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Extra-Biblical Credibility Toward Historical Jesus

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Abstract

For centuries, there has been fervent contention regarding the historical authenticity of Jesus. Critics and skeptics have raised numerous charges due to the absence of unequivocal evidence beyond biblical sources. Establishing trustworthy historical evidence for Jesus necessitates more than the mere reliability of the Bible. Since the Enlightenment in the 18th century, the examination of the historical Jesus has been laden with skepticism. Numerous contemporary critical scholars have meticulously examined the portrayal of Jesus in the New Testament and have published a confidential declaration asserting that the Jesus shown in the NT is not the historical figure, as there is insufficient external evidence to support this claim. This article explores the historical relevance of Jesus' life as Christians endeavour to present persuasive evidence of his existence beyond biblical texts. Consequently, in this writing, I provide robust evidence from non-biblical texts to substantiate the historical credibility of Jesus Christ and examine his presence outside the New Testament.

Keywords

Historical Jesus, Mythicists, Gnosis, Romans, Gospel, Jewish, Gentiles, Pagan, and others.

Introduction

As human intelligence and knowledge have progressed, different interpretations of Jesus, who lived two millennia ago in Palestine, have gained more acceptance. This article aims to elucidate a clearer and more detailed understanding of Jesus, referenced outside the Bible in the first century CE, by an examination of historical research regarding his life. To defend Jesus beyond the confines of the Bible, it will elucidate the incontrovertible historical figure of Jesus from a purely historical standpoint to clarify his representation in the New Testament.

Scholar's Refutation of Historical Jesus

The scholars¹ have made an impact on refutation to the historical Jesus. They have consistently generated confusion and doubt regarding the historicity of Jesus in relation to New Testament studies. Extracanonical

¹ John Gribbin, in his book *In Search of the Double Helix: Quantum Physics and Life*, asserts that if one inquires of devoted Christians whether they think that Christ died and resurrected, the believers will affirmatively respond in the affirmative. Request evidence from them, and they will be perplexed by the inquiry. The issue is to belief rather than evidence; requesting evidence signifies skepticism, and skepticism undermines faith. Albert Schweitzer: A distinguished New Testament scholar, in his work "*Quest of the Historical Jesus*," presented a critical examination of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, highlighting specific historical issues that challenge the reality of the historical Jesus and asserting that no definitive truth could be attained. F.F. Bruce: In his work, *The New Testament Documents - Are They Reliable?* Inquired about the existing collateral evidence for the historical reality of Jesus Christ's life. Robert Price asserts in his work, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable is the Gospel Tradition?* The onus of proof appears to rest with those asserting the existence of a historical figure named Jesus. Rudolf Bultmann: who was an influential New Testament scholar of the twentieth century penned the words: I do indeed think

evidence is sufficiently dependable and robust to substantiate the historical existence of Jesus. The Greco-Roman data is paramount to consider. The historians have deliberated in their writings.

Roman Historians on Historical Jesus

Historians have consistently provided historical viewpoints on life events and recorded prominent sociopolitical circumstances during the Roman era. Roman historians provide literal evidence that supports the existence of a historical Jesus. The subsequent historians and their perspectives warrant examination.

Suetonius Tranquillus (ca.70 CE), Claudius 25.4.

A Roman historian who wrote on the lives of the twelve emperors of Rome who was member of the equite class and worked as a lawyer of Pliny the younger² and also the chief secretary of the Emperor Hadrian around 117-138 CE and for that he might had the access to the imperial records,³ saying in 49 CE, a wave of riots broke out in the very large Jewish community in Rome. Emperor Claudius enacted a severe measure by expelling all Jews from the city, as referenced in Acts 18:2; upon Paul's arrival in Corinth, he encountered a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. Suetonius states that Emperor Claudius banished the Jews from Rome due to the riots in which they frequently engaged, incited by *Chrestus*.⁴ Many experts contend that the issue is with the citation; "Chrestus" does not refer to Christ.

However, Christian scholarships assert that the Latin style implies a Quodam (someone or somebody) would introduce a new or unknown entity, which is absent in this context. Secondly, numerous names of Roman Jews have been discovered in the Roman catacombs, none of which are "Chrestus," indicating a misinterpretation of the reference that likely intended to denote Chrestiani, a colloquial variant of the term for "Christians."⁵ The manuscripts describe Christian Jews disseminating their beliefs in Roman synagogues from 40-50 CE, indicating that knowledge of the historical Jesus was widely recognized beyond the Bible in the early first century following Jesus' ascension.

Tacitus Cornelius (55/56 CE), Annals 15.44

Cornelius Tacitus, a member of the senatorial elite, served as Proconsul of Asia and is renowned for his two significant historical writings that critique the Principate: The Histories (about 105-110) and the Annals (around 116/117). The impetus for Tacitus to address the Christians is the conflagration of Rome in 64 CE, during which Emperor Nero implicated the Christians to deflect suspicion from himself. In his biography, *Life of Nero*, Tacitus delineates a stark difference between the initial five tranquil years of Nero's reign and the subsequent period of dread, characterized by the brutal death of Christians. He expresses disdain for Christians, however considers them culpable not for the arson but for their 'hate towards humanity.' He denounces Nero's motivations, even for offenders deserving of severe and exemplary punishment, although a sense of compassion emerged.⁶

Tacitus provides an extensive excerpt from extra-biblical sources, stating that Nero established scapegoats and inflicted the most sophisticated tortures on persons referred to as "Christians," who were despised for their heinous offenses. The individual known as Christ was executed by the procurator Pontius

that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist"; R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1934), 8.

² Darrell I. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus: A guide to Sources and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 47-48.

³ Robert Graves, "Introduction," in *Suetonius' the Twelve Caesars*, trans. by Robert Graves (Baltimore: Penguin, 1957), 7.

⁴ F. F Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Outside the New Testament* (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 21.

⁵ Bock, *Analyzing the Historical Jesus*, 48. John Meier, in *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 of The Anchor Bible Reference Library, posits that the reference is only attributable to pronunciation mistake, indicating it pertains exclusively to Christ. However, Bruce, Jesus, and Christian propose that Chrestus is a prevalent name among slaves. The absence of the name Chrestus from catacomb inscriptions indicates that it did not resonate within Christian communities. This suggests that Suetonius is referencing Christian activities, and the lack of evidence in the catacombs implies that Chrestus is a misattribution by Suetonius. Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* asserts that a significant issue with this reconstruction of events is that if Suetonius had referred to such a situation, he erroneously spelled Jesus' epithet, as Christ in Latin is Christus, not Chrestus, which was a frequent type of orthographic error. Furthermore, Chrestus may refer to an individual, namely a Jew named Chrestus, who instigated a disturbance resulting in rioting within the Jewish community.

⁶ Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 81-82.

Pilate during the reign of Tiberius, and his influence extended beyond Judea to the city of Rome.⁷ Suetonius noted in 120 CE the great fire of Rome, stating, 'Punishment was imposed on the Christians, a group of individuals devoted to a fresh and harmful superstition.'⁸

Tacitus primarily aims to depict the brutal execution of Christians in Rome under Nero. He makes three significant assertions regarding Jesus: first, he dates Christ's death to the reign of Emperor Tiberius (14-37 CE) and the governorship of Pontius Pilate (26-36 CE); second, he confirms that Christ's death was executed by the Roman governor of Judea; and third, he notes that this execution temporarily suppressed the burgeoning Christian movement, which soon reemerged, initially in Judea and subsequently proliferated to Rome.⁹ The disciples of Christ were derided and subjected to torment, even being crucified. Tacitus so determined that such penalties served not the general interest but merely to satisfy an individual's cruelty.¹⁰

Another citation in Tacitus' writings appears in the *Histories*, where he describes the incineration of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans in 70 CE, which led to the city's devastation. The Christians are referenced as a collective associated with these occurrences. Tacitus clearly shown awareness of Christians and reported that Jesus was well recognized throughout his era.¹¹

Nonetheless, Bruce observed that Tacitus obtained the information from a source, potentially an official record included in one of Pilate's reports to the emperor, to which Tacitus likely had access due to his prominence within the government.¹² This provides comprehensive proof for the existence of Jesus in the early first century CE.

Pliny the Younger (111-112 CE), Epistles 10.96-97

The earliest extant reference to Jesus by a non-Christian, non-Jewish source is found in the writings of Pliny the Younger, the governor of the Roman province of Bithynia-Pontus in Asia Minor. Pliny also notes their practice of convening periodically before dawn on a designated day to recite lines "to Christ as to a deity."¹³

Pliny maintained extensive formal correspondence with Emperor Trajan. As allegations against Christians escalated, he appealed to the emperor over this matter, stating, "I have never participated in investigations of Christians; therefore, I am unaware of the crimes typically prosecuted or examined, or what leniencies are afforded."¹⁴ Pliny provides statements regarding 'Christus' and his interactions with Christians.

Pliny further elucidates their practice of convening on a designated day before dawn to proclaim Christ as a deity, and that they pledged an oath, not for any transgression, but to refrain from theft, robbery, adultery, breach of promise, and denial of a requested deposit. Subsequently, they proceeded. It was their tradition to separate and subsequently reconvene to share a meal, which consisted of simple and wholesome fare.¹⁵ Pliny discovered those who had previously succumbed to superstition, now prepared to give incense to Caesar's likeness and to denounce Christ for refuting their allegations by the Romans.¹⁶ Pliny's letter reveals several pieces of evidence regarding Jesus, which include:

- i. Christ was worshiped as deity by early Christian believers.
- ii. Teaching of Jesus and his followers as "excessive superstition" and "contagious superstition," which is reminiscent of the words of both Tacitus and Suetonius.
- iii. Jesus' ethical teaching reflects not be guilty of sins.

⁷ John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, *The Anchor Bible Reference Library* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 90. For the pagan Tacitus, Christus was merely a proper noun; for the Jews and the early Christians, it represented a title, the Greek equivalent of the Semitic Messiah, meaning 'Anointed.' The Christians referred to him as Christus, believing him to be the prophesied Messiah; the Jews, who did not share this belief, would not have conferred such a distinguished title upon him. Tacitus had access to government information, being the son-in-law of Julius Agricola, governor of Britain from AD 80 to 84 CE. For detail see, F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they reliable?* 117-120,

⁸ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 118.

⁹ Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 1, 90-91.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

¹¹ Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 2008), 174.

¹² F Bruce, *Jesus and Christian outside the New Testament*, 25.

¹³ Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1, 92.

¹⁴ Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, 106-107.

¹⁵ Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 51.

¹⁶ Shirley Jackson Case, *The Historicity of Jesus: A criticism of the contention that Jesus never lived, a statement of the evidence for his existence, an estimate of his relation to Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912), 243.

iv. Institution of holy communion and celebration of the “love feast” (Lk 22:19-20 and 1 Cor 11:26) in gathering of ordinary food. This gave to non-believers suspicion of their meeting of drinking of blood and eating of human body.

v. Establishment of Sunday’s worship as they were met “on a certain day” (Acts 20:7).¹⁷

vi. Pliny informs the emperor, the Christians “sing hymns to Christ as to a god.”¹⁸

Pliny succinctly characterizes the service, which can be comprehended in relation to the early Christian Eucharist or Agape. The term service originated from a Jewish synagogue tradition involving the reading and interpretation of Scripture, the singing of psalms, and the recitation of prayers. The Gospels (Matt 13:53–58; Mk 6:1–6; Lk 4:16–30) show that Jesus engaged in these rites on the Jewish Sabbath.¹⁹ The writings of Pliny the Younger provide incontrovertible evidence and documentation of Jesus’ existence outside the New Testament.

***Thallus*²⁰ (52 CE)**

In his third book, Thallus recounts the earthquake and the unnatural darkness that attended the crucifixion of Christ, attributing it to a solar eclipse, despite the fact that Jesus was crucified during a full moon, when a solar eclipse is not feasible. Thallus evidently have knowledge of the Christian tale concerning the crucifixion of Christ, as seen in his work.²¹ Thallus pertains to a Christian oral or written tradition of the passion.²²

***Mara Bar Serapion* (73 CE)**

A Syriac manuscript at the British Museum contains a text authored by Mara Bar Serapion, intended to motivate his son to seek wisdom by illustrating that people who punished the intelligent ultimately faced calamity. He elucidates the circumstances surrounding the killings of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Christ, questioning the benefits the Athenians derived from executing Socrates. What benefit did the men of Samos derive from incinerating Pythagoras? What benefit did the Jews derive from the execution of their sagacious king? Nevertheless, Socrates did not perish permanently; he persisted through the teachings of Plato. Pythagoras did not perish permanently; he endured in the statue of Hera. The sagacious king did not perish permanently; he endured via the teachings he imparted.²³

Bruce suggested that this author was either a Christian or asserted that Christ continued to exist through resurrection. His potential influence by Christians is strikingly clear in his portrayal of ‘the Jews’ as the executioners of their sagacious ruler, seeing the consequences of the Jewish insurrection of 66-73 CE as a divine retribution for this execution.²⁴

***Lucian of Samosata* (ca. 115-200 CE)**

Lucian of Samosata was a prominent Greek satire and itinerant lecturer.²⁵ In his 165 CE work, *The Death of Peregrinus*, Lucian delineates the life and demise of Peregrinus of Parion, a prominent character of the second century, asserting that Peregrinus was not insignificant but rather a Cynic with substantial philosophical insights and political and religious ambitions. No educated individual could be devoid of a viewpoint.²⁶

¹⁷ Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 179.

¹⁸ Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?* 104.

¹⁹ Bradley M. Peper and Mark DelCogliano, “The Pliny and Trajan Correspondence,” in *The Historical Jesus in Context*, edited by Donald S. Lopez (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 370.

²⁰ He was thought to be a Samaritan by birth, the offspring of a freedman of Emperor Tiberius, and authored a history of the Eastern Mediterranean from the Trojan War until his contemporary period. Nevertheless, the document has been destroyed; however, Julius Africanus transcribed it in the early third century. For further facts, see to Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, which asserts that in the latter half of the first century, a non-Christian historian was compelled to counter ‘false’ historical information inside it. Julius Africanus, for his part, ‘demonstrates’ the miracle by noting that Jesus was crucified during Passover.

²¹ Bruce, *Jesus and Christian outside the New Testament*, 30.

²² Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, 85; Dale C. Allison Jr., “Thallus on the Crucifixion,” in *The Historical Jesus in Context*, edited by Donald S. Lopez (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 405.

²³ Bruce, *Jesus and Christian outside the New Testament*, 30-31.

²⁴ Bruce, *Jesus and Christian outside the New Testament*, 31.

²⁵ Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 54.

²⁶ C. P. Jones, *Culture and Society in Lucian* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986) 132.

Lucian remarks on the founder of Christianity and his teachings, noting that during this time, Peregrinus was affiliated with the priests and scribes of the Christians in Palestine, acquiring their remarkable wisdom. Lucian asserts that in a brief period, he (Jesus) rendered them childlike; he assumed the roles of their prophet, leader, head of the synagogue, and everything else, single-handedly. He (Jesus) elucidated and provided commentary on certain of their sacred texts, and even authored some himself. They revered him (Jesus) as a deity, appointed him as their lawgiver, and designated him as the official patron of their group, or at the very least, the vice patron. He was surpassed only by the individual whom they continue to venerate today, the guy in Palestine who was executed for introducing this novel style of initiation into the world.²⁷

Voorst asserts that Lucian referred to Christ as “that crucified sophist,” identifying him as “the man in Palestine who was crucified for introducing this new form of initiation into the world.” The verb he employs for crucifixion in both instances is an uncommon term, ἀνασκολοπίζειν, rather than ἀνασταυρεῖν, the term typically utilized by ancient authors and consistently found in the New Testament and other early Christian texts.²⁸

The scripture indicates that Jesus was steadfast, and Christians venerate him as a divine figure who was incarnated as a man and crucified in Palestine. They possess a profound conviction in an afterlife that influences their current existence. Christians adhere to his (Christ’s) commandments, particularly the principle of brotherly love (Matt 23:8): “You are all brothers”). Christians possess their own texts that are routinely read and interpreted. They visit and assist their incarcerated fellow believers (Matt 25:35) and engage in extensive communication with one another. Lucian delineates the doctrine of Jesus. He interprets his teachings as “laws,” with Jesus serving as the “primary lawgiver” for Christians. The observation on Christians “disregarding all possessions indiscriminately” indicates that the practice of regarding possessions as communal property is not documented in the ministry or teachings of Jesus, but is solely found in the Acts: 4-5.²⁹

The association between Peregrinus and Christians is likely valid based on the text, but Lucian has significantly embellished it for satirical purposes. The narrative of Peregrinus likely substantiated many truths of Jesus beyond the New Testament, which Lucian then inflated for his own objectives in his composition.

Celsus (175 CE)

Celsus, the Neo-Platonist philosopher, authored a critique of Christianity titled *True Doctrine*. Although *True Doctrine* has been lost, around 60 to 90 percent of its manuscript was integrated into Origen’s extensive and robust rebuttal in his work *Against Celsus*. Celsus launches a comprehensive critique of Jesus as the originator of the religion. He dismisses or belittles Jesus’ lineage, conception, nativity, upbringing, ministry, demise, resurrection, and ongoing impact.

Celsus asserts that Jesus’ lineage sprang from a Jewish town (*Against Celsus* 1.28), and his mother was a destitute rural woman who supported herself by cloth spinning. He performed his wonders using wizardry. His physical appearance was unattractive and diminutive. Jesus adhered to all Jewish traditions, including sacrificial practices in the temple. He amassed merely ten adherents and imparted to them his most detrimental practices, including solicitation and theft. Jesus was conceived through adultery, and his biological father was a Roman soldier named Panthera.³⁰

Nag Hammadi

In December 1945, two Egyptian siblings excavated at the base of a hill near Nag Hammadi in search of nitrates for agricultural fertilization. While excavating near a boulder, one of the brothers

²⁷ Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament*, 56-57.

²⁸ Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament*, 58

²⁹ Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament*, 58-59.

³⁰ Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament*, 59-62. Panther was a common name among Roman soldiers of that period, but most interpreters hold that this name was used by some Jews because of its similarity to parthenos, “virgin.” If this is the case, it would mean that this is a Jewish reaction to the Christian doctrine of the virgin birth, which does not become a leading Christian theme until near the end of the first century. Celsus has Jesus proclaiming his own virgin birth, which is of course not reflected in Christian writings but is attested in later Jewish polemic. Other traditions say, he was born out of wedlock to a woman of Qumran’s royal-priestly line, befriended outcasts, and performed no miracles. He was crucified with Simon Magus and Judas Iscariot at Qumran.

unearthed a substantial sealed pottery jar. The jar held thirteen Gnostic codices inscribed in Coptic, originating from the fourth century.³¹

Nevertheless, experts frequently disagree regarding the date of the original compositions. Elaine Pagels asserts that certain texts can scarcely be dated later than 120-150 CE, as Irenaeus, the orthodox Bishop of Lyons, writing circa 180 CE, states that heretics “boast that they possess more gospels than there truly are,” and laments that such writings had already gained considerable circulation in his era.³²

The most notable instance is found in the second- or third-century *Apocryphon of James*, wherein the resurrected Jesus instructs James that if one is afflicted by Satan and endures persecution while fulfilling the Father’s will, He would love them and elevate them to equality with Himself. Will you not stop adoring the corporeal and fearing pain? Are you unaware that you have still to endure mistreatment, be unfairly accused, imprisoned, wrongfully condemned, crucified without cause, and buried, as I was, by the malevolent one? Do you have the audacity to preserve the corporeal form, you for whom the spirit serves as a surrounding barrier? Verily, I declare unto you, none shall get salvation unless they have faith in my crucifixion. Disdain death, and contemplate life! Recall my crucifixion and demise, and you shall endure.³³

Gospel of Thomas

The hitherto obscured Gospel of Thomas, referenced sporadically by Hippolytus and Origen, was unearthed in 1945 within the Nag Hammadi manuscripts. Inscribed in Coptic, the subscription states “The Gospel of Thomas.” The text commences without a title, stating, “These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymus Judas Thomas recorded.” This record comprises a division of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus.³⁴

The poem demonstrates a Jewish Christian foundation in Sayings 12 through its commendation of James, the brother of Jesus, and in Sayings 53, which spiritualizes circumcision. Among the extracanonical gospels, The Gospel of Thomas is arguably the most credible in preserving a substantial collection of Jesus’ sayings beyond the New Testament.³⁵

Gospel of Peter

In 1886, a French archaeological team excavating the necropolis of an ancient Pachomian monastery some 250 miles south of Cairo discovered a little book in a monk’s grave, and the Gospel of Peter served as a source for the passion accounts of the canonical Gospels.³⁶ Here are some of the similarities in the given line. The Gospel of Peter (2:3,4 & 5) indicates that Joseph, a confidant of Pilate and the Lord, approached Pilate to request the Lord’s body for burial, having realized that crucifixion was imminent.

Pilate requested Herod to receive the body. Herod stated, “Brother Pilate, even if no one requests it, we ought to inter him, as the Sabbath is imminent.” It is stipulated in the law that the sun must not set on one who has been executed. The Gospel of Peter (4:10-11) states that two malefactors were taken and the Lord was crucified between them. He remained still, as if devoid of suffering, and when the cross was erected, the inscription read, “This is the King of Israel.”³⁷ This text demonstrates the presence and historical evidence of Jesus beyond the New Testament, despite not being an accepted canonical writing. It provides credible sources regarding Jesus’ impact and historical acknowledgment.

Evidences from Jewish Sources

Jewish sources provide substantial literary evidence supporting the existence of the historical Jesus. Given that Jesus was recognized as a Jew, it is essential to examine Jewish texts.

³¹ Mark R. Fairchild, “History and the Historical Jesus in the Nag Hammadi Literature,” <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1612&context=asburyjournal> (12/10/2024).

³² Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 14-15.

³³ Francis E. Williams, “Apocryphon of James,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, vol.1, ed., by James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), 32-34.

³⁴ Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament*, 164. See more Meier, Marginal Jew, 1:124-39; Raymond E. Brown, “The Gospel of Thomas and St. John’s Gospel,” in *NTS* 9 (1962-63): 155-77; Ron Cameron, “The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Origins,” in *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. Birger A. Pearson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 381-92;

³⁵ Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, 164. See Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, 38-39.

³⁶ Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament*, 205.

³⁷ Voorst, *Jesus outside the New Testament*, 206-207, citing from F. Neirynck, “The Apocryphal Gospels and the Gospel of Mark,” in *The New Testament in Early Christianity*, ed. J.-M Sevrin (Louvain: University Press, 1989) 171-73.

Josephus (36-100 CE)

The most significant extrabiblical evidence for Jesus originates from the Jewish historian Joseph Ben Matthias, commonly referred to as Flavius Josephus, who was a Pharisee and served as a commander of Jewish Galilean forces during the Jewish War against the Romans.³⁸ The most extensive works of Josephus are *Antiquities* and *Testimonium Flavianum*, which contain the two most notable references from the first century outside the Bible about the lives of James and Jesus.

James the Just

Josephus notes the killing of the Lord's brother during the transition of Festus' administration (62 CE), following Festus' abrupt death in office and a subsequent interregnum of three months before the arrival of his successor, Albinus, in Judaea. Annas the Younger, the son of Annas, assumed leadership as referenced in the Gospel of Luke 3:2, John 18:13, and Acts 4:6. The younger Annas swiftly seized the advantage and exerted increased control.³⁹

Josephus states that he convened a judicial session of the Sanhedrin and presented before it. James, the brother of Jesus, referred to as Christ, along with several others, whom he accused of violating the law and then delivered to be stoned to death. Bruce concurs with Josephus' assertion that James is referred to as the 'brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ,' aligning with Paul's characterization of him in Galatians 1:9 as 'James, the Lord's brother.'⁴⁰

Josephus on Jesus

Josephus recounts the numerous adversities experienced by the inhabitants of Judaea during the tenure of Pontius Pilate (26-36 CE). In his work, *Testimonium Flavianum*, he states, "Now, there was about this Jesus, a wise man, if it is permissible to refer to him as a man, for he performed remarkable deeds and taught those who embraced the truth with delight." He attracted numerous Jews and Gentiles to himself. He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the behest of the leading figures among us, condemned him to crucifixion, those who initially loved him did not abandon him, for he manifested himself alive on the third day, as the divine prophets had predicted, along with myriad other remarkable events concerning him; and the sect of Christians, named after him, persists to this day.⁴¹

Eusebius, an early church historian, references this book in his *Ecclesiastical History* (1.1.7-8) and in his *Demonstration of the Gospel* (3.5.105-6), indicating that Josephus' writings were widely recognized by 325 CE.⁴² The phrase 'he was the Christ' represents a clear declaration of confidence in Jesus as the Messiah, a title universally recognized by the Gentiles.⁴³

The testimony of the Jewish historian is of significant value, irrespective of the version one endorses. Josephus affirms that (i) Jesus was esteemed as a sagacious individual and educator; (ii) Jesus was recognized for executing extraordinary deeds; (iii) Jesus' considerable influence provoked opposition from Jewish authorities; (iv) he was crucified under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Emperor Tiberius; and (v) Jesus' movement was initiated and persisted into the first century.⁴⁴ These writings eliminate significant concerns regarding Jesus' existence, as he has profoundly influenced history beyond the Bible.

³⁸ Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 53.

³⁹ Bruce, *Jesus and Christian outside the New Testament*, 36; Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 54.

⁴⁰ Bruce, *Jesus and Christian outside the New Testament*, 36. Tradition holds that James was esteemed for his character and nobility, which were upheld in the Church of Jerusalem, earning him the love of the Jewish populace. However, a horrific event transpired under the high priest, and a few years later, a conflict erupted, culminating in the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. Tradition claims that this calamity occurred due to the absence of James' prayer, which was previously said to prevent such an incident. Meier, in *A Marginal Jew*, asserts that the narrative attributed to Josephus is not an early Christian account, and that Josephus' depiction of James' martyrdom diverges in both timing and style from that of Hegesippus. Josephus reports that James was executed by stoning under the order of the high priest Annas before to the onset of the Jewish War in early 62 CE. According to Hegesippus, the scribes and Pharisees hurled James from the parapet of the Jerusalem temple. They attempt to stone him but are restrained by a priest; ultimately, a laundryman bludgeons James to death.

⁴¹ Josephus, *Antiquities* xxviii.63-64.

⁴² Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 55.

⁴³ Bruce, *Jesus and Christian outside the New Testament*, 37.

⁴⁴ Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, 57. Numerous contemporary scholars exhibit diminished confidence in Josephus' reference to Christ in *Antiquities* xx.200, leading to the hypothesis that a Christian interpolator may have inserted italicized segments or variations thereof, or that the text was subsequently modified by a Christian editor, likely between the third and fourth centuries CE. For better explanation look into the books, F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origin*, 36-41; Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 67-73; John Meier, *A Marginal Jew* 1,60-63.

Josephus describes John as establishing a community 'by baptism.' This aligns with Luke 1:17, where John is described as coming "to prepare the way for the Lord."⁴⁵

Josephus' works attest to the historical existence of Jesus, both during and after his lifetime, through the following points. (a) reference to the date of Jesus, (b) his renown as a miracle worker, (c) his relation to James as a brother, (d) his crucifixion under Pilate at the behest of the Jewish authorities and Emperor Tiberius, (e) his claim to messiahship, (f) his role as the founder of 'the tribe of Christians,' and likely (g) the belief in his rising from the dead⁴⁶ and tarrying his message beyond Judea.

Jesus in the Rabbinic Tradition

Rabbinical evidence provides greater support and precision in comprehending Jesus as referenced in Christian texts. The Babylon Talmud is a significant official rabbinic work that was completed in the sixth century, and the Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 43a references Jesus.

"On the eve of the Passover Yeshu (the Nazarene) 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 had practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favour let him forward and pleads on his behalf."⁴⁷

The Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 107b states: One day, Rabbi Joshua was chanting the Shema (Deut 6:4) when Jesus approached him. He planned to welcome him and gestured towards him. He (Jesus), believing it was intended to deter him, erected a brick, and worshipped it. A master has stated, "Jesus the Nazarene engaged in sorcery and misled others."⁴⁸

These books do not directly address the life of Jesus and include some negative commentary regarding him. Nevertheless, they acknowledge or concede in various respects, including (i) the existence of Jesus, (ii) his performance of miracles and wonders, and (iii) his disciples throughout his lifetime and subsequent to his ascension, which collectively serve as substantial corroborative evidence found in the Gospels and Christian literature.

Conclusion

References to Jesus in Jewish tradition and pagan literature constitute a substantial contribution by credible witnesses to the historical Jesus. Nonetheless, there exist sporadic insights and trivial observations. Non-Christian evidence consistently depicts Jesus as a historical individual. Nonetheless, the evidence presented regarding Jesus' familial lineage, temporal existence, ministry, and demise lacks persuasive or trustworthy qualities for authentic Christian faith. The pagan evidence for Jesus is intriguing; although current research has yielded rather conclusive results, it, along with Jewish evidence, forms a more comprehensive understanding of Jesus. Jesus is exemplified by the movement he initiated. If this movement had not endured until the conclusion of the first century, neither Josephus, the rabbis, nor pagans would have documented Jesus.

The allusions to Jesus in Jewish tradition provide even more compelling evidence than those found in classical literature and align with the church's assertions regarding him. These, undoubtedly, furnish the most compelling proof for the existence of Jesus. Nevertheless, if any individuals in the ancient world had justification to disdain Christianity, it was the Jewish rabbis and historians. All sources and references from Jewish and pagan documents do not suggest the argument of non-historicity or Christian fabrication, but rather acknowledge Jesus as a wholly historical figure.

Consequently, any conspiracies regarding the historical Jesus' credibility, beyond the New Testament, are propagated by contemporary authors and critical scholars who concoct narratives about ancient Christians and their faith in Jesus, thereby distorting Christianity's influence through their writings and rational arguments. Primarily, Jesus transcends the confines of a mere historical figure. He is the world's hope and the Lord, who traversed among his people in Judea and shall continue to do so eternally.

⁴⁵ Bruce, *Jesus and Christian outside the New Testament*, 43-35. For better insight see the *Qumran Rule of the Community* (1QS) 3:2-8 on Qumran Documents, 66-70.

⁴⁶ Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 112.

⁴⁷ C. Marvin Pate, *40 Questions about the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2015), 83-84; See Bock, *Studying The Historical Jesus*, 58-60.

⁴⁸ Graham Stanton, "Jesus of Nazareth: A Magician and a False Prophets Who Deceived God's People?" in *Jesus Of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, edited by Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 168. See Pate, *40 Questions about the Historical Jesus*, 83-84; Bock, *Studying The Historical Jesus*, 59-60.