BONUS SECTION · AFTER REVELATION · HISTORY OUTSIDE THE BIBLE

EXHIBIT A

Jesus in history: what people outside the Bible said about Him

THE QUESTION	Did Jesus really live, or did the church make Him up? This section looks only at writers who were NOT writing Scripture.
THE WITNESSES	A Jewish historian, Roman historians, a Roman governor, a Syrian prisoner, a Greek comedian, a pagan philosopher, the Jewish Talmud, and the first Christians after the apostles.
THE TIME RANGE	From about AD 50 to about AD 500. Jesus was crucified about AD 30 or 33.
THE VERDICT	Almost every historian today, Christian or not, agrees Jesus was a real man who was baptized by John and crucified under Pontius Pilate.
HOW TO USE IT	Each exhibit gives you who wrote it, when, the actual words, how the text survived, what it backs up in the Bible and the honest debate. Confidence ratings are HIGH, MEDIUM or LOW.

Opening Statement

Imagine a courtroom. The Bible is the main witness, and it has a lot to say. But a good lawyer always asks: does anybody else back this up? Is there anyone who was not a follower of Jesus, maybe even someone who hated Christians, who says this Jesus was real?

There is. Quite a few, actually. Some of them were not trying to help Christians at all. The Roman historian Tacitus called Christianity a mischievous superstition. A Greek comedian made fun of Christians for being gullible. A pagan philosopher said Jesus was a magician. Their mean comments are gold for us, because enemies do not usually invent the person they are insulting.

Here is the honest truth up front. No outside writer is as detailed as the Gospels. Jesus was a poor teacher from a small town in a far corner of the Roman Empire, and Roman writers mostly wrote about emperors, wars and senators. What is surprising is not how little they say. It is that they say anything at all.

HOW TO READ THE QUOTES. Quotes from old books come from public domain English translations, so the wording sounds old. Words in a pink highlight are words most scholars think a Christian copyist added later. Where a translation is still owned by someone, the passage is retold in plain English and labeled that way.

EXHIBIT 1

FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

The Jewish general who switched sides and wrote it all down

WHO	Yosef ben Matityahu, born in Jerusalem in AD 37 into a family of priests. He later took the Roman name Titus Flavius Josephus.
HIS STORY	He led Jewish troops in Galilee during the revolt against Rome in AD 66. In AD 67 he surrendered and told the Roman general Vespasian he would become emperor. Two years later Vespasian did,

	freed him, and Josephus spent the rest of his life writing in Rome. He died around AD 100.
HIS BOOKS	The Jewish War, about AD 75, and the Antiquities of the Jews, 20 books finished about AD 93 or 94. The Antiquities is a history of the Jews from Creation to his own day.
WHY HE MATTERS	He was a Jew who never became a Christian. He grew up in Jerusalem just a few years after the crucifixion, and he knew the places, rulers and priestly families of the Gospels firsthand.

How Many Copies of Josephus Survive

About 120 Greek manuscripts of Josephus' works survive, and 33 of them are older than the 1300s. Not every copy holds every book. For book 18, the one that mentions Jesus, the oldest Greek copy is a manuscript in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, Italy, copied in the 1000s. The next oldest is in the Vatican Library and is dated AD 1354. A third, in Florence, is from the 1300s or 1400s.

There is also an old Latin translation, made around AD 550 for a Roman scholar named Cassiodorus. About 170 Latin manuscripts of it survive. And Christian writers quoted Josephus long before any of these copies were made, which helps us see what the text said earlier.

Every Greek and Latin copy that has book 18 includes the passage about Jesus. Nobody has ever found a copy without it. The debate is not whether Josephus mentioned Jesus. The debate is whether every word in our copies is his.

The Testimony of Josephus, Three Versions

This passage is famous enough to have its own Latin name: the Testimonium Flavianum, which means the testimony of Flavius. It sits in Antiquities book 18, sections 63 to 64, right between two stories about Pontius Pilate. Here are the three versions people argue about.

VERSION 1. THE TEXT AS IT READS TODAY

This is what every Greek manuscript says. The parts in pink are the parts many scholars think a Christian copyist added, because a Jew who did not follow Jesus would not likely write them.

> **JOSEPHUS, ANTIQUITIES 18.63 TO 64 · WILLIAM WHISTON TRANSLATION, 1737**
>
> *Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.*

VERSION 2. THE CORE MOST SCHOLARS THINK JOSEPHUS WROTE

Take out the three pink parts and you get a calm, neutral report that sounds just like Josephus. It calls Jesus a wise man and a worker of amazing deeds, says Jewish leaders brought charges, Pilate crucified Him, and His followers never gave up. Many scholars accept something close to this.

THE RECONSTRUCTED CORE · WHISTON WORDING WITH THE THREE DISPUTED PARTS REMOVED

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.

VERSION 3. THE ARABIC VERSION OF AGAPIUS

In 1971 an Israeli scholar named Shlomo Pines brought attention to a different version. It is in a world history written in Arabic around AD 942 by Agapius, a Christian bishop in Syria. It is milder than the Greek. Instead of He was the Christ, it says he was perhaps the Messiah. A Syriac chronicle by Michael the Syrian, written in the 1100s, has the same idea: he was thought to be the Messiah.

AGAPIUS, BOOK OF THE TITLE, ABOUT AD 942 · RETOLD IN PLAIN ENGLISH FROM THE ARABIC

At this time there was a wise man named Jesus. He lived a good life and was known as a good man. Many people from the Jews and from other nations became his followers. Pilate sentenced him to be crucified and to die. His followers did not leave him. They reported that he appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. So he was perhaps the Messiah that the prophets told amazing things about.

What the Scholars Say

CAMP 1. ALL OF IT IS REAL

A small group says Josephus wrote the whole thing. Josephus was flattering, he admired wise teachers, and maybe he was writing what Christians claimed rather than what he believed. In 2025 a scholar named T. C. Schmidt published a book with Oxford University Press arguing that the passage is mostly what Josephus wrote.

CAMP 2. A REAL CORE WITH CHRISTIAN ADDITIONS

This is the biggest group. They see Josephus' style all through the passage. The phrase wonderful works, for example, is one he uses for the prophet Elisha. But the three pink phrases sound like a Christian, so they think a copyist added them, probably before AD 300.

CAMP 3. ALL OF IT IS FAKE

A smaller group says the whole passage was added by a Christian, maybe even by Eusebius, the church historian who is the first to quote it, in the early 300s. They point out that the passage seems to interrupt the story around it. Most scholars do not agree, because the language fits Josephus and because of the second passage below.

CLUE FROM ORIGEN

Origen, a Christian scholar writing around AD 248, read Josephus and said twice that Josephus did not believe Jesus was the Christ. That is strong evidence that the copy Origen read did not say He was the Christ. It is one of the main reasons scholars think that line was added later.

CLUE FROM JEROME

Jerome, the man who translated the Latin Bible, quoted the passage around AD 392 with the words he was believed to be the Christ. That matches the milder Arabic and Syriac versions. Many scholars think the older wording was something like that, and a later copyist made it stronger.

CLUE FROM THE ARABIC

Scholar Alice Whealey showed in 2008 that the Arabic and Syriac versions probably come from a Syriac translation of Eusebius, not straight from Josephus. So they are not a separate copy of Josephus. But they may still keep older wording than our Greek copies.

WHAT ABOUT THE SLAVONIC JOSEPHUS

An old Slavonic, which is old Russian, version of The Jewish War has long stories about Jesus and John the Baptist. Scholars agree these were added in the Middle Ages and are worthless for history. Do not let anybody sell you that one.

CONFIDENCE

HIGH that Josephus wrote about Jesus here. MEDIUM on the exact wording. LOW that the three pink phrases are his.

The Second Passage: the Brother of Jesus

This is the one most scholars accept with little argument. In Antiquities book 20, section 200, Josephus tells how James was killed in AD 62. The Roman governor Festus had died, and the next governor, Albinus, had not yet arrived. During that gap, the high priest Ananus grabbed his chance.

> **JOSEPHUS, ANTIQUITIES 20.200 · WILLIAM WHISTON TRANSLATION, 1737**
>
> *Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.*

WHY SCHOLARS TRUST IT

It is short, it is not praising Jesus, and it reads like Josephus. A Christian adding words would not say only who was called Christ. He would say much more. It also explains which Jesus he means, because Jesus was a common name. Josephus mentions more than a dozen different men named Jesus.

WHAT IT BACKS UP

The Bible says Jesus had a brother named James, Mark 6:3 and Matthew 13:55. Paul says he met James, the Lord's brother, in Galatians 1:19. James led the church in Jerusalem in Acts 15 and Acts 21:18. Josephus confirms all of it: a man named James, brother of Jesus who was called Christ, important enough in Jerusalem that the high priest wanted him dead.

A BONUS CONNECTION

The high priest who killed James was Ananus, a son of Annas. Josephus says five sons of Annas became high priest. That is the same Annas who questioned Jesus in John 18:13. Same family, a generation later, still going after Jesus' people.

HOW IT ENDED FOR ANANUS

Josephus says fair minded people in Jerusalem complained, and Ananus was kicked out after only three months as high priest.

ANOTHER ACCOUNT

A Christian writer named Hegesippus, around AD 170, as quoted by Eusebius, tells the story differently. He says James was thrown from the temple, stoned and then beaten to death with a club. The details differ, but both agree James was killed by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.

CONFIDENCE
HIGH.

The Third Passage: John the Baptist

In Antiquities book 18, sections 116 to 119, Josephus tells about John the Baptist, and he spends more words on John than on Jesus. Around AD 36, Herod Antipas lost a war to King Aretas of Nabatea, the father of his first wife. Some Jews said God was punishing Herod for what he did to John.

> **JOSEPHUS, ANTIQUITIES 18.116 TO 119 · WILLIAM WHISTON TRANSLATION, 1737**
> *Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism... Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death.*

WHAT IT BACKS UP
John was a real preacher called the Baptist. He told people to live right and be baptized, Mark 1:4. Herod Antipas arrested and killed him, Mark 6:17 to 29. Josephus even names the place, the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea.

WHY DID HEROD DO IT
Mark says Herod killed John because John said it was wrong for Herod to marry Herodias, his brother's wife, Mark 6:18. Josephus says Herod feared John's crowds might start a revolt. Both can be true. And Josephus tells the backstory: Herod dumped his first wife, the daughter of Aretas, to marry Herodias. That is exactly why Aretas went to war. Josephus confirms the scandalous marriage Mark talks about.

THE DANCING DAUGHTER
The Gospels never name the girl who danced for Herod. Josephus does. In Antiquities 18.136 he says Herodias had a daughter named Salome. That is how she got her name in later art and movies.

THE FORTRESS TODAY
Hungarian archaeologists led by Győző Vörös have dug at Machaerus since 2009. They uncovered the royal courtyard and what they believe was the throne area, the likely setting for the banquet in Mark 6.

CONFIDENCE
HIGH. Almost no scholar thinks a Christian wrote this. It does not even connect John to Jesus, which a Christian would have done.

More Things Josephus Backs Up

Josephus never set out to prove the Bible, which makes him a great witness. He just wrote history, and over and over his history matches the people and events of the New Testament.

BIBLE	JOSEPHUS	WHAT MATCHES
Matthew 2	Antiquities 15 to 17	Herod the Great was a ruthless, paranoid king who killed his own wife and sons. Killing the boys of Bethlehem fits him.
Matthew 2:22	Antiquities 17.317 to 320	After Herod died, his son Archelaus ruled Judea, so Joseph moved the family to Galilee.

BIBLE	JOSEPHUS	WHAT MATCHES
Luke 3:1	Antiquities 18	Tiberius, Pilate, Herod Antipas and Philip ruled exactly where Luke says.
John 18:13	Antiquities 18.26, 18.35, 20.198	Annas was high priest and Caiaphas, called Joseph Caiaphas, held the office about AD 18 to 36.
Luke 13:1	Antiquities 18.55 to 62, 85 to 89	Pilate was violent and stubborn. He was finally sent back to Rome after his troops attacked Samaritans in AD 36.
Acts 5:37	Antiquities 18.1 to 10	Judas the Galilean led a revolt over the Roman census.
Acts 11:28	Antiquities 20.51 to 53, 101	A great famine hit Judea under Emperor Claudius. A queen named Helena bought grain from Egypt to feed Jerusalem.
Acts 12:21 to 23	Antiquities 19.343 to 350	Herod Agrippa I wore shining royal robes in Caesarea, the crowd called him a god, he did not stop them, and he was struck with stomach pains and died five days later.
Acts 21:38	Jewish War 2.261 to 263	A false prophet called the Egyptian led a crowd into the wilderness. The Roman officer asks Paul if he is that man.
Acts 23:2	Antiquities 20.205 to 213; Jewish War 2.441	Ananias the high priest was greedy and violent. Jewish rebels killed him in AD 66.
Acts 24:24	Antiquities 20.141 to 143	Governor Felix married Drusilla, a Jewish princess who left her husband for him.
Acts 25:13	Antiquities 20.145	King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice were together so much that people gossiped.
Mark 13:2	Jewish War 6	The temple was burned and torn down by the Romans in AD 70. Josephus was there and watched.

TWO HONEST PUZZLES

Luke 2:2 ties Jesus' birth to a census when Quirinius governed Syria. Josephus dates Quirinius' census to AD 6, about ten years after Herod died. Scholars still argue about this one. Some think Luke meant an earlier census, and the Greek can be read as before Quirinius. Also, in Acts 5:36 the teacher Gamaliel mentions a rebel named Theudas, but Josephus puts a Theudas around AD 45, after Gamaliel's speech. It may be a different Theudas, since it was a common name, or one of the writers got the timing mixed up. We tell you, because a fair witness shows his whole hand.

EXHIBIT 2

TACITUS

Rome's greatest historian, and no fan of Christians

WHO	Publius Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman senator, governor of the province of Asia and the most respected historian of ancient Rome.
WHEN	He wrote the Annals around AD 116, about 85 years after the crucifixion.
WHERE	Annals book 15, section 44, in the story of the Great Fire of Rome in July of AD 64.
MANUSCRIPT	Books 11 to 16 of the Annals survive in one main manuscript, copied in the 1000s at the monastery of Monte Cassino in Italy. It is now in the Laurentian Library in Florence.

Rome burned for six days. People blamed Emperor Nero, so Nero found someone else to blame.

> TACITUS, ANNALS 15.44 · CHURCH AND BRODRIBB TRANSLATION, 1876
> *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 Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome.*

WHAT IT BACKS UP
Christ was a real person. He was executed, and the extreme penalty for a non Roman meant crucifixion. It happened under Emperor Tiberius, who ruled AD 14 to 37, by order of Pontius Pilate. The movement started in Judea and had reached Rome by the 60s. That is the Gospel timeline in one sentence from a man who could not stand Christians.

THE TITLE PUZZLE
Tacitus calls Pilate a procurator. A stone found at Caesarea in 1961 calls him a prefect. The title changed under Emperor Claudius, so Tacitus was probably using the word people used in his own day. Skeptics once called it a mistake that proved fakery. It is more like calling an old car a vintage car.

CHRISTIANS OR CHRESTIANS
Under ultraviolet light the manuscript shows that the word Christians was first written Chrestians and later corrected. It may mean the crowd in Rome said it wrong, or a copyist slipped. Either way it does not change the line about Christus.

WHERE DID HE GET IT
Tacitus does not say. He may have used Roman records, police reports from the trials, or what Christians themselves said. His friend Pliny the Younger, Exhibit 3, questioned Christians a few years earlier. Tacitus was careful and usually checked sources.

IS IT FAKE
Almost no scholars think so. The tone is hostile, the Latin is pure Tacitus, and no Christian would call his own faith a mischievous superstition. Fun fact: the part of the Annals that covered AD 29 to 31 is lost, and that may include the year Jesus died. So we will never know if Tacitus said more.

CONFIDENCE
HIGH.

EXHIBIT 3

PLINY THE YOUNGER

A Roman governor writes to the emperor for advice

WHO	Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, a Roman lawyer and the governor of Bithynia and Pontus, in what is now northern Turkey. His uncle was Pliny the Elder, who died in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.
WHEN	About AD 111 to 113. Letter 10.96, with Emperor Trajan's answer in letter 10.97.

MANUSCRIPT	Book 10 of his letters came down through one very old manuscript copied around AD 500 and kept at the abbey of Saint Victor in Paris. Aldus Manutius printed it in Venice in 1508. Only six leaves of that old book still exist, now at the Morgan Library in New York, and they hold other letters, not this one.

Pliny had a problem. People kept being accused of being Christians, and he was not sure what to do with them. So he wrote to the emperor and described what he had learned, partly by questioning two slave women the Christians called deaconesses, under torture.

> PLINY, LETTERS 10.96 · MELMOTH TRANSLATION, REVISED BY BOSANQUET
> *They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up.*

WHAT IT BACKS UP

By about 80 years after the cross, Christians were in big numbers in Turkey, in cities and villages, men and women, slave and free. They worshiped Christ as God, not just as a dead teacher. They met early on a set day, which fits Sunday worship. They had women serving as deacons, like Phoebe in Romans 16:1. And they would die rather than curse Christ.

WHAT IT DOES NOT DO

Pliny says nothing about the life of Jesus. He is a witness to what Christians believed and did, not to Jesus' biography.

TRAJAN'S ANSWER

Do not hunt Christians down. Do not accept anonymous accusations. But if someone is proven to be a Christian and will not worship the Roman gods, punish him. In other words, being a Christian was itself a crime.

CONFIDENCE

HIGH that the letter is real.

EXHIBIT 4

SUETONIUS

The palace secretary who loved juicy details

WHO	Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, a secretary to Emperor Hadrian with access to the imperial archives.
WHEN	The Lives of the Twelve Caesars, about AD 121.
MANUSCRIPT	The oldest copy is a manuscript in Paris copied in the 800s.

> SUETONIUS, LIFE OF CLAUDIUS 25.4 · J. C. ROLFE TRANSLATION, 1914
> *Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.*

> SUETONIUS, LIFE OF NERO 16.2 · J. C. ROLFE TRANSLATION, 1914
> *Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.*

WHAT IT BACKS UP

Acts 18:2 says Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Suetonius confirms that expulsion. A later writer, Orosius, dates it to AD 49, which fits Paul's timeline in Acts.

WHO WAS CHRESTUS

Most scholars think Chrestus is a misspelling of Christus. Chrestus was a common slave name, and Greeks and Romans often mixed the two up. The fights were probably Jews arguing about whether Jesus was the Messiah. Suetonius seems to think Chrestus was in Rome stirring things up himself, which shows he only half understood the story. Some scholars think it was some other troublemaker named Chrestus.

CONFIDENCE

MEDIUM that Chrestus means Christ. HIGH that Nero punished Christians.

EXHIBIT 5

MARA BAR SERAPION

A father's letter from prison

WHO	Mara, son of Serapion, from Samosata in Syria, writing to his son. He was probably not a Christian.
WHEN	Sometime after AD 73. Most scholars place it in the late first century, though some say later.
MANUSCRIPT	One Syriac manuscript from the 500s or 600s, bought by the British Museum in 1843 and now in the British Library. William Cureton published the first English translation in 1855.

Mara tells his son that wisdom outlasts cruelty. He gives three examples: the Athenians who killed Socrates, the people of Samos who burned Pythagoras, and the Jews who killed their wise king.

> MARA BAR SERAPION, LETTER TO HIS SON · AFTER CURETON, 1855
> *What advantage did the Jews gain from the murder of their wise king, seeing that from that very time their kingdom was driven away from them?*

WHAT IT BACKS UP

Mara never says the name Jesus. But Pilate's sign over the cross called Jesus the King of the Jews, Mark 15:26. Mara says the wise king lives on through the new law he gave, and that the Jews lost their kingdom soon after, which happened in AD 70. Most scholars think he means Jesus.

CONFIDENCE

MEDIUM. The date and the meaning are both debated.

EXHIBIT 6

THALLUS AND PHLEGON

Two pagan writers and a very dark afternoon

The Gospels say darkness covered the land from noon to three o'clock while Jesus was on the cross, Mark 15:33. Two pagan writers seem to mention a darkness like it. Their own books are lost. We only know them because Christian writers quoted them.

THALLUS
A historian who wrote a history of the Mediterranean world, maybe around AD 52, though his date is debated. His work is lost. Julius Africanus, a Christian writing around AD 221, quotes him. Africanus' book is also lost, but a Byzantine monk named George Syncellus copied the quote around AD 800.

> JULIUS AFRICANUS, CHRONOGRAPHY, FRAGMENT 18 · ANTE NICENE FATHERS TRANSLATION
> *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.*

WHY IT MATTERS
If Africanus is right, a pagan historian writing only about 20 years after the cross knew the story of the darkness and tried to explain it away as an eclipse. You do not explain away something nobody is talking about.

AFRICANUS' COMEBACK
He pointed out that a solar eclipse cannot happen at Passover, because Passover falls at full moon, when the moon is on the far side of the earth from the sun. Score one for Africanus.

PHLEGON
Phlegon of Tralles, a freed slave of Emperor Hadrian, wrote a history called the Olympiads around AD 140. Eusebius and others quote him saying that in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad, which is AD 32 or 33, there was the greatest eclipse ever known. At noon the day turned into night, stars came out, and a great earthquake in Bithynia knocked down buildings in the city of Nicaea. Origen adds that Phlegon also wrote about some of Jesus' predictions coming true.

THE HONEST DEBATE
Neither fragment, as it survives, names Jesus. Phlegon may have been describing a real eclipse that crossed the region on November 24, AD 29. And the quotes come to us secondhand. These are interesting clues, not courtroom proof.

CONFIDENCE
LOW to MEDIUM.

EXHIBIT 7

LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA

A Greek comedian roasts the Christians

WHO	A Greek satirist, the stand up comedian of his day. He made fun of philosophers, priests, gods and anyone gullible.
WHEN	The Passing of Peregrinus, about AD 165.

The story is about a con man named Peregrinus who joined the Christians, got rich off their kindness and became a big shot among them, until they kicked him out.

> LUCIAN, THE PASSING OF PEREGRINUS 13 · H. W. AND F. G. FOWLER TRANSLATION, 1905
> *The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day, the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.*

WHAT IT BACKS UP
Christians worshiped a man who was crucified. In section 11 Lucian adds that he was crucified in Palestine. Lucian also says Christians looked after each other in prison,

shared everything, called each other brothers and were not afraid to die. He meant it as a joke about how easy they were to fool. It reads like a compliment.

CONFIDENCE

HIGH that it is real. He tells us what pagans knew, not anything new about Jesus' life.

EXHIBIT 8

CELSUS

The first book written against Christianity

WHO	A Greek philosopher who wrote The True Word, an all out attack on Christianity.
WHEN	About AD 175 to 180. His book is lost, but around AD 248 Origen wrote a long answer called Against Celsus that quotes a large part of it.

CELSUS, QUOTED IN ORIGEN, AGAINST CELSUS 1.28 · ANTE NICENE FATHERS TRANSLATION

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, he returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed himself a God.

WHAT IT BACKS UP

Celsus attacked Jesus with everything he had, and he never said Jesus did not exist. He admits Jesus did amazing things. He just says it was Egyptian magic. That matches what Jesus' enemies said in the Gospels: He casts out demons by the prince of demons, Mark 3:22. Celsus also knew about the trip to Egypt, Matthew 2:14.

THE NASTY RUMOR

Celsus repeats a story that Jesus' real father was a Roman soldier named Panthera. Many scholars think this was a mean joke on the Greek word parthenos, which means virgin. Either way, it shows that even Jesus' enemies knew Christians claimed He was born of a virgin, and they knew there was something unusual about His birth.

CONFIDENCE

HIGH that Celsus wrote it. It is hostile testimony.

EXHIBIT 9

THE TALMUD

What some rabbis said

WHAT	The Talmud is the giant collection of Jewish teaching and debate. The Babylonian Talmud was finished around AD 500, but it contains older sayings.
WHERE	Sanhedrin 43a. The passage is labeled as an older teaching, which would place it in roughly AD 70 to 200, though scholars debate that.
MANUSCRIPTS	Christian censors cut this passage from many printed editions starting in the 1500s. It survives in medieval manuscripts copied before the censors got to work.

BABYLONIAN TALMUD, SANHEDRIN 43A · RETOLD IN PLAIN ENGLISH

On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu. For forty days before, a herald went out saying he would be stoned because he practiced sorcery and led Israel astray, and anyone who knew something in his defense should come and say it. Nobody did, so they hanged him on the eve of Passover. The passage adds that Yeshu had five disciples.

WHAT IT BACKS UP

A man called Yeshu, which is Jesus in Hebrew, was executed on the eve of Passover. John 19:14 puts the crucifixion on the day of preparation for Passover. Hanged is a word the New Testament also uses for crucifixion, Galatians 3:13. The charge of sorcery matches what His enemies said about His miracles. And the passage admits the Jewish leaders were involved.

THE DEBATE

Some scholars, like Peter Schäfer, think these Talmud stories are later answers to the Gospels, written to mock them, not independent history. Others doubt the passage is about Jesus of Nazareth at all. The forty day herald also does not fit the Gospels, where the trial was quick. Read it as what some rabbis believed centuries later, not as an eyewitness account.

TOLEDOT YESHU

A collection of Jewish stories called Toledot Yeshu, from the Middle Ages, tells a mocking life of Jesus. It is far too late to be history.

CONFIDENCE

MEDIUM that it refers to Jesus. LOW as independent history.

EXHIBIT 10

THE FIRST CHRISTIANS AFTER THE APOSTLES

Writings that are not in the Bible

These men were Christians, so they are not neutral. But they are early, and several of them knew the apostles or their students personally.

CLEMENT OF ROME, ABOUT AD 96

A leader in the church at Rome wrote to the church in Corinth. He talks about Peter and Paul as heroes of his own generation who died for their faith.

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, ABOUT AD 110

On his way to be thrown to the lions in Rome, he wrote seven letters. He hammers on the facts of Jesus' life because some people were saying Jesus only seemed to have a body.

IGNATIUS, LETTER TO THE TRALLIANS 9 · J. B. LIGHTFOOT TRANSLATION, 1891

Jesus Christ, who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died.

POLYCARP OF SMYRNA, DIED ABOUT AD 155

A student of the apostle John, according to Irenaeus. When told to curse Christ or burn, he said he had served Him 86 years and He had never done him wrong. They burned him.

PAPIAS, ABOUT AD 110 TO 130
He collected what the apostles' followers remembered. He said Mark wrote down what Peter preached, and Matthew collected Jesus' sayings.

QUADRATUS, ABOUT AD 125
He wrote to Emperor Hadrian that some of the people Jesus healed or raised from the dead were still alive in his own lifetime. Eusebius preserved the quote. That is a bold claim to make to an emperor if it was easy to check and false.

JUSTIN MARTYR, ABOUT AD 155
A philosopher who became a Christian. He told the emperor he could check Jesus' birth in the census records of Quirinius and the records of Pontius Pilate. We do not have those records today, so we cannot test the claim.

EXHIBIT 11

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Stones, a ring, coins and a cartoon

THE PILATE STONE
A limestone block found in 1961 in the theater at Caesarea Maritima. Its Latin inscription names Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea, and a building he dedicated to Emperor Tiberius. It is in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. CONFIDENCE: HIGH.

THE PILATE RING
A small copper alloy ring found in 1968 or 1969 at Herodium. In 2018 scholars cleaned and photographed it and read the name Pilatus. It may have belonged to someone who worked for Pilate. CONFIDENCE: MEDIUM that it is connected to him.

PILATE'S COINS
Pilate minted small bronze coins around AD 29 to 31. Some show a priest's staff and a ladle used in pagan rituals, a strange choice in a Jewish land. They fit Philo's description of Pilate. CONFIDENCE: HIGH.

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA
A Jewish philosopher who lived at the same time as Jesus. Around AD 41 he described Pilate as stubborn, harsh and cruel. That fits the Pilate of Luke 13:1 and Josephus. Philo never mentions Jesus.

THE CAIAPHAS OSSUARY
The bone box of the high priest who put Jesus on trial. See the Field Notes page in Matthew. CONFIDENCE: HIGH.

THE JAMES OSSUARY
A bone box announced in 2002 with the words James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus. The Israel Antiquities Authority said the last part was forged. Its owner was put on trial, and in 2012 a judge found him not guilty of forgery but said that did not prove the box was real. Experts are still split. CONFIDENCE: LOW. Do not lean on it.

PHOTO NEEDED: ALEXAMENOS GRAFFITO, PALATINE HILL, ROME

THE ALEXAMENOS GRAFFITO
A cartoon scratched into a wall on Palatine Hill in Rome, around AD 200. It shows a man worshiping a crucified figure with a donkey's head. The caption says Alexamenos worships his god. It is the oldest known picture of the crucifixion, and it is an insult. Pagans thought worshiping a crucified man was ridiculous, 1 Corinthians 1:23. CONFIDENCE: HIGH that it mocks Christians.

CLOSING ARGUMENT

WHAT THE WITNESSES AGREE ON

Put them all together

Take away the Bible completely, and from these outside sources alone you can still piece together the following:

#	THE FACT	WHO SAYS SO
1	Jesus was a real Jewish man who lived in the early first century.	Josephus, Tacitus, the Talmud, Celsus
2	He was known as a wise teacher who did amazing deeds.	Josephus, Celsus, the Talmud
3	Some Jewish leaders brought charges against Him.	Josephus, the Talmud, Mara
4	He was executed by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate while Tiberius was emperor.	Tacitus, Josephus, Lucian
5	He was put to death around Passover.	The Talmud
6	His followers did not give up. They said He appeared to them alive.	Josephus, the Arabic version
7	He was called the Christ, and His followers were named Christians after Him.	Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny
8	Within a few decades Christians were in Rome and Turkey, worshiping Christ as God, and dying for it.	Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, Lucian
9	He had a brother named James, who was killed in Jerusalem around AD 62.	Josephus
10	John the Baptist was a real preacher killed by Herod Antipas.	Josephus

The Scorecard

WITNESS	WRITTEN	NAMES HIM AS	CONFIDENCE
Josephus, Testimonium	AD 93	Jesus, a wise man	HIGH core, LOW additions
Josephus, James	AD 93	Jesus called Christ	HIGH
Thallus	about AD 52?	Darkness only	LOW to MEDIUM
Mara bar Serapion	after AD 73	The wise king	MEDIUM
Pliny	AD 112	Christ	HIGH

WITNESS	WRITTEN	NAMES HIM AS	CONFIDENCE
Tacitus	AD 116	Christus	HIGH
Suetonius	AD 121	Chrestus	MEDIUM
Phlegon	AD 140	Darkness only	LOW
Lucian	AD 165	The crucified man	HIGH
Celsus	AD 178	Jesus	HIGH
Talmud	AD 200 to 500	Yeshu	MEDIUM

How Does That Compare

Alexander the Great died in 323 BC. The oldest full biographies of him that survive, by Plutarch and Arrian, were written around 400 years later. Nobody doubts Alexander existed. For Jesus we have four Gospels within about 60 years, Paul's letters within about 20 years, and outside witnesses starting within one lifetime. For a poor preacher from Nazareth who never led an army or ruled a city, that is a lot of paperwork.

What About People Who Say He Never Existed

There is a small group, sometimes called mythicists, who say Jesus never lived. A few have academic degrees, like Richard Carrier. But they are a tiny minority. Bart Ehrman, a well known scholar who is not a Christian and argues against much of the Bible, wrote a whole book in 2012 called Did Jesus Exist? His answer was yes, and he said nearly every expert agrees. Historians argue about who Jesus was. Very few argue about whether He was.

The Real Question

History can show you that Jesus lived, taught, was crucified under Pilate and that His followers said He rose from the dead. History cannot make you believe He did. That part is between you and Him. As Jesus asked Peter in Mark 8:29, But what about you? Who do you say I am?

Read It Yourself

Most of these books are free online. Search for Whiston Josephus Antiquities, Tacitus Annals Church and Brodribb, Pliny Letters book 10, Suetonius Lives of the Caesars, Lucian Peregrinus, Origen Against Celsus and the Ante Nicene Fathers. The Codex Sinaiticus is at codexsinaiticus.org/en. Check our work. That is what a good jury does.