willing to die for their belief.
Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome.

3. Pliny the Younger – Roman Lawyer, Author, Magistrate (61-c. 113 A.D.) As the Roman governor of Bithynia-Pontus (now in modern Turkey) Pliny wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan around 112 AD and asked for counsel on dealing with Christians. In the letter (*Epistulae X.96*) Pliny detailed an account of how he conducted trials of suspected Christians who appeared before him as a result of anonymous accusations and asked for the Emperor's guidance on how they should be treated. Pliny had never performed a legal investigation of Christians, and thus consulted Trajan in order to be on solid ground regarding his actions, and saved his letters and Trajan's replies. Neither Pliny nor Trajan mention the crime that Christians had committed, except for being a Christian; Trajan's response to Pliny makes it clear that being known as a "Christian" was sufficient for judicial action.

His disciples were willing to die for their belief.

4. Phlegon's Olympiades: (a freed slave who wrote histories) *"In the 4th year of the 202nd Olympiad, there was a great eclipse of the Sun, greater than had ever been known before, for at the 6th hour the day was changed into night and the stars were seen in the heavens. An earthquake occurred in Bythinia and overthrew a great part of the city of Nicæa."*

Darkness and an earthquake occurred when He died.

5. Thallus (1st Century Historian) Church Father Julius Africanus writes... *On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness **Thallus** in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun. For the Hebrews celebrate the Passover on the 14th day according to the moon, and the passion of our Savior falls on the day before the Passover; but an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun. And it cannot happen at any other time but in the interval between the first day of the new moon and the last of the old, that is, at their junction: how then should an eclipse be supposed to happen when the moon is almost diametrically opposite the sun? Let that opinion pass however; let it carry the majority with it; and let this portent of the world be deemed an eclipse of the sun, like others a portent only to the eye. **Phlegon** records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth—manifestly that one of which we speak. But what has an eclipse in common with an earthquake, the rending of rocks, and the resurrection of the dead, and so great a perturbation throughout the universe? Surely no such event as this is recorded for a long period. But it was a darkness induced by God, because the Lord happened then to suffer.*

Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar.

Darkness and an earthquake occurred when He died.

He was crucified on the eve of the Jewish Passover.

6. Suetonius – (Roman Historian (c.69 – after 122 AD) A statement in *Divus Claudius* 25 involves the agitations in the Roman Jewish community which led to the expulsion of Jews from Rome by Claudius in AD 49, and may be the same event mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (18:2). *"Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."*

In *Nero* 16 Suetonius lists various laws by Nero to maintain public order, including halting chariot races as the drivers were cheating and robbing and pantomime shows which frequently were scenes of brawls. Amongst these is punishment for Christians. He states: *"During his reign many abuses were severely punished and put down, and no fewer new laws were made: a limit was set to expenditures; the public banquets were confined to a distribution of food; the sale of any kind of cooked viands in the taverns was forbidden, with the exception of pulse and vegetables, whereas before every sort of dainty was exposed for sale. Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition. He put an end to the diversions of the chariot drivers, who from immunity of long standing claimed the right of*

-ranging at large and amusing themselves by cheating and robbing the people. The pantomimic actors and their partisans were banished from the city."

Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome

7. Lucian (Greek Satirist) satirized the Christians in his *Passing of Peregrinus*, a story of a philosopher sage who at one point becomes a leader of the Christians to take advantage of their gullibility. *"These deluded creatures, you see, have persuaded themselves that they are immortal and will live forever, which explains the contempt of death and willing self-sacrifice so common among them. It was impressed on them too by their lawgiver that from the moment they are converted, deny the gods of Greece, worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws, they are all brothers. They take his instructions completely on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods and hold them in common ownership. So any adroit, unscrupulous fellow, who knows the world, has only to get among these simple souls and his fortune is quickly made; he plays with them."*

8. Celsus was a Greek philosopher and opponent of Early Christianity. He is known for his literary work, *The True Word* (also *Account*, *Doctrine* or *Discourse*), which survives exclusively in Origen's quotations from it in *Contra Celsum*. This work, c. 177 is the earliest known comprehensive attack on Christianity.

Celsus wrote a narrative describing a Jew who discounts the story of the Virgin Birth of Jesus.^[109] Scholars have remarked on the parallels (adultery, father's name "Panthera", return from Egypt, magical powers) between Celsus' account and the Talmudic narratives. In Celsus' account, the Jew says:

"... [Jesus] came from a Jewish village and from a poor country woman who earned her living by spinning. He says that she was driven out by her husband, who was a carpenter by trade, as she was convicted of adultery. Then he says that after she had been driven out by her husband and while she was wandering about in a disgraceful way she secretly gave birth to Jesus. He states that because he [Jesus] was poor he hired himself out as a workman in Egypt, and there tried his hand at certain magical powers on which the Egyptians pride themselves; he returned full of conceit, because of these powers, and on account of them gave himself the title of God . . . the mother of Jesus is described as having been turned out by the carpenter who was betrothed to her, as she had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a certain soldier named Panthera."

9. Mara Bar-Serapion – A letter to his son

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.

10. Jewish Talmud

Scholars have identified the following references in the Jewish Talmud.

- Jesus as a sorcerer with disciples (b Sanh 43a-b)
- Healing in the name of Jesus (Hul 2:22f; AZ 2:22/12; y Shab 124:4/13; QohR 1:8; b AZ 27b)
- As a torah teacher (b AZ 17a; Hul 2:24; QohR 1:8)
- As a son or disciple that turned out badly (Sanh 103a/b; Ber 17b)
- As a frivolous disciple who practiced magic and turned to idolatry (Sanh 107b; Sot 47a)
- Jesus' punishment in hell (b Git 56b, 57a)
- Jesus' execution (b Sanh 43a-b)
- Jesus as the son of Mary (Shab 104b, Sanh 67a)

Piecing together all 10 non-Christian references, we see that:

1. Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar.
2. He lived a virtuous life.
3. He was a wonder-worker.
4. He had a brother named James.
5. He was acclaimed to be the Messiah.
6. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
7. He was crucified on the eve of the Jewish Passover.
8. Darkness and an earthquake occurred when He died.
9. His disciples believed He rose from the dead.
10. His disciples were willing to die for their belief.
11. Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome.
12. His disciples denied the Roman gods and worshiped Jesus as God.