Some Ancient Non-Christian Sources for the Life of Jesus

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| Tacitus (Roman historian) 55-120 ADThe Annals and the Histories | Suetonius (Roman historian) 117-138 AD | Josephus (Jewish historian) 37/38-97 AD, The Antiquities | Thallus (fragments from other historians), around 52 AD | Pliny the Younger (Roman author & administrator) |
| “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, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre 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. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man’s cruelty, that they were being destroyed.” (Annals, 115 AD) | “Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city.”“After the great fire at Rome . . . . Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief.” | “the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ” (Antiquities, 90-95 AD)“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats. . . . He was (the) Christ . . . he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him.” (Antiquities, 90-95 AD)A different version based on Arabic version of the same passage by Josephus (Professor Schlomo Pines of the Hebrew University):“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.” | “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.” (Julius Africanus) | “They (the Christians) 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; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food — but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.” (early letter)“The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those denounced to you as Christians is extremely proper. It is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the fixed standard in all cases of this nature. No search should be made fore these people; when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our Gods) he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance, even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion. Informations without the accuser’s name subscribed must not be admitted in evidence against anyone, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the spirit of the age.” (response to letter by emperor Trajan) |
| Serenius Granianus (proconsul of Asia) 117-138 AD | Lucian (Greek satirist) 2nd century |
| “I do not wish, therefore, that the matter should be passed by without examination, so that these men may neither be harassed, nor opportunity of malicious proceedings be offered to informers. If, therefore, the provincials can clearly evince their charges against the Christians, so as to answer before the tribunal, let them pursue this course only, but not by mere petitions, and mere outcries against the Christians. For it is far more proper, if any one would bring an accusation, that you should examine it.” (early letter) | “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. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.” |
| Justin Martyr quoting lost Acts of Pontius Pilate (reported 150 AD) | Mara bar Serapion, letter, 1st-3rd century |
| “And the expression, “They pierced my hands and my feet,” was used in reference to the nails of the cross which were fixed in His hands and feet. And after he was crucified, they cast lots upon his vesture, and they that crucified Him parted it among them. And that these things did happen you can ascertain the “Acts” of Pontius Pilate.” | “What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment fort heir 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 that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given.” |
| The Gospel of Thomas, around 140-200 AD | Talmud, 70-200 AD | Gnostic Gospel of Truth, 135-160 AD | Phlegon, born around 80 AD, fragments recorded by Origin | The Apocryphon of John, around 120-130 AD |
| “Jesus said, “It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the All. From Me did the All come forth, and unto Me did the All extend. Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find Me there.” | “On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, “He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward ad plead on his behalf.” But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!” | “For when they had seen him and had heard him, he granted them to taste him and to smell him and to touch the beloved Son. When he had appeared instructing them about the Father . . . . For he came by means of fleshly appearance”“Jesus was patient in accepting sufferings . . . since he knows that his death is life for many . . . he was nailed to a tree; he published the edict of the Father on the cross. . . . He draws himself down to death through life . . . eternal clothes him. Having stripped himself of the perishable rags, he put on imperishability, which no one can possibly take away from him.” | “Now Phlegon, in the thirteenth or fourteenth book, I think, of his Chronicles, not only ascribed to Jesus a knowledge of future events (although falling into confusion about some things which refer to Peter, as if they referred to Jesus), 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.” (comment by Origin) | “It happened [one day]when Jo[hn, the brother] of James,—who are the sons of Ze[bed]ee—went up and came to the temple, that a [Ph]arisee named Arimanius approached him and said to him, “[Where] is your master whom you followed?” And he [said] to him, “He has gone to the place from which he came.” The Pharisee said to him, “[This Nazarene] deceived you (pl.) with deception and filled [your ears with lies] and closed [your hearts and turned you] from the traditions [of your fathers].” |



Summary of Gary Habermas, The Historical Jesus (1996)