

# **Extra-Biblical Historical Evidence for the LIFE, DEATH, and RESURRECTION of JESUS**

## **A**NCIENT NON-CHRISTIAN SOURCES

**Cornelius Tacitus (55-120 AD), "the greatest historian" of ancient Rome:**

"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."

**Gaius Suetonius Tranquillas, chief secretary of Emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD):**

"Because the Jews of Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] expelled them from the city."

"After the great fire at Rome [during Nero's reign] ... Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief."

**Flavius Josephus (37-97 AD), court historian for Emperor Vespasian:**

"At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And 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." (Arabic translation)

Julius Africanus, writing around 221 AD, found a reference in the writings of **Thallus, who wrote a history of the Eastern Mediterranean around 52 AD**, which dealt with the darkness that covered the land during Jesus's crucifixion:

"Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away the darkness as an eclipse of the sun--unreasonably, as it seems to me." [A solar eclipse could not take place during a full moon, as was the case during Passover season.]

**Pliny the Younger, Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor around 112 AD:**

"[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." Pliny added that Christianity attracted persons of all societal ranks, all ages, both sexes, and from both the city and the country. Late in his letter to Emperor Trajan, Pliny refers to the teachings of Jesus and his followers as excessive and contagious superstition.

**Emperor Trajan, in reply to Pliny:**

"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 for 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."

**Emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD), in a letter to Minucius Fundanus, the Asian proconsul:**

"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 anyone would bring an accusation, that you should examine it." Hadrian further explained

that if Christians were found guilty they should be judged "according to the heinousness of the crime." If the accusers were only slandering the believers, then those who inaccurately made the charges were to be punished.

### **The Jewish Talmud, compiled between 70 and 200 AD:**

"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 practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover."

[Another early reference in the Talmud speaks of five of Jesus's disciples and recounts their standing before judges who make individual decisions about each one, deciding that they should be executed. However, no actual deaths are recorded.]

### **Lucian, a second century Greek satirist:**

"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." Lucian also reported that the Christians had "sacred writings" which were frequently read. When something affected them, "they spare no trouble, no expense."

**Mara Bar-Serapion, of Syria, writing between 70 and 200 AD from prison to motivate his son to emulate wise teachers of the past:**

"What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burying 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 in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise king die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given."