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Published On : April 11, 2025

Last Updated : April 11, 2025

False Claim That Jesus Christ Is Not Mentioned Outside Of The Scriptures, Flavius Josephus: "The Antiquities of the Jews", Jesus Appears Before Pontius Pilate, James The Lord's Brother And Companions Are Stoned To Death, Publius Cornelius Tacitus And "The Annals", Nero And The Great Fire of Rome, Christians Blamed Torture And Martyred, Pliny The Younger's Letter To Emperor Trajan, Suetonius Tranquillus And "The Lives Of The Twelve Emperors", Emperor Claudius Kicks Jews Out Of Rome Due To Disturbances About Jesus, Emperor Nero Inflicts Punishment On The Christians, Closing Remarks, Suggesting Reading List

As some of you will know, there are certain nonbelievers who vehemently insist that Jesus Christ never actually existed, because -- at least they foolishly claim -- there supposedly exists no clear proof of His existence outside of the pages of the Holy Scriptures, meaning, of course, the Holy Bible. However, their proud boast is really in error, either out of pure ignorance, or because they knowingly and willingly have chosen to ignore the evidence for the same. So what evidence am I referring to? Please continue reading this article and you will quickly find out.

One of our primary sources of information is a literary work by first century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, called "The Antiquities of the Jews". For those of you who may not be familiar with this work, aside from the Holy Scriptures themselves, much of what we know and understand concerning the Creation of the world, the Old Testament history of the Jewish people, the two destructions of Jerusalem and the temple compound, and later events, is in fact derived from this important work, as well as from Josephus' other work entitled "The Wars of Jews", or "The Jewish Wars".

"The Antiquities of the Jews" was written by Josephus during the thirteenth year of the reign of Roman emperor Domitian. This places its creation in the year 94 AD. Written in Greek, this twenty-volume work is divided into two sections. In the

first ten volumes, Josephus follows the events of the Hebrew Bible beginning with the creation of Adam and Eve. In the following ten volumes, Josephus continues the history of the Jewish people beyond what we find in the Holy Bible, up to the time of the First Jewish-Roman War, which occurred from 66 AD to 73 AD. On a side note, I discuss this latter event in articles such as the following, which you'll find listed, with links, at the end of this same article:

Abomination of Desolation: Explained!

Jesus Christ's Return: Have We Been Deceived?

Vespasian, Titus and the Fall of Jerusalem

To continue then, in Book 18 Chapter 3 Paragraph 3 of "The Antiquities of the Jews", we find the following mention of Jesus Christ, and how He was crucified by Roman procurator Pontius Pilate, at the instigation of the Jewish religious leaders:

----- Begin Quote -----

"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 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 at 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."

----- End Quote -----

But this is not the only place where Josephus mentions Jesus. In Book 20 Chapter 9 Paragraph 1 of "The Antiquities of the Jews", Josephus also mentions the death of James, who was the biological brother of Jesus, as we see here:

----- Begin Quote -----

"But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders above all the rest of

the Jews, as we have already observed: when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority.] 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, [or, some of his companions.] And when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned;"

----- End Quote -----

Next we turn to the works of Roman historian and senator, Publius Cornelius Tacitus, who is the author of "The Annals", as well as "The Histories". Combined, these two works are a history of the Roman Empire, and describe the reigns of the following emperors:

Tiberius  
Caligula  
Claudius  
Nero  
Galba  
Otho  
Vitellius  
Vespasian  
Titus  
Domitian

In other words, these two works span the history of the Roman Empire from the death of Augustus in the year 14 AD, to the death of Domitian in the year 96 AD. In Book 15 Chapter 44, of "The Annals", we find the following description of some of the events which transpired following the conflagration. That is to say, the Great Fire of Rome which occurred on July 19, 64 AD. While some people suspect that Emperor Nero himself was responsible for the fire, as some of you may know, he in fact successfully blames the Christians for it instead, which began the first Roman persecution against the Christians.

What makes Publius Tacitus' account particularly believable is the fact that he had a very negative view of the Christian faith. That is why in the quotes below, he refers to it as a "mischievous superstition". Yet despite not being a Christian himself, Tacitus obviously believed that the story regarding Jesus was true, and thus he mentions it in his "The Annals". Consider now the following quote where Tacitus writes about

these events:

----- Begin Quote -----

"Such indeed were the precautions of human wisdom. The next thing was to seek means of propitiating the gods, and recourse was had to the Sibylline books, by the direction of which prayers were offered to Vulcanus, Ceres, and Proserpina. Juno, too, was entreated by the matrons, first, in the Capitol, then on the nearest part of the coast, whence water was procured to sprinkle the fane and image of the goddess. And there were sacred banquets and nightly vigils celebrated by married women.

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. 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 Judea, 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."

----- End Quote -----

Our next piece of historical evidence is found in a letter which Roman governor Pliny the Younger wrote to Emperor Trajan around 112 AD, in which he requested the emperor's advice concerning how to deal with the Christians, and in particular, how to punish them if they choose to not deny their Christian faith. Likewise included below is Emperor Trajan's short reply to Pliny, who was also known as Secundus:

----- Begin Quote -----

XCVII: TO THE EMPEROR TRAJAN

"It is my invariable rule, Sir, to refer to you in all matters where I feel doubtful; for who is more capable of removing my scruples, or informing my ignorance? Having never been present at any trials concerning those who profess Christianity, I am unacquainted not only with the nature of crimes, or the measure of their punishment, but how far it is proper to enter into an examination concerning them.

Whether, therefore, any difference is usually made with respect to ages, or no distinction is to be observed between the young and the adult; whether repentance entitles them to a pardon, or, if a man has been once a Christian, it avails nothing to desist from his error; whether the very profession of Christianity, unattended with any criminal act, or only the crimes themselves inherent in the profession are punishable; on all these points I am in great doubt.

In the meanwhile, the method I have observed towards those who have been brought before me as Christians is this: I asked them whether they were Christians; if they admitted it, I repeated the question twice, and threatened them with punishment; if they persisted, I ordered them to be at once punished: for I was persuaded, whatever the nature of their opinions might be, a contumacious and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved correction. There were others also brought before me possessed with the same infatuation, but being Roman citizens, I directed them to be sent to Rome.

But this crime spreading (as is usually the case) while it was actually under prosecution, several instances of the same nature occurred. An anonymous information was laid before me

containing a charge against several persons, who upon examination denied they were Christians, or had ever been so. They repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered religious rites with wine and incense before your statue (which for that purpose I had offered to be brought, together with those of the gods), and even reviled the name of Christ: whereas there is no forcing, it said, those who are really Christians into any of these compliances: I thought it proper, therefore, to discharge them.

Some among those who accused by a witness in person at first confessed themselves Christians, but immediately after denied it; the rest owned indeed that they had been of that number formerly, but had now (some above three, others more, and a few above twenty years ago) renounced that error. They all worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, uttering imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ. They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or this error, was, that they met on a stated day before it was light, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purpose of any wicked design, 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 eat in common a harmless meal.

From this custom, however, they desisted after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your commands, I forbade the meeting of any assembles. After receiving this account, I judged it so much the more necessary to endeavor to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to officiate in their religious rites: but all I could discover was evidence of an absurd and extravagant superstition. I deemed it expedient, to adjourn all further proceedings, in order to consult you.

For it appears to be a matter highly deserving your consideration, more especially as great numbers must be involved in the danger of these prosecutions, which have already extended, and are still likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes. In fact, this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread its infection among the neighbouring villages and country. Nevertheless, it still seems possible to restrain its progress. The temples, at least, which were once

almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and the sacred rites, after a long intermission, are again revived; while there is a general demand for the victims, which till lately found very few purchasers. From all this it is easy to conjecture what numbers might be reclaimed if a general pardon were granted to those who shall repent of their error."

#### XCVIII: TRAJAN TO PLINY

"You have adopted the right course, my dearest Secundus, in investigating the charges against the Christians who were brought before you. It is not possible to lay down any general rule for all such cases. Do not go out your way to look for them. If indeed they should be brought before you, and the crime is proved, they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that where the party denies he is a Christian, and shall make it evident that he is not, by invoking our gods, let him (notwithstanding any former suspicion) be pardoned upon his repentance. Anonymous information ought not to be received in any sort of prosecution. It is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and is quite foreign to the spirit of our age."

----- End Quote -----

The final source we are going to look at is "The Lives of the Twelve Emperors", which was written by the Roman historian C. Suetonius Tranquillus during the early second century around 120 AD. In this particular work, Suetonius covers the lives of the following Roman emperors:

Julius Caesar  
Augustus  
Tiberius  
Caligula  
Claudius  
Nero  
Galba  
Otho  
Vitellius  
Vespasian  
Titus  
Domitian

Following are the two sections of "The Lives of the Twelve Emperors" where Suetonius mentions Jesus Christ -- which he

mistakenly understood to be "Chrestus" instead of "Christus"  
-- and the Christians:

----- Begin Quote -----

Emperor Claudius Section XXV:

"He banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus."

Emperor Nero Section XVI:

"He likewise inflicted punishments on the Christians, a sort of people who held a new and impious superstition."

----- End Quote -----

Thus we see that while, indeed, there may not be very much extra-Biblical evidence, nevertheless, Jesus Christ is in fact mentioned outside of the pages of the Bible, despite opposition from the naysayers.

With these thoughts, I will bring this article to a close. It is my hope that you've found it informative and enlightening, and I pray that it has been a blessing in your life as well. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would really appreciate if you'd take the time to click or tap on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information and further study, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were either mentioned in this article, or which contain topics which are related to this article. All of these articles are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server. To read these articles, simply click or tap on any link you see below.

Abomination of Desolation: Explained!

Jesus Christ's Return: Have We Been Deceived?

The Family Life of Jesus Christ: Did Jesus Have Siblings?

Vespasian, Titus and the Fall of Jerusalem

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