

TEN HISTORICAL REFERENCES TO JESUS FROM NON-BIBLICAL SOURCES

(1-200AD)

1) *Thallus* (ca. AD 55) -> *Julius Africanus* (~220 CE) -> *Georgius Syncellus* (~800 CE)

“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.” [Same as in Mark 15:33]

2) *Mara Bar Serapion* (ca. AD 73)

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 by murdering Socrates, for which they were repaid with famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, because their country was completely covered in sand in just one hour? Or the Jews by killing their wise king, because their kingdom was taken away at that very time? God justly repaid the wisdom of these three men: the Athenians died of famine; the Samians were completely overwhelmed by the sea; and the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, are scattered through every nation. 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 laws he laid down.

3) *Josephus* (ca. AD 93) - *Antiquities of the Jews*

“At this time 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.”

4) *Pliny the Younger* (ca. AD 112) - *Pliny’s Letters*

Others, whose names were given me by an informer, first said that they were Christians and afterwards denied it, declaring that they had been but were so no longer, some of them having recanted many years before, and more than one so long as twenty years back. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the deities, and cursed the name of Christ. But they declared that the sum of their guilt or their error only amounted to this, that on a stated day they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak and to recite a hymn among themselves to Christ, as though he were a god, and that so far from binding themselves by oath to commit any crime, their oath was to abstain from theft, robbery,

adultery, and from breach of faith, and not to deny trust money placed in their keeping when called upon to deliver it.

5) Tacitus (ca. AD 116) - The Annals

“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 Judca, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.”

6) Suetonius (ca. AD 120) - De vita Caesarum (Lives of the Caesars)

“Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [Christ], he expelled them from Rome.” [Same as in Acts 18:2]

7) Phlegon (ca. AD 140) - Against Celsus

“Now Phlegon, in the thirteenth or fourteenth book, I think, of his Chronicles, not only ascribed to Jesus a knowledge of future events...but also testified that the result corresponded to His predictions.”

“And with regard to the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place, Phlegon too, I think, has written in the thirteenth or fourteenth book of his Chronicles”

“We have in the preceding pages, made our defence, according to our ability, adducing the testimony of Phlegon, who relates that these events took place at the time when our Saviour suffered. And he goes on to say, that “Jesus, while alive, was of no assistance to himself, but that he arose after death, and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails.”

8) Lucian of Samosata (ca. AD 166) - The Death of Peregrine

“The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day,—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all

brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.”

9) Celsus (ca. 175 AD) -> Origen (250 CE) - The True Doctrine

“...in imitation of a rhetorician training a pupil, he [Celsus] introduces a Jew, who enters into a personal discussion with Jesus, and speaks in a very childish manner, altogether unworthy of the grey hairs of a philosopher, let me endeavour, to the best of my ability, to examine his statements, and show that he does not maintain, throughout the discussion, the consistency due to the character of a Jew. For he represents him disputing with Jesus, and confuting Him, as he thinks, on many points; and in the first place, he accuses Him of having “invented his birth from a virgin,” and upbraids Him with being “born in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child, who having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt on account of his poverty, and having there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed himself a God.”

Early Christian Writers (ca. 50-157)

- 1) *The manuscript we have is known as the Didache (ca. 50-70 AD), a sort of early discipleship manual explaining how Christians should act. It recites some of the teachings of Jesus and lays out instructions for celebrating communion, remembering Jesus’ death and resurrection.*
- 2) *Clement was a first-century leader of the church at Rome who wrote a letter to the church at Corinth (ca. AD 70-96). In it he speaks of the teachings of Jesus (13:1), his death (21:6), and his resurrection from the dead (24:1). (1 Clement)*
- 3) *Papias (ca. AD 95-110) wrote that he learned of Jesus teachings directly from those who had heard him in-person. (Ecclesiastical History)*
- 4) *Ignatius of Antioch wrote a letter to the Smyrnaeans (ca. AD 110) in which he claims that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch (Ch. 1) and that “he suffered all these things for us; and He suffered them really, and not in appearance only, even as also He truly rose again” (Ch. 2). (Epistle to the Smyrnaeans)*

- 5) *Quadratus was an early Christian apologist who wrote a letter to the emperor Hadrian (ca. AD 117-138) in defense of Christianity. In it he stated, "But the works of our Saviour were always present, for they were genuine:— those that were healed, and those that were raised from the dead, who were seen not only when they were healed and when they were raised, but were also always present; and not merely while the Saviour was on earth, but also after his death, they were alive for quite a while, so that some of them lived even to our day."* (**Ecclesiastical History**)
 - 6) *Similarly, Polycarp in his letter to the Philippians (ca. AD 110-140) affirmed that Jesus lived and died (1:2). (Epistle of Polycarp) Polycarp was said to have been taught directly by the original Apostles. (Ecclesiastical History)*
 - 7) *Justin Martyr, in his First Apology (ca. AD 155-157) argues that Jesus was a teacher, that he was crucified, that he died and rose again (Ch. XXI). (First Apology)*
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Summary of everything we know from the 1st and 2nd century from non-Christian sources

- He was reported to have been born of a poor virgin and that his father was a carpenter
 - He was a teacher, and his disciples passed on his teachings to others
 - He prophesied and performed miracles
 - He was known for his wisdom and his virtuous life
 - He claimed to be God
 - He was crucified by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar in Judea
 - That an earthquake and darkness accompanied his death
 - His followers reported that he had risen from the dead, appeared to them, and showed them the wounds in his hands
 - His followers worshiped him as God
 - Belief in Jesus caused disturbances with the Jews, which led to Claudius' decree for the Jews to leave Rome
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Total references to Jesus in from 1-200AD

9 (Non-Christian sources) + 7 (Early church fathers) + 27 (New Testament books) = 43 + apocryphal writings