

# 5

## JESUS, A MAN OF HISTORY

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Introduction

Secular Authorities on Jesus' Historicity

Jewish References to Jesus' Historicity

Christian Sources for Jesus' Historicity

Additional Historical Sources

Conclusion

### INTRODUCTION

In his essay "Why I Am Not a Christian," philosopher Bertrand Russell asserts, "Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him." (Russell, WIANC, 16)

One would be hard-pressed to find very many knowledgeable people today who would agree with Russell's radical claim. Many people have raised questions about Jesus Christ, and some have doubted that what the Bible says about Him is true, but the circle of those who claim He never lived at all or that if He did we can know nothing about Him is very small. Even the American

revolutionary Thomas Paine, who held Christianity in utter contempt, did not question the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth.

While Paine believed that the biblical statements about Jesus' deity were mythological, he still held that Jesus actually lived. Said Paine, "He [Jesus Christ] was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practiced was of the most benevolent kind; and though similar systems of morality had been preached by Confucius, and by some of the Greek philosophers, many years before; by the Quakers since; and by many good men in all ages, it has not been exceeded by any." (Paine, CWTP, 9)

Yet, once in a while, I run across someone like Russell who, in spite of the evidence, insists on denying that Jesus ever existed at all. One of these occasions happened during a debate sponsored by the associate students of a midwestern university. My opponent, a congressional candidate for the Progressive Labor Party (Marxist) in New York, said in her opening remarks: "Historians today have fairly well dismissed Jesus as being historical." I couldn't believe my ears. But I was

glad she said it, because she gave me the opportunity to show twenty-five hundred students that she had not done her history homework. If she had, she would have discovered what F. F. Bruce, Rylands professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, has said: "Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth,' but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories." (Bruce, NTDATR '72, 119)

Otto Betz is right: "No serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus." (Betz, WDWKAJ, 9)

The historicity of Jesus isn't just a matter of curious interest for the Christian. The Christian faith is grounded in history. New Testament scholar Donald Hagner notes:

True Christianity, the Christianity of the New Testament documents, is absolutely dependent on history. At the heart of New Testament faith is the assertion that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19 NASB). The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a real event in time and space, i.e., as historical realities, are the indispensable foundations of Christian faith. To my mind, then, Christianity is best defined as the recitation of, the celebration of, and the participation in God's acts in history, which as the New Testament writings emphasize have found their culmination in Jesus Christ. (Hagner, NTCI, 73, 74)

This chapter contains evidence from Christian sources, secular authorities, and Jewish references to the life of Christ.

### 1A. SECULAR AUTHORITIES ON JESUS' HISTORICITY

By *secular* I mean "pagan"—non-Christian, non-Jewish, and generally anti-Christian. Many ancient secular writers mention Jesus and the movement He birthed. The fact that they are usually antagonistic to Christianity makes them especially good witnesses, since they have nothing to gain by admitting the historicity of the events surrounding a religious leader and His following, which they disdain.

*No serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus.*

—OTTO BETZ

### 1B. Cornelius Tacitus

According to Habermas, "Cornelius Tacitus (c. A.D. 55–120) was a Roman historian who lived through the reigns of over a half dozen Roman emperors. He has been called the 'greatest historian' of ancient Rome, an individual generally acknowledged among scholars for his moral 'integrity and essential goodness.'" (Habermas, VHCELJ, 87) Tacitus's most acclaimed works are the *Annals* and the *Histories*. "The *Annals* cover the period from Augustus's death in A.D. 14 to that of Nero in A.D. 68, while the *Histories* begin after Nero's death and proceed to that of Domitian in A.D. 96." (Habermas, VHCELJ, 87)

Writing of the reign of Nero, Tacitus alludes to the death of Christ and to the existence of Christians at Rome. His misspelling of Christ—"Christus"—was a common error made by pagan writers. Says Tacitus:

But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome.

Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also. (Annals XV, 44)

Norman Anderson sees a possible allusion to Jesus' resurrection in this account: "It is distinctly possible, that, when he adds that 'A most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out,' he is bearing indirect and unconscious testimony to the conviction of the early church that the Christ who had been crucified had risen from the grave." (Anderson, JC, 20)

F. F. Bruce points out another interesting sidelight about this passage from Tacitus: "Pilate is not mentioned in any other pagan document which has come down to us. . . . And it may be regarded as an instance of the irony of history that the only surviving reference to him in a pagan writer mentions him because of the sentence of death which he passed upon Christ. For a moment Tacitus joins hands with the ancient Christian creed: ' . . . suffered under Pontius Pilate.'" (Bruce, JCOCNT, 23)

Cambridge lecturer Markus Bockmuehl notes that Tacitus's comments provide us with testimony by the leading Roman historian of his day, "independent confirmation that Jesus lived and was formally executed in Judaea in the reign of Tiberius and during Pontius Pilate's office as procurator (technically still a prefect, A.D. 26–36). That may not seem like much, but it is actually surprisingly useful in discounting two different theories which are still sometimes advanced: first, that Jesus of Nazareth never existed;

and secondly, that he did not die by the duly administered Roman death penalty." (Bockmuehl, TJMLM, 10, 11)

### 2B. Lucian of Samosata

A Greek satirist of the latter half of the second century, Lucian spoke scornfully of Christ and the Christians, never assuming or arguing that they were unreal. As Lucian said: "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, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11–13)

### 3B. Suetonius

Suetonius, another Roman historian, court official under Hadrian, and annalist of the Imperial House, stated in his *Life of Claudius* 25. 4, "As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [another spelling of Christus], he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome." Luke refers to this event in Acts 18:2, which took place in A.D. 49.

In another work Suetonius wrote about the fire that swept through Rome in A.D. 64 under the reign of Nero. Suetonius recounts that "Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition." (*Lives of the Caesars*, 26. 2)

Assuming Jesus was crucified in the early thirties, Suetonius—no friend of Christianity—places Christians in the imperial city less than twenty years later, and he reports that they were suffering and dying for their conviction that Jesus Christ had really lived, died, and risen from the dead.

#### 4B. Pliny the Younger

Governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor (A.D. 112), Pliny was writing the emperor Trajan to seek counsel as to how to treat the Christians. He explained that he had been killing both men and women, boys and girls. There were so many being put to death that he wondered if he should continue killing anyone who was discovered to be a Christian, or if he should kill only certain ones. He explained that he had made the Christians bow down to the statues of Trajan. Pliny goes on to say that he also “made them curse Christ, which a genuine Christian cannot be induced to do.” In the same letter he says of

The Gospel account of the darkness which fell upon the land during Christ's crucifixion was well known and required a naturalistic explanation from non-Christians. Thallus did not doubt that Jesus had been crucified and that an unusual event had occurred in nature that required an explanation. What occupied his mind was coming up with a different interpretation. The basic facts were not called into question.

—F. F. BRUCE

the people being tried: “They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to do any wicked

deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, adultery, never to falsify their word, not to deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up.” (Epistles X, 96)

#### 5B. Thallus

One of the first secular writers who mentions Christ is Thallus. Dated perhaps around A.D. 52, Thallus “wrote a history of the Eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War to his own time.” (Habermas, VHCELJ, 93) Unfortunately, his writing now exists only in fragments that have been cited by other writers. One such writer is Julius Africanus, a Christian who penned his work around A.D. 221. One very interesting passage relates to a comment made by Thallus about the darkness that enveloped the land during the late afternoon hours when Jesus died on the cross. As Africanus reports: “Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun—unreasonably, as it seems to me (unreasonably, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died).” (Julius Africanus, *Chronography*, 18.1)

This reference shows that the Gospel account of the darkness that fell upon the land during Christ's crucifixion was well known and required a naturalistic explanation from non-Christians. Thallus did not doubt that Jesus had been crucified and that an unusual event had occurred in nature that required an explanation. What occupied his mind was the task of coming up with a different interpretation. The basic facts were not called into question. (Bruce, NTDATR, 113)

#### 6B. Phlegon

Another secular authority, Phlegon, wrote a history called *Chronicles*. While this work

has been lost, Julius Africanus preserved a small fragment of it in his writing. Like Thallus, Phlegon confirms that darkness came upon the earth at Jesus' crucifixion, and he, too, explains it as the result of a solar eclipse: "During the time of Tiberius Caesar an eclipse of the sun occurred during the full moon." (Africanus, *Chronography*, 18. 1)

Aside from Africanus, Phlegon's reference to this event is also mentioned by the third-century Christian apologist Origen (*Contra Celsum*, 2. 14, 33, 59) and the sixth-century writer Philopon (*De. opif. mund.* II 21). (McDowell/Wilson, HWAU, 36)

### 7B. Mara Bar-Serapion

Some time after A.D. 70, Mara Bar-Serapion, a Syrian and probably Stoic philosopher, wrote a letter from prison to his son, encouraging him to pursue wisdom. In his letter he compares Jesus to the philosophers Socrates and Pythagoras. He writes:

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 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. (Bruce, NTDATR, 114)

This father was certainly not a Christian, since he puts Jesus on equal footing with Socrates and Protagoras; he has Jesus living

on in His teaching rather than in His resurrection, and in another place he indicates a belief in polytheism. Nonetheless, his references to Christ indicate that he did not question whether Jesus really lived or not.

### 2A. JEWISH REFERENCES TO JESUS' HISTORICITY

Scholars have found many reliable references to Jesus, as well as unreliable ones or ones that were once thought to refer to Jesus but do not. (McDowell/Wilson, HWAU, 55–70) I have selected a few of the more important reliable references to focus on here. You can

Similar to the secular references, the ones found in ancient Jewish sources are unfriendly toward Christianity's founder, followers, and beliefs. For this reason their attestation to events surrounding Jesus' life are valuable testimony to the historicity of these events.

find more citations in chapter 3 of my book *He Walked Among Us: Evidence for the Historical Jesus*.

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### 1B. The Crucifixion

In the Babylonian Talmud we read: "It has been taught: On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu. And an announcer went out, in front of him, for forty days (saying): 'He is going to be stoned, because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who knows anything in his favor, let

him come and plead in his behalf? But, not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the eve of Passover” (Sanhedrin 43a; cf. t. Sanh. 10:11; y. Sanh. 7:12; Tg. Esther 7:9). Another version of this text says, “Yeshu the Nazarene.”

“Yeshu” translates through Greek to English as “Jesus,” and the reference to him being a Nazarene makes the link to Jesus Christ even stronger.

Moreover, the word “hanged” is another way of referring to crucifixion (see Luke 23:39; Gal. 3:13). “The Talmud,” writes the Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner, “speaks of hanging in place of crucifixion, since this horrible Roman form of death was only known to Jewish scholars from Roman trials, and not from the Jewish legal system. Even Paul the Apostle (Gal. iii. 13) expounds the passage ‘for a curse of God is that which is hanged’ (Deut. xxi. 23) as applicable to Jesus.” (Klausner, JN, 28)

Also, the reference that this crucifixion occurred “on the eve of Passover” agrees with John 19:14 (phrase also found in b. Sanh. 67a; y. Sanh. 7:16).

Therefore, this text clearly affirms the historicity of Jesus and His death. It also affirms that the Jewish authorities were involved in the sentencing, but it tries to justify their actions. In a backhanded way it even attests to Jesus’ miracles (see also b. Sanh. 107b; t. Sabb. 11:15; b. Sabb. 104b.; b. Sota 47a), but it attempts to explain them away as the work of a sorcerer or magician, a response mentioned by the Gospel writers (Mark 3:22; Matt. 9:34; 12:24). (Klausner, JN, 23)

Following this Jewish text appears a comment by the late third-century Ammora, ‘Ulla, which states: “Would you believe that any defence would have been so zealously sought for him? He was a deceiver, and the All-merciful says: ‘You shall not spare him, neither shall you conceal him.’ It was different with Jesus, for he

was near to the kingship.” This phrase—“near to the kingship”—may refer to Jesus’ genealogical descent from Israel’s King David, or it may denote Pilate’s washing his hands before turning Jesus over to scourging and crucifixion.

## 2A. Jesus and His Disciples

In a later Talmudic passage on Jesus’ crucifixion comes a passage that asserts that “Yeshu had five disciples—Mattai, Nakkai, Netzer, Buni, and Todah.” (b. Sanh. 107b). While “Mattai” may be a reference to Matthew, no one is sure that the other names can be identified with any of the other disciples named in the Gospel accounts. The claim that Jesus had five disciples “could be explained by the fact that other teachers in the Talmud, viz. Yohanan ben Zakkai and Akiba, are also described as having five disciples or students.” (McDowell/Wilson, HWAU, 65) At any rate, one thing is sure: this text makes it clear that the Jewish tradition accepts the fact that the rabbi Jesus did have followers.

## 3B. Virgin Born?

In the Talmud, the titles “Ben Pandera (or ‘Ben Pantere’)” and “Yeshu ben Pandera” are used of Jesus. Many scholars say *pandera* is a play on words, a travesty on the Greek word for virgin, which is *parthenos*. The Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner says, “The Jews constantly heard that the Christians (the majority of whom spoke Greek from the earliest times) called Jesus by the name ‘Son of the Virgin,’ . . . and so, in mockery, they called him *Ben ha-Pantera*, i.e., ‘son of the leopard.’” (Klausner, JN, 23)

In another passage, the Babylonian Talmud states, “R. Shimeon ben Azzai said [concerning Jesus]: ‘I found a genealogical roll in Jerusalem wherein was recorded, Such-an-one is a bastard of an adulteress’”

(b. Yebamoth 49a; m. Yebam. 4:13). In yet another passage we find, “His mother was Miriam, a women’s hairdresser. As they say . . . ‘this one strayed from her husband’” (b. Sabb. 104b). In still another passage we are told that Mary, “who was the descendant of princes and governors, played the harlot with carpenters” (b. Sanh. 106a). This passage is, of course, an attempted explanation for the Christian confession of Jesus’ virgin birth (see also b. Sabb. 104b). “Princes and governors” may refer to some of the names in Luke’s genealogy, which some of the church fathers assigned as Mary’s ancestors back to King David (cf. “Jesus . . . was near to kingship” in b. Sanh. 43a). The allusion to “carpenters” is an obvious reference to Joseph (see also b. Sabb. 104b).

The argument goes like this: If Joseph was not Jesus’ father, then Mary was impregnated by another man; therefore she is an adulteress and Jesus was an illegitimate son. The New Testament records that the scribes and Pharisees indirectly leveled this charge at Jesus (John 8:41).

Although the New Testament affirms that this charge is baseless, the accusation does confirm that the Christian account of Jesus’ miraculous birth was an early claim of the church that required a response. And notice, the response did not include a denial of Jesus’ existence—only a different interpretation of His conception. As Klausner observes, “Current editions of the *Mishnah* add: ‘To support the words of R. Yehoshua’ (who, in the same *Mishnah*, says: What is a bastard? Everyone whose parents are liable to death by the Beth Din). That Jesus is here referred to seems to be beyond doubt.” (Klausner, JN, 35)

#### 4B. The Testimonium of Josephus

“Josephus ben Mattathias (born 37/38 A.D., died after 100 A.D.),” writes professor John P.

Meier, was by turns a Jewish aristocrat, a priestly politician, a not-so-eager commander of rebel troops in Galilee during the First Jewish Revolt against Rome (66–73 A.D.), a tricky turncoat, a Jewish historian in the pay of the Flavian emperors, and a supposed Pharisee. Captured by Vespasian in 67, he served the Romans as mediator and interpreter during the rest of the revolt. Brought to Rome, he composed there two great works: *The Jewish War*, written in the early 70s, and the much longer *Jewish Antiquities*, finished about 93, 94. (Meier, BR, 20, 22)

Flavius Josephus became part of the emperor’s inner circle. In fact, he was given the emperor’s name, Flavius, as his Roman name. Josephus is his Jewish name.

In his *Jewish Antiquities*, a passage occurs that has created heated debate among scholars. This is how it reads:

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, at the suggestion of the principal men among 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 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. (*Antiquities*, XVIII, 33, italics added)

I won’t go into the ins and outs of the positions scholars have taken on this passage, which has come to be known as the Testimonium. For a more detailed discussion of the debate, see my book *He Walked Among Us*, pages 37–45. Instead let me just say here that the passage has raised furor because Josephus, a non-Christian Jew, makes statements about Jesus that an orthodox Jew could not

affirm—for instance, he refers to Jesus as the Christ (Messiah) and claims that He rose from the dead as the Hebrew prophets had foretold.

After assessing the evidence for myself, I find myself agreeing with those scholars who see that, while some Christian additions—notably the phrases italicized above—have been made to the text that are clearly foreign to it, the Testimonium contains a good deal of truth that Josephus could have easily affirmed. As Meier states:

Read the Testimonium without the italicized passages and you will see that the flow of thought is clear. Josephus calls Jesus by the generic title “wise man” (*sophos an'r*, perhaps the Hebrew *khakham*). Josephus then proceeds to “unpack” that generic designation (wise man) with two of its main components in the Greco-Roman world: miracle working and effective teaching. This double display of “wisdom” wins Jesus a large following among both Jews and gentiles, and presumably—though no explicit reason is given—it is this huge success that moves the leading men to accuse Jesus before Pilate. Despite Jesus’ shameful death on the cross, his earlier adherents do not give up their loyalty to him, and so (note that the transition is much better without the reference to the resurrection in the deleted passage) the tribe of Christians has not yet died out. (Meier, BR, 23)

Following this Testimonium a couple of sections later, Josephus refers to James the brother of Jesus. In *Antiquities* XX, 9. 1 he describes the actions of the high priest Ananus:

But the younger Ananus who, as we said, received the high priesthood, was of a bold disposition and exceptionally daring; he followed the party of the Sadducees, who are severe in judgment above all the Jews, as we have already shown. As therefore Ananus was of such a disposition, he thought he had now

a good opportunity, as Festus was now dead, and Albinus was still on the road; so he assembled a council of judges, and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, whose name was James, together with some others, and having accused them as law-breakers, he delivered them over to be stoned. (Bruce, NTDATR, 107)

Louis Feldman, professor of classics at Yeshiva University and translator for the Loeb edition of *Antiquities*, states, “Few have doubted the genuineness of this passage.” (Josephus, *Antiquities*, Loeb, 496) The passing reference to Jesus as the “so-called Christ” does not make sense unless Josephus has provided a longer discussion about Jesus earlier in his *Antiquities*. This is yet another indication that the earlier and more extensive treatment in *Antiquities* is genuine, excluding the obvious Christian interpolations.

So even the great first-century Jewish historian Josephus, writing just a little more than half a century after Jesus’ life and crucifixion, attests to the truth that Jesus was not a figment of the church’s imagination but a real historical figure.

### 3A. CHRISTIAN SOURCES FOR JESUS’ HISTORICITY

#### 1B. Pre-New Testament Creedal Confessions

Early Christians often paid with their lives or suffered great persecution for their reports that Jesus had lived, died, risen from the dead, and appeared to many after His resurrection. These early Christians had nothing to gain and everything to lose for their testimony that these things had actually happened. For this reason, their accounts are highly significant historical sources.

Recorded in the pages of the New Testament, biblical scholars have identified what they believe are at least portions of early Christian creedal confessions that were for-



mulated and passed on verbally years before they were recorded in the books of the New Testament. As apologist Gary Habermas explains, these affirmations “preserve some of the earliest reports concerning Jesus from about 30–50 A.D. Therefore, in a real sense, the creeds preserve pre-New Testament material, and are our earliest sources for the life of Jesus.” (Habermas, VHCELJ, 119)

In his book *The Verdict of History*, Habermas focuses on several of the creedal affirmations embedded in the New Testament:

- Luke 24:34: “‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’”  
Referring to Joachim Jeremias and his essay “Easter: The Earliest Tradition and the Earliest Interpretation,” Habermas writes, “Jeremias holds that Luke’s brief mention of Jesus’ resurrection appearance to Peter in Luke 24:34 is of even greater antiquity than is 1 Cor. 15:5, which would make this an extremely early witness to these [post-resurrection] appearances.” (Habermas, VHCELJ, 122)
- Romans 1:3, 4: “His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” States Habermas:

That Romans 1:3, 4 is an ancient pre-Pauline creed is shown by the parallelism of the clauses, which is especially seen in the contrast between Jesus as both the son of David and the Son of God. The same Jesus who was born in space and time was raised from the dead. This creed proclaims that Jesus was shown to be the Son of God, Christ (or Messiah) and Lord and vindicated as such by his resurrection from the dead. [Oscar] Cullman adds that redemption and Jesus’ final exaltation were also included in this significant creedal affirmation. Such an encompassing statement,

including three major Christological titles and implying some of the actions of Jesus, reveals not only one of the earliest formulations of Christ’s nature, but also conveys an apologetic motif in relating all of this theology to the vindication provided by Jesus’ resurrection (cf. Acts 2:22f). (Habermas, VHCELJ, 123)

- Romans 4:24, 25: “who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”  
Even the biblical critic Rudolf Bultmann believes this statement “evidently existed before Paul and had been handed down to him” as part of the earliest apostolic Christian tradition. (Bultmann, TNT, 82)
- Romans 10:9, 10: “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”  
In the early church, this confession of faith was likely said by believers at their baptism. The confession connects belief in the historical reality of Jesus’ resurrection with confessing him as Lord and securing one’s salvation. (Habermas, VHCELJ, 123; Martin, WEC, 108; Martin, DPHL, 192)
- 1 Corinthians 11:23–26: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; this do, as often as you drink it,

in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."

Habermas says that

Paul's account in 1 Cor. 11:23ff. presents a fixed tradition that is probably based on material independent of the sources for the synoptic Gospels. Jeremias notes that Paul's words "received" and "delivered" are not Paul's typical terms, but "represent the rabbinical technical terms" for passing on tradition. Additionally, there are other non-Pauline phrases such as "he was betrayed," "when he had given thanks" and "my body" (11:23, 24), which are further indications of the early nature of this report. In fact, Jeremias asserts that [t]his material was formulated "in the very earliest period; at any rate before Paul . . . a pre-Pauline formula." Paul is actually pointing out "that the chain of tradition goes back unbroken to Jesus himself." (Habermas, VHCELJ, 121)

- 1 Corinthians 15:3–5: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve."

Bible scholar Ralph Martin cites several "telltale marks" that "stamp" this passage "as a creedal formula" that predates Paul's writings:

The four-fold "that" introduces each member of the creed (in verses 3, 4, 5). The vocabulary is unusual, containing some rare terms and expressions that Paul never employs again. The preface to the section informs us that Paul "received" what follows in his next sentences as part of the instruction, no doubt, he had known in the early days of his discipleship, possibly through his contacts with the Church

at Jerusalem and Antioch and Damascus. And now in turn, he transmits (using the same technical expressions as in 1 Corinthians xi, 23) to the Corinthian Church what he has received as a sacred tradition. The matter of the suggested background of this passage and its pre-Pauline and creedal origin is clinched by verse 11 of the chapter, where Paul remarks that he has stated what was the common proclamation of the Apostles: "Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed."

There are certain indications in the text itself that 1 Corinthians xv, 3 ff. is a translation into Greek of a piece of Aramaic. The most obvious points are that Peter's name is given in its Semitic form as Cephas, and that there is a double reference to the Old Testament Scriptures. Professor Jeremias argues, with some cogency, that these verses arose in a Jewish-Christian *milieu*; and more recently still a Scandinavian scholar has submitted that this piece of Christian creed emanated from the earliest Palestinian Church. It represents, he says, "a logos (i.e. statement of belief) fixed by the college of Apostles in Jerusalem." . . . If this argument is sound, it is clear that the passage belongs to the very earliest days of the Church and is, as E. Meyer phrased it, "the oldest document of the Christian Church in existence." It goes back to the teaching of the Hebrew-Christian fellowship shortly after the death of Christ, and may well embody the fruit of the post-Resurrection instruction and reflection contained in Luke xxiv, 25–27, 44–47. (Martin, WEC, 57–59)

- Philippians 2:6–11: "Being in the form of God, [He] did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him the name

which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess

It is clear that these pre-New Testament creeds provide the earliest testimony to the church's conviction that Jesus, the sinless God-man, actually lived, died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven for the salvation of anyone who would confess Him as Lord and truly believe that God resurrected Him.

that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Scholars have identified this text as a pre-Pauline hymn that professes belief in a real Jesus who was both human and divine. (Habermas, VHCELJ, 120; Martin, WEC, 49, 50)

- 1 Timothy 3:16: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory."

This is another Christological hymn that predates Paul's writings and was probably sung in worship. (Martin, WEC, 48, 49)

- 1 Timothy 6:13: "Christ Jesus, who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate."

According to Habermas, this passage is "also an early tradition, and perhaps even a part of a more extensive oral Christian confession of faith." Habermas also notes that scholar Vernon Neufeld "points out that Jesus' testimony was probably his affirmative answer to Pilate's question as to whether he

was the King of the Jews (see Mark 15:2)." (Habermas, VHCELJ, 122)

- 2 Timothy 2:8: "Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel."

"Here Jesus' birth in the lineage of David is contrasted with his resurrection from the dead, again showing the early Christian interest in linking Jesus to history." (Habermas, VHCELJ, 120)

- 1 Peter 3:18: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit."

This ancient piece of tradition connects Jesus' historical death on the cross as the sinless Messiah with His historical resurrection from the dead as the means of bringing sinners to God. (Habermas, VHCELJ, 122)

- 1 John 4:2: "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh."

This is a concise, clear, pre-Johannine affirmation that Jesus the Christ was a historical flesh-and-blood person. (Habermas, VHCELJ, 120)

Reflecting upon these ancient confessions, Habermas notes that they make at least seventeen historical claims about Jesus from his earthly birth to his heavenly ascension and glorification:

Although these early creeds are interested in theological elements of Christology, to be sure, they are also early reports of events in the life of Jesus. We are told (1) that Jesus was really born in human flesh (Phil. 2:6; 1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 4:2) (2) of the lineage and family of David (Rom. 1:3, 4; 2 Tim. 2:8). We find (3) an implication of his baptism (Rom. 10:9) and (4) that his word was preached, (5) resulting in persons believing his message (1 Tim. 3:16).

In addition to the events of his life, we are further informed that (6) Jesus attended a dinner (7) on the evening of his betrayal. (8) He gave thanks before the meal and (9) shared

both bread and drink, (10) which, he declared, represented his imminent atoning sacrifice for sin (1 Cor. 11:23ff.). (11) Later, Jesus stood before Pilate and made a good confession, (12) which very possibly concerned his identity as the King of the Jews (1 Tim. 6:13). (13) Afterward, Jesus was killed for mankind's sins (1 Pet. 3:18; Rom. 4:25; 1 Tim. 2:6), (14) in spite of his righteous life (1 Pet. 3:18). (15) After his death he was resurrected (Luke 24:34; 2 Tim. 2:8). (16) It was asserted that this event validated Jesus' person and message (Rom. 1:3, 4; 10:9, 10). (17) After his resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven and was glorified and exalted (1 Tim. 3:16; Phil. 2:6ff.). (Habermas, VHCELJ, 121, 123, 124)

It is clear that these pre-New Testament creeds provide the earliest testimony to the church's conviction that Jesus, the sinless God-man, actually lived, died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven for the salvation of anyone who would confess Him as Lord and truly believe that God resurrected Him. Furthermore, as noted above, at least some of these creeds can be traced back to Jesus' actual words and the testimony of the apostles themselves. So these creeds are not

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament proclaim, verify, and often assume the historicity of Jesus Christ. Since I have already shown that these books are historically reliable, we can see that their testimony about Jesus provides significant, irrefutable evidence that He really lived and, in fact, still does.

only early but are also based on eyewitness accounts of Jesus' earthly life.

## 2B. The New Testament Documents

The twenty-seven books of the New Testament proclaim, verify, and often assume the

historicity of Jesus Christ. Since I have already shown that these books are historically reliable, we can see that their testimony about Jesus provides significant, irrefutable evidence that He really lived and, in fact, still does.

No wonder historian and legal scholar John Montgomery unequivocally states that the historian can know "first and foremost, that the New Testament documents can be relied upon to give an accurate portrait of Him [Jesus]. And he knows that this portrait cannot be rationalized away by wishful thinking, philosophical presuppositionalism, or literary maneuvering." (Montgomery, HC, 40)

## 3B. Post-Apostolic Writers

Following the apostles, the next extensive Christian source for the historical nature of Jesus is found in the writings of those people who followed on the heels of the apostles. Some of these writers were church leaders, and others were teachers and apologists. All of them believed Jesus was the incarnate Son of God as revealed in the Scriptures and taught by the apostles.

Below is a good sampling from their writings of the more significant references to the historicity of Jesus Christ.

### 1C. Clement of Rome

Clement was bishop of the church at Rome toward the end of the first century. He wrote a letter called *Corinthians* to help settle a dispute in the church at Corinth between the church's leaders and laity. In this work, Clement said:

The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed

order. Having therefore received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance

Jesus Christ, who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him, who in the like fashion will so raise us also who believe on Him.

—IGNATIUS

of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come. So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe. (*Corinthians*, 42)

Among other things, this passage affirms that the gospel message came from the historical Jesus who had been sent by God, and that His message was authenticated by His actual resurrection from the dead.

### 2C. Ignatius

While on his way to execution in Rome, Ignatius, who was the bishop of Antioch, wrote seven letters—six to different churches and one to his friend Polycarp. Three references Ignatius makes to the Historical Jesus are especially pertinent and characteristic of his other statements:

- “Jesus Christ who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was

truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him, who in the like fashion will so raise us also who believe on Him.” (*Trallians*, 9)

- “He is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, but Son of God by the Divine will and power, truly born of a virgin and baptized by John that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him, truly nailed up in the flesh for our sakes under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch (of which fruit are we—that is, of His most blessed passion); that He might set up an ensign unto all ages through His resurrection.” (*Smyrneans*, 1)
- “Be ye fully persuaded concerning the birth and the passion and the resurrection, which took place in the time of the governorship of Pontius Pilate; for these things were truly and certainly done by Jesus Christ our hope.” (*Magnesians*, 11)

Ignatius, whom Christian tradition identifies as a disciple of Peter, Paul, and John, was obviously convinced that Jesus really lived and that He was all the apostles said He was. (McDowell/Wilson, HWAU, 79)

### 3C. Quadratus

A disciple of the apostles and the bishop of the church at Athens, Quadratus was one of the earliest apologists. Church historian Eusebius has preserved the only lines remaining of Quadratus’s defense of the faith to the Roman Emperor Hadrian (c. A.D. 125): “The deeds of our Saviour were always before you, for they were true miracles; those that were healed, those that were raised from the dead, who were seen, not only when

healed and when raised, but were always present. They remained living a long time, not only whilst our Lord was on earth, but likewise when he had left the earth. So that some of them have also lived to our own times.” (Eusebius, IV: III)

Habermas observes that Quadratus affirms the actual existence of Jesus through the historicity of His miracles: “(1) The facticity of Jesus’ miracles could be checked by interested persons, since they were done publicly. With regard to the actual types of miracles, (2) some were healed and (3) some were raised from the dead. (4) There were eyewitnesses of these miracles at the time they occurred. (5) Many of those healed or raised were still alive when Jesus ‘left the earth’ and some were reportedly still alive in Quadratus’ own time.” (Habermas, VHCELJ, 144)

#### 4C. The Epistle of Barnabas

The authorship of this letter is unknown. The name Barnabas does not occur in the letter, and scholars deny that the New Testament figure called Barnabas penned it. “Dates for this writing have varied widely,” Habermas remarks, “often from the late first century to the mid-second century. A commonly accepted date is 130–138 A.D.” (Habermas, VHCELJ, 145) This epistle confirms many of the events claimed as facts in the sources already cited. In section 5 of the letter, we read:

He Himself endured that He might destroy and show forth the resurrection of the dead, for that He must needs be manifested in the flesh; that at the same time He might redeem the promise made to the fathers, and by preparing the new people for Himself might show, while He was on earth, that having brought about the resurrection He will Himself exercise judgment. Yea and further, He preached teaching Israel and performing so many wonders and miracles, and He loved him [Israel] exceedingly. And when He chose

His own apostles who were to proclaim His Gospel, who, that He might show that He came not to call the righteous but sinners, were sinners above every sin, then He manifested Himself to be the Son of God.” (McDowell/Wilson, HWAU, 82, 83)

In section 7, the author adds, “But moreover when crucified He [Jesus] had vinegar and gall given Him to drink.” (McDowell/Wilson, HWAU, 83)

#### 5C. Aristides

Aristides was a second-century Christian apologist and philosopher of Athens. His work was lost until the late nineteenth century when it was discovered in three separate versions—Armenian, Syriac, and Greek. He addressed his defense of Christianity to the Roman Emperor Antonius Pius, who reigned between A.D. 138 and A.D. 161. In part of this treatise, Aristides described Jesus Christ as:

the Son of the most high God, revealed by the Holy Spirit, descended from heaven, born of a Hebrew Virgin. His flesh he received from the Virgin, and he revealed himself in the human nature as the Son of God. In his goodness which brought the glad tidings, he has won the whole world by his life-giving preaching . . . He selected twelve apostles and taught the

Accordingly, after He was crucified, even all His acquaintances forsook Him, having denied Him; and afterwards, when He had risen from the dead and appeared to them, and had taught them to read the prophecies in which all these things were foretold as coming to pass, and when they had seen Him ascending into heaven, and had believed, and had received power sent thence by Him upon them, and went to every race of men, they taught these things, and were called apostles.

—JUSTIN MARTYR

whole world by his mediatorial, light-giving truth. And he was crucified, being pierced with nails by the Jews; and he rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. He sent the apostles into all the world and instructed all by divine miracles full of wisdom. Their preaching bears blossoms and fruits to this day, and calls the whole world to illumination. (Carey, "Aristides," NIDCC, 68)

### 6C. Justin Martyr

"The consensus of scholarly opinion is that Justin [Martyr] is one of the greatest of the early Christian apologists." (Bush, CRCA, 1) He was born around A.D. 100 and was scourged and beheaded for his faith around 167. He was a learned man, well versed in the leading philosophies of his day, including Stoicism, Aristotelianism, Pythagoreanism, and Platonism. (Carey, "Justin Martyr," NIDCC, 558) After his conversion to Christ (c. 132), "Justin became a professor of philosophical Christianity in his own private school in Rome. Since he was a layman, he probably operated the school in his home. He also seems to have traveled considerably throughout the Roman Empire, spending his time in a ministry of teaching and evangelism." (Bush, CRCA, 3)

In his many writings, Justin builds his case for the faith upon the New Testament writings and his independent verification of many of the events they record. Here are some selections from his works concerning the accuracy of the accounts about Jesus Christ:

- "Now there is a village in the land of the Jews, thirty-five stadia from Jerusalem, in which Jesus Christ was born, as you can ascertain also from the registers of the taxing made under Cyrenius, your first procurator in Judea." (*First Apology*, 34)
- "For at the time of His birth, Magi who came from Arabia worshipped Him, coming first to Herod, who then was sovereign in your land." (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 77)

- "For when they crucified Him, driving in the nails, they pierced His hands and feet; and those who crucified Him parted His garments among themselves, each casting lots for what he chose to have, and receiving according to the decision of the lot." (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 97)
- "Accordingly, after He was crucified, even all His acquaintances forsook Him, having denied Him; and afterwards, when He had risen from the dead and appeared to them, and had taught them to read the prophecies in which all these things were foretold as coming to pass, and when they had seen Him ascending into heaven, and had believed, and had received power sent thence by Him upon them, and went to every race of men, they taught these things, and were called apostles." (*First Apology*, 50)
- "Christ said amongst you [i.e., the Jews] that He would give the sign of Jonah, exhorting you to repent of your wicked deeds at least after He rose again from the dead . . . yet you not only have not repented, after you learned that He rose from the dead, but, as I said before, you have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified, but His disciples stole him by night from the tomb, where He was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that He has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven." (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 108)

### 7C. Hegesippus

"Jerome . . . says that Hegesippus lived near the time of the apostles. Eusebius draws the conclusion that Hegesippus was a Jew and says his work comprised five books of

‘Memoirs.’” (Williams, NIDCC, 457) Only fragments of these Memoirs have survived in the work of Eusebius. What they show is that Hegesippus traveled extensively and was “intent on determining if the true story [about Jesus] had been passed from the apostles down through their successors.” He found it had, even in the troubled church at Corinth. As Eusebius quotes him: “The Corinthian church continued in the true doctrine until Primus became bishop. I mixed with them on my voyage to Rome and spent several days with the Corinthians, during which we were refreshed with the true doctrine. On arrival at Rome I pieced together the succession down to Anicetus, whose deacon was Eleutherus, Anicetus being succeeded by Soter and he by Eleutherus. In every line of bishops and in every city things accord with the preaching of the Law, the Prophets, and the Lord.” (Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 9. 22. 2)

The essential facts about Jesus and His teaching were passed down by the apostles and carefully preserved and faithfully passed on by the churches generation after generation from one location to another. The verdict is in: “The early church writers, both by their lives and words, certified that the historical details of Jesus’ life, as present in the gospel accounts, are correct and may be trusted.” (McDowell/Wilson, HWAU, 87)

#### 4A. ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL SOURCES FOR CHRISTIANITY

There are additional sources that refer to Christ and Christianity. The following are some additional secular sources that warrant further study:

**1B. Trajan**, Roman emperor (Pliny the Younger, *Epistles* 10:97). This is a letter from the emperor to Pliny, telling him not to pun-

ish those Christians who are forced to retract their beliefs by the Romans. He tells Pliny that anonymous information about the Christians is not to be accepted by the Roman officials.

**2B. Macrobius**, *Saturnalia*, lib. 2, ch. 4. Pascal (*Pensees*) mentions this quote of Augustus Caesar as an attestation of the slaughter of the babes of Bethlehem.

**3B. Hadrian**, Roman emperor (Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, chs. 68, 69). Justin quotes Hadrian’s letter to Minucius Fundanus, proconsul of Asia Minor. The letter deals with the accusations of the pagans against the Christians.

**4B. Antoninus Pius**, Roman emperor (Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, ch. 70). Justin (or one of his disciples) quotes Antoninus’s letter to the general assembly of Asia Minor. The letter basically says that the officials in Asia Minor are getting too upset at the Christians in their province, and that no changes will be made in Antoninus’s method of dealing with the Christians there.

**5B. Marcus Aurelius**, Roman emperor (Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, ch. 71). This letter from the emperor to the Roman senate was added to the manuscript by one of Justin’s disciples. The emperor describes Christians in fighting action in the Roman army.

**6B. Juvenal**, *Satires*, 1, lines 147–157. Juvenal makes a veiled mention of the tortures of Christians by Nero in Rome.

**7B. Seneca**, *Epistulae Morales*, Epistle 14, “On the Reasons for Withdrawing from the World,” par. 2. Seneca, like Juvenal, describes the cruelties of Nero dealt upon the Christians.



**8B. Hierocles** (Eusebius, *The Treatise of Eusebius*, ch. 2). This quote by Eusebius preserves some of the text of the lost book of Hierocles, *Philalethes*, or *Lover of Truth*. In this quote, Hierocles condemns Peter and Paul as sorcerers.

**9B.** In discussing Christ as a man of history, one of the most important collections of material is a volume published in Cambridge in 1923 by C. R. Haines entitled *Heathen Contact with Christianity During Its First Century and a Half*. The subtitle reads as follows: "Being all References to Christianity Recorded in Pagan Writings During That Period."

### CONCLUSION

Howard Clark Kee, professor emeritus at Boston University, makes the following conclusions from the sources outside of the New Testament: "The result of the examination of the sources outside the New Testament that bear directly or indirectly on our knowledge of Jesus is to confirm his historical existence, his unusual powers, the devotion of his followers, the continued existence of the movement after his death at the hands of the Roman governor in Jerusalem, and the penetration of Christianity into the upper strata of society in Rome itself by the later first century." (Kee, WCKAJ, 19)

Kee adds: "In spite of this range of ways in which the tradition about Jesus has been transmitted, we have available a clear and remarkably consistent array of evidence about this figure whose life, teachings, and death have continued to have such a profound impact on the subsequent history of the human race." (Kee, WCKAJ, 114)

In the 1974 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the contributor writing about Jesus Christ uses twenty thousand words to describe Him, more space than was given to Aristotle, Cicero, Alexander, Julius Caesar,

Accordingly, after He was crucified, even all His acquaintances forsook Him, having denied Him; and afterwards, when He had risen from the dead and appeared to them, and had taught them to read the prophecies in which all these things were foretold as coming to pass, and when they had seen Him ascending into heaven, and had believed, and had received power sent thence by Him upon them, and went to every race of men, they taught these things, and were called apostles.

—JUSTIN MARTYR

Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, or Napoleon Bonaparte. Concerning the testimony of the many independent secular accounts of Jesus of Nazareth, the author resoundingly concludes: "These independent accounts prove that in ancient times even the opponents of Christianity never doubted the historicity of Jesus, which was disputed for the first time and on inadequate grounds by several authors at the end of the 18th, during the 19th, and at the beginning of the 20th centuries." (EB, 145)

To those who would deny the historical existence of Jesus, noted British New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall comments, "It is not possible to explain the rise of the Christian church or the writing of the Gospels and the stream of tradition that lies behind them without accepting the fact that the Founder of Christianity actually existed." (Marshall, IBHJ, 24)

Though the non-Christian sources do not provide as much detail about Jesus as the New Testament, they do provide corroboration for some of the basic facts of the biblical portrayal of Jesus. Robert Stein, a New Testament professor, states: "The non-Christian sources establish beyond reasonable doubt the following minimum: (1) Jesus was truly a historical person. This may seem silly

to stress, but through the years some have denied that Jesus ever lived. The nonbiblical sources put such nonsense to rest. (2) Jesus lived in Palestine in the first century of our era. (3) The Jewish leadership was involved in the death of Jesus. (4) Jesus was crucified by the Romans under the governorship of Pontius Pilate. (5) Jesus' ministry was associated with wonder/ sorcery." (Stein, JM, 49)

R. T. France writes: "Non-Christian evidence therefore substantiates the fact of Jesus' existence, his popular following, his execution and the rough date." (France, NBD, 564)

Edwin Yamauchi, professor of history at Miami University, asserts that we have more and better historical documentation for Jesus than for any other religious founder (e.g., Zoroaster, Buddha, or Mohammed). Of the nonbiblical sources testifying of Christ, Yamauchi concludes:

Even if we did not have the New Testament of Christian writings, we would be able to conclude from such non-Christian writings as Josephus, the Talmud, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger that: (1) Jesus was a Jewish teacher; (2) many people believed that he performed healings and exorcisms; (3) he was rejected by the Jewish leaders; (4) he was crucified under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius; (5) despite this shameful death, his followers, who believed that he was still alive, spread beyond Palestine so that there were multitudes of them in Rome by A.D. 64; (6) all kinds of people from the cities and countryside—men and women, slave and free—worshipped him as God by the beginning of the second century. (Yamauchi, JUF, 221, 222)

The profound and powerful life of Jesus as a historical figure has made a dramatic impact on the rest of history. Noted Yale his-

torian Jaroslav Pelikan writes, "Regardless what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for almost twenty centuries. If it were possible, with some sort of supermagnet to pull up out of that history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of his name, how much would be left?" (Pelikan, JTC, 1)

His impact on the course of history is without parallel. A *Newsweek* magazine writer observes, "By any secular standard, Jesus is also the dominant figure of Western culture. Like the millennium itself, much of what we now think of as Western ideas, innovations, and values finds its source or inspiration in the religion that worships God in His name. Art and science, the self and society, politics and economics, marriage and family, right and wrong, body and soul—all have been touched and often radically transformed by Christian influence." (Woodward, N, 54)

Upon surveying the historical evidence for the existence of Christ, Gary Habermas notes, "Surprisingly few scholars have asserted that Jesus never existed or have attempted to cast almost total doubt on his life and ministry. When such efforts have occurred, they have been met by rare outcries from the scholarly community. We have seen that these attempts are refuted at almost every turn by the early and eyewitness testimony presented by Paul and others, as well as by the early date of the Gospel." (Habermas, HJ, 46)

The evidence is conclusive. Jesus really lived among us and accomplished powerful works that even hostile, nonChristian sources do not fail to confirm. The skeptics about Jesus' historicity are simply wrong.