



Non-Christian Sources for Christianity

Ancient non-Christian sources that confirm Christianity, the life of Jesus, and the basic biblical narrative.

Non-Christian Historians:

Tacitus, Roman Historian, writes in 115 A.D.:

“Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, **called Christians by the populace. Christ, 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 Pilate, 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”

Suetonius, Roman Historian and secretary to Emperor Hadrian, writes ~125 A.D.:

“As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Christ, he expelled them from Rome.”

(Corroborates Acts 18:2b)

“Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a body of people addicted to a novel and mischievous superstition.”

Josephus, Jewish historian, in the *Antiquities of the Jews* 93 A.D. writes:

“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... 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.**” (Bold sections not in doubt)

Josephus also confirms James as the brother of Jesus and the life of John the Baptist:

“[H]e assembled the Sanhedrin of the 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.”

“Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God, and very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, who 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.”

Josephus in *Against Apion* (confirming exactly the Old Testament books of the Bible):

“For we have... twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life... [H]ow firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add any thing to them, to take any thing from them, or to make any change in them; but it is become natural to all Jews immediately, and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain Divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be willingly to die for them.”

{22 Volumes or Books in the Jewish ordering of the Old Testament – **The Law**: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy: 5 books; **The Prophets**: Joshua, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah-Lamentations, Ezekiel, The book of the twelve (Hosea to Malachi): 7 books; **The Writings**: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth-Judges, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles: 10 books}

Africanus quoting Thallus, a 1st century historian ~52 A.D., regarding the sudden darkness at Jesus' crucifixion: "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... [because] it was at the season of the paschal full moon that Jesus died."

Other Non-Christians Sources:

Pliny the Younger, writing around 112 A.D.:

"They [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 do 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."

Emperor Trajan responds to Pliny the Younger's letter on how to treat Christians:

"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."

Lucian. A second century Greek satirist writes ~170 A.D.:

"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."

Mara Bar Serapion, Syrian writing around the 2nd century A.D.:

"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 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."

Compiled from *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell & *The Historical Jesus – Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, Gary Habermas

Luke 1:1-4, "Many have taken to draw up an **account** of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were **eyewitnesses** and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have **carefully investigated** everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an **orderly account** for you...so that you may know the **certainty** of the things you have been taught."