

Evidence

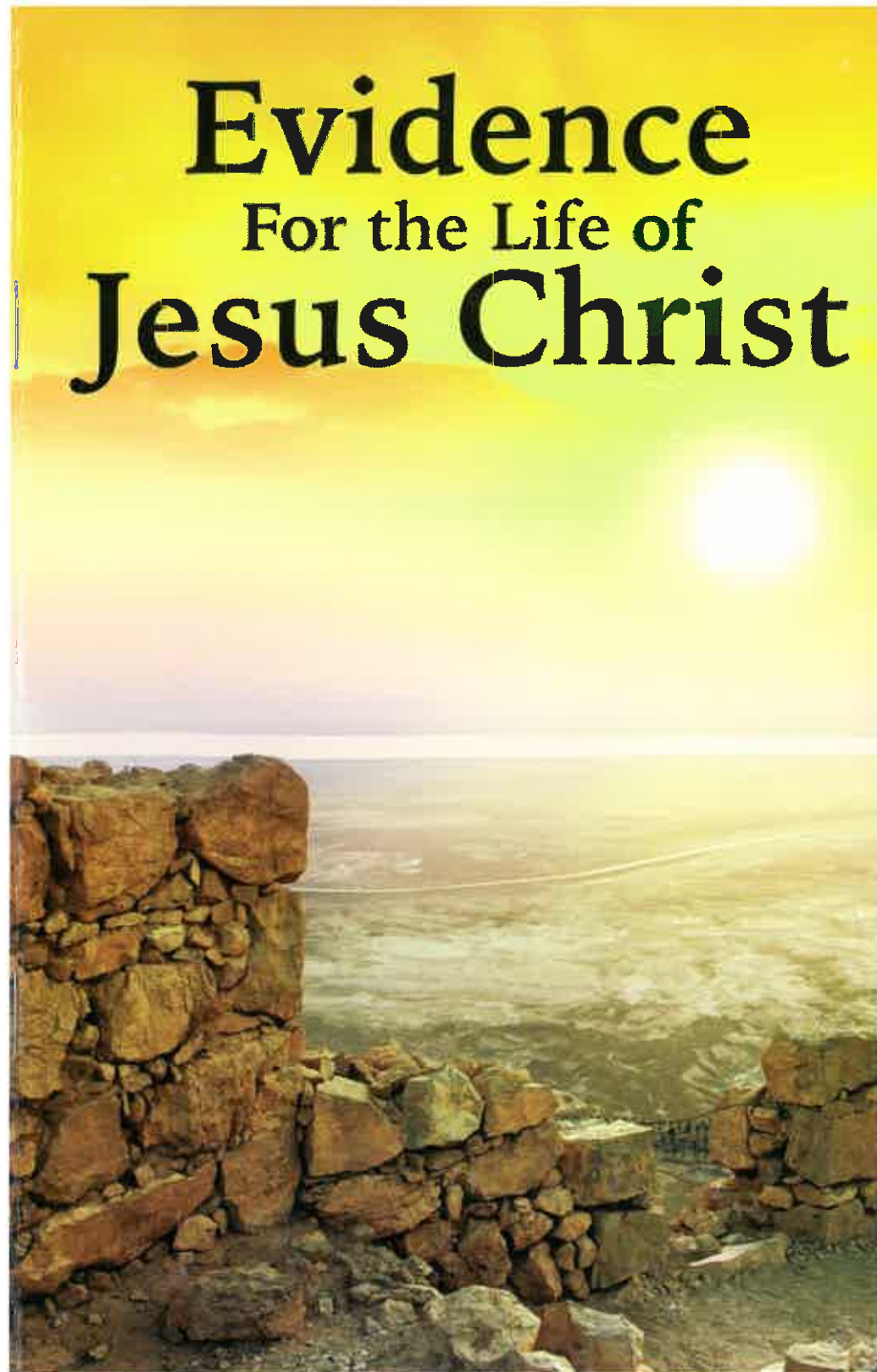
For the Life of

Jesus Christ



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Evidence For the Life of Jesus Christ

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

All Scripture quotations were taken from the King James Version except as noted.

As early as the fourth century, A.D., the intellectual elite of the Roman world were professing Christians. Christianity retained its dominant position in the West until the 1800s, when secular thinkers, aided by Darwin's theory of evolution, gained the upper hand, and thus rejected the Genesis account of Creation. Since then we have seen biblical authority undermined. Therefore, we should not be surprised to see the rejection of Christian doctrine and morality, objections to school prayer, and removal of the Ten Commandments from public places.

There are now many who affirm strongly, "Jesus never lived!" Others think He was only a historical figure, but not the Son of God. Some don't care one way or another. Then there are those who believe with all their heart, mind, and soul that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and would give their life before denying it.

What proof do we have that the Christ of the Bible really lived, and have we taken the time to substantiate the truth of the Bible record for ourselves? No doubt, Jesus performed those astonishing miracles of raising men from the dead, healing the blind and lame, and walking on water, but the more we know about His life the better witnesses of His life and resurrection we will be.

Did Jesus really walk the dusty roads of Israel during the time of the Roman occupation some 2,000 years ago?

The New Testament, of course, certainly makes it clear and bears record of a man named Jesus Christ. But many ask, Is there evidence *outside* the Bible that He really lived, and that He performed miracles? Was He really condemned to death by the Roman governor Pilate as record-

ed in the New Testament?

Within the Bible there is ample proof that Jesus did live and was crucified as described in detail, but can it be proven from the words of Roman historians and others who wrote about Him?

We must also keep this fact in mind: Every time scholars and other professional people question the integrity of the Bible, or think they have found a loose brick in the historical report found in its pages, given a little time, the Bible always turns out to be absolutely correct. We will find the Bible to be perfect in its historical account of Jesus Christ.

Biblical Evidence

Before we examine some secular historical evidence, let's first notice some of the details the Bible itself has to offer. We will find in the Bible a record of the existence of a human being known as Jesus Christ living during the days of the Roman Empire. "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (Matthew 1:16). The royal line continued through Joseph who, though he was not Jesus' father, was the husband of Mary. Mary was the mother of Jesus, who is called the Messiah. Matthew had completed his goal in listing this genealogy—showing beyond any doubt, that Jesus was a descendant of David, thus fulfilling God's promises.

Another very interesting passage is in the book of John: "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? For this man doeth many miracles. If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (John 11:47-48).

Luke reports, "And they watched Him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of His words, so they might deliver Him unto the power and authority of the governor. And they asked Him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly: Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But He perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. And He said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's" (Luke 20:20-25).

We find in the New Testament the record of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the church He founded. The written accounts—or Gospels—of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (Jesus' disciples and apos-

ties) clearly show that Christ was born during the closing days of the reign of Herod, king of Judea, and that He lived during the time of the earlier Roman Caesars and the Roman occupation of Israel and Jerusalem.

Christ's Birth and Birthplace Predicted

The New Testament records Christ's birth as being in the town of Bethlehem of Judea. "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:21-23). Right from the start we understand that Jesus came to save people from their sins, not to save them from Rome or tyranny, nor to set up an earthly kingdom at that time. The point was not that Jesus would ever bear the name "Immanuel," but rather this name described Jesus' role, to bring God's presence to people. John, in chapter 1, verse 1, tells us that Jesus was Himself God and He brought God to earth in His human body, living and eating as we do, but also teaching, healing, and dying.

Hundreds of years before Christ's birth, the prophets predicted the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah: yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel" (Micah 5:2). Bethlehem is identified by its ancient name, Ephrathah (see Genesis 35:16,19; 48:7; Ruth 4:11). Here Micah offers a glorious picture of future royal majesty, a king who would bring lasting security, extending Israel's influence to the ends of the earth.

The prophet Isaiah writes, "Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). Micah and Isaiah are merely two of the dozens of prophecies and references to a Messiah in the Hebrew Bible that are mentioned in the New Testament as having been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. These Hebrew prophecies, as historians and linguists admit, were all written *hundreds of years before Jesus was born!*

Jesus, during His ministry, pointed out to the people of His day the fact that the Scriptures (now called the Old Testament by Christians) spoke about Him. "In the same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this

was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook Him, and fled" (Matthew 26:55–56). There was no need for these people to come after Him with swords and clubs, because He voluntarily surrendered Himself. Jesus was not a criminal, He was a teacher who had been teaching in the Temple every day for the past week, and they came at night for fear of the crowds.

The Emmaus Disciples

The disciples from Emmaus had thought that Jesus could rescue Israel. Most Jews believed that the Old Testament prophecies pointed to a military and political Messiah who would free the nation from Roman tyranny. Jesus had come to redeem them from sin, not from Roman rule.

These disciples from Emmaus were deep in discussion as they walked along. Apparently a man walking in the same direction drew up beside them. This was Jesus Himself, but they were until Jesus was ready to reveal Himself to them (Luke 24:30–31).

Jesus, who had walked up behind these men during their deep discussion, asked what they were so concerned about. They seemed to be very withdrawn and saddened. They assumed Jesus was a pilgrim traveling home from Jerusalem.

"And, behold two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three score furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him. And He said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto Him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And He said unto them, What things? And they said unto Him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him" (Luke 24:13–20).

These men of Emmaus described Jesus as a teacher and prophet who did wonderful miracles. They had heard Him teach and had seen Him perform miracles of healing; but as far as they knew, He had died like all the other prophets before Him.

These two disciples knew who was responsible for Jesus' death. While the Romans may have actually done the executing, it was the leading

priests and other religious leaders who had arrested Him and handed Him over. The religious leaders' attempt to blame the Romans failed. Everyone knew the religious leaders' role in Jesus' death. While it is easy to lay the blame on the religious leaders of the day, and they are to be held accountable, still all have sinned, and no man can pay the price the law demands and live. We must therefore admit that no one's hands are clean.

"But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; and when they found not His body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulcher, and found it even so as the women had said: but Him they saw not. Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:21–27).

These two men had left Jerusalem disheartened and cheerless after having heard an amazing report. The women who had been to the tomb and heard the angels' words said that Jesus' body was missing and that angels had said Jesus is alive. Then Peter and John verified what the women had said. "Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did out run Peter, and came first to the sepulcher. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulcher, and he saw and believed" (John 20:3–8). In spite of all this information they were still in a state of melancholy, and had left the city still believing that all their hopes in Jesus was for naught.

Jesus said these disciples were foolish, for even though they knew all that the prophets had written in the Scriptures, they failed to understand that Christ's suffering was His path to glory. Beginning with the writings of Moses and then moving through all the prophets, Jesus explained to these bewildered disciples what all the Scriptures said about Himself. He made it clear that He had fulfilled all that had been prophesied regarding

the Messiah (see also John 5:39; Luke 4:17–21).

Old Testament Prophecies

There are many Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah that Jesus fulfilled. “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn” (Zechariah 12:10).

On Pentecost, fifty days after Christ’s resurrection, the Holy Spirit was poured out (see Acts 2). Zechariah calls the Spirit “a spirit of grace and prayer.” It is this Spirit that convicts us of sin, reveals to us God’s righteousness and judgment, and helps us as we pray. Even in times of distress when we do not know what we should pray for or how we should pray, God’s Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words (Romans 8:26).

The following verse is a prophecy of Christ’s betrayal: “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psalm 41:9). This verse is referred to in John 13:18. Judas, one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, had spent three years learning from Jesus, traveling and eating with Him (Mark 3:14–19), and handling the finances for the group. Finally, this “best friend” betrayed Jesus. “Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him” (Matthew 26:14–16). The Bible does not reveal Judas’ motives other than gaining money. Perhaps he expected Jesus to start a political rebellion and overthrow Rome, and Jesus would then give him a prestigious position. It is also possible that when Jesus praised Mary for pouring out perfume worth a year’s salary, Judas may have realized that Jesus’ Kingdom was not physical or political but spiritual. Judas could not see any gain by following Jesus any further so he turned to the religious leaders, betraying Jesus in exchange for money.

The Suffering Messiah

It was foretold long ago by the prophet Isaiah that when the Messiah came He would suffer a painful and agonizing death, with His hands and feet being pierced. “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a

sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His generation? For He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was He stricken. And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7–9). He was oppressed as one oppresses a debtor to exact payment, or as a slave driver whips the slaves; yet there was no word of complaint. In His patience and silence, He was like a lamb, the Passover lamb of Exodus 12:3. John the Baptist calls Jesus the “Lamb of God” in John 1:29,35.

He was bound and placed under guard like a criminal, after which He was led away to die. The people did not understand the meaning of all His suffering or its purpose. Even His disciples were without understanding. Then, He was cut off by violent torture and death. A death His people, as well as all the people of the world, deserved. The intention was that His grave should be with the wicked, that is, with the condemned criminals who were crucified with Him. But actually, when He died, “He was buried with honor by a rich man in a tomb that had never been used.” “When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus’ disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed” (Matthew 27:57–60). This was God’s assurance that the accusations that He was a violent man and a deceiver were false (1 Peter 2:22). He was gentle with sinners, and His words were true.

God not only allowed the Servant’s death, it pleased God to bruise Him and make Him suffer (Isaiah 53:10). We in no way deserved such a sacrifice on our behalf. God did it out of pure grace and love (John 3:16). God made the Servant’s soul, that is, His life including His whole self, a guilt offering (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus, by the shedding of His blood and the outpouring of His life, made sufficient expiation for all our sin and guilt. But His death would not be the end. That He would “view seed” means He would rise from the dead and see spiritual children. That He would “lengthen days” means He would live on. The “pleasure of the LORD” includes the business of the Lord. Jesus, when only twelve years old, made the remark that He must be about His Father’s business. It will be brought to a successful conclusion.

Christ in the Psalms

It has been long believed by both Jewish and Christian faiths that many of the Psalms referred as much to the promised Messiah as they did to events at the time. Most everything that occurred at the crucifixion and most all of Jesus' words during His final hours were prophesied in Psalms. Here are the main references to Christ:

Reference in Psalms	Reference to Christ	Fulfillment in the New Testament
2:7	Messiah is God's Son	Hebrews 1:5-6
16:8-10	He rises from the dead	Luke 24:5-7
22:1-21	He has an agonizing death	Matthew 26-27
22:18	Men cast lots for His clothing	Matthew 27:35
22:15	He thirsts while on the cross	John 19:28
22:22	He declares God's name	Hebrews 2:12
34:20	His bones are not broken	John 19:36-37
40:6-8	He comes to do God's will	Hebrews 10:5-7
41:9	His close friend betrays Him	Luke 22:48
45:6-7	His throne is everlasting	Hebrews 1:8-9
68:18	He ascends to heaven	Ephesians 4:8
69:9	He is zealous for God	John 2:17
69:21	He is offered vinegar	Matthew 27:48
89:3-4, 35-36	He is a descendant of David	Luke 1:31-33
96:13	He will judge the world	1 Thessalonians. 1:10
110:1	He is David's son and Lord	Matthew 22:44
110:4	He is the eternal priest-king	Hebrews 6:20
118:22	He is rejected by many	1 Peter 2:7

Jewish Historical Evidence

Matthew gives a clear example of the intensifying conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. A man who was demon possessed, blind, and unable to talk was brought to Jesus for healing. "Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw" (Matthew 12:22). Therefore, all the people were greatly impressed and said, "Is not this the son of David?" (Matthew 12:23).

The religious leaders had already decided that they wanted to kill Jesus, and also they had accused Him of casting out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. "But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of

the devils" (Matthew 12:24). While the people were simply amazed, these leaders refused to believe that Jesus' power was from God. They could not deny the reality of Jesus' miracles and supernatural power, for He had indeed been casting out demons. So the Pharisees accused Him of having power from Satan.

Although religious leaders were jealous of Jesus and cast doubts as to whether He was the prophesied Messiah, they were forced by the very fact of His miracles and influence among the people to give recognition to Him in their records.

Jesus is referred to in the Talmud. The Talmud is a Jewish record of debates, doctrines, stories, and traditions covering a period from before the birth of Jesus to the centuries immediately following. In the Talmud, Jesus is referred to as "that man," "dead dog," "the hanged one," and "the sorcerer" (*The Jewish Encyclopedia* lists the places where Jesus is referred to in the Talmud.)

The Talmud records Jesus' healing of the blind, the lame, and the leprous. It also mentions His walking on the sea! But the Talmud also speaks of Jesus as having learned sorcery in Egypt (recall Matthew 12:24), in an attempt to discredit His miracles and His claim to being the very Son of God. The Talmud also records a list of references to Jesus' mother, Mary, but in a non-complimentary sense.

Even though the Talmud is uncomplimentary to both Jesus and His mother Mary, it does establish the *evidence* that we are looking for, that Jesus was a walking, talking, real human being.

Historical Evidence From a Non-Christian Source

Jesus was too dangerous a man to be allowed to live, according to the high priests and the teachers of religious law. He simply had to be eliminated. Therefore, they went so far as to bring completely false charges against Jesus. Pilate saw through their blatant lies. He knew Jesus was innocent.

The Jewish council had already decided that Jesus should die; but they could not, under Roman law, carry out the death penalty. Jesus would have to be tried and convicted in a Roman court. Thus, they schemed and took Jesus over to Pilate, the Roman governor.

Pilate was the governor of Judea, where Jerusalem was located. Pilate's normal residence was in Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea, but he happened to be in Jerusalem because of the Passover festival. With the large crowd who had flocked to the city for that celebration, Pilate and his soldiers came to help keep the peace. He stayed in his headquarters,

called the Praetorium.

The envious religious leaders finally succeeded in having Jesus arrested by the Roman authorities under the trumped up charges of treason and other false accusations.

“And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse Him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo nothing worthy of death is done unto Him. I will therefore chastise Him, and release Him. (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabas: (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.) Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him: I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed” (Luke 23:13–23).

Nevertheless, Pilate did give into these malicious religious leaders who demanded the crucifixion of Jesus (Luke 23:24–25).

Considering the contempt in which Roman society held the Jews and also the obscurity of Judea in the empire, it is not surprising that voluminous testimony to our Lord’s person is lacking. Yet some detail is given, and this must be accorded an important place.

Thallus the Samaritan, who lived in A.D. 52, recorded in his history that there was a miraculous darkness covering the face of the earth at the Passover in A.D. 32. Julius Africanus, a North African Christian teacher in A.D. 215, writes, “Thallus, in the third book of his history, calls this darkness an eclipse of the sun, but in my opinion he is wrong.” The allusion in question is to the preternatural darkness that accompanied the crucifixion of Jesus (Mark 15:33 par.). A significant comment on this testimony is given by M. Goguel in his *Life of Jesus* (Eng. Tr. 1933), p. 93: “This shows that this detail [of the darkness] was known in Rome, in the middle of the first century, in a circle near to the Imperial House. A small detail like this could not have been preserved and transmitted save within the setting of a narrative of the Passion.” And thus a fragmentary allusion becomes sufficient to dispel the idea that Christ’s story grew like a legend over the decades and centuries. Within twenty years or so of the

actual event in the Gospels, a secular writer is aware that a phenomenal happening was reported in connection with the event of the cross.

The crucifixion was recorded by the Roman historian Tacitus. He wrote less than a hundred years after Christ. In his writing about the Roman Emperors from Nero to Trajan, Tacitus mentions the great fire of Rome in A.D. 64 and Nero’s attempt to place the blame for it on the Christians.

Tacitus then wrote that “Christus [the Latin spelling of Christ], from whom the name [Christians] had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty [crucifixion] during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition [referring to Christianity], thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome...” (*Annals* XV, 44). Tacitus adds this note: “Christ from whom they [the Christians whom Nero accused of arson] took their name had been put to death as a punishment 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, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.” This testimony speaks for itself and, by linking the names of Pilate and Tiberius (as in Luke 3:1), firmly anchors Christianity in the historical stream.

This is clear historical evidence that Jesus lived! This was not a Christian writing, but a Roman historian who abhorred things Christian! Tacitus had access to the government records. He had the proof Jesus was crucified!

Another Roman historian by the name of Seutonius, who was a contemporary of Tacitus, wrote that about A.D. 49 the Emperor Claudius banished all Jews from the city of Rome (an incident also mentioned in Acts 18:2): “He expelled the Jews from Rome, on account of the riots in which they were constantly indulging, at the instigation of Chrestus [generally understood as a misspelling of the name of Christ]” (*The Lives of the Caesars*, Book V, 25). “After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all *Jews to depart from Rome*;) and came unto them” (Acts 18:2, italics added).

Aquila and Priscilla had just been expelled from Rome by Claudius Caesar’s order. Trained as tentmakers, Aquila and Priscilla had packed

up the tools of their trade and made their way to Corinth. There they met Paul, who joined them in the business of tentmaking.

Reference to Jesus is also made by the Jewish historian, priest, and general, Flavius Josephus, born about A.D. 37. Writing about the death, in Jerusalem, of James, Josephus casually speaks of him as “the brother of Jesus who was called Christ” (*Antiquities of the Jews* XX. 9. 1).

Much more interesting is this description also given by the Jewish historian Josephus: “Now about this time arises Jesus, a wise man, if indeed He should be called a man. For He was a doer of marvelous deeds, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure; and He won over to Himself many Jews and many also of the Greek[s]. He was the Christ. And when, on the indictment of the principal men among us, Pilate had sentenced Him to the cross, those who had loved [or perhaps “been content with”] him at the first did not cease; for He appeared to them on the third day alive again, the divine prophets having [previously] told these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning Him. And even now the tribe [or “race”] of Christians, named after Him, is not extinct” (*Antiquities* XVIII.3.3 [63]).

While there are some textual doubts, nevertheless, we may grant that this *testimonium* is at least a witness that Jesus existed, was a wonder-worker who gathered followers, and paid the price for His novelties by death on a cross.

In *Antiquities of the Jews* (XX.9.1), Josephus described the death of James, the brother of Jesus. “As therefore Ananus [the High Priest] was of such a disposition, he thought he had now a good opportunity, as Festus [the Roman Procurator] was now dead, and Albinus [the new Procurator] 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.”

Josephus also writes about John the Baptist: “Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that 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; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away, [or remission] of some sins [only] but for the purification of the body: supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness. Now, when [many] there came to

crowd about him, for they were greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion [for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise], thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod’s suspicious temper, to Macherus [Masada], the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death” (*Antiquities* XVIII.5.2). These historical sources written by Josephus certainly give us ample evidence that Jesus of Nazareth lived in the first century of this era.

Flavius Josephus and the Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius were not Christians; therefore, their writings can be considered neutral historical evidence of Jesus’ life and of His crucifixion by the Romans.

Before His crucifixion, Christ predicted that His followers would suffer severe persecution and martyrdom for their belief in Him. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:11–12). Jesus was telling His disciples that they shouldn’t be surprised when people mock and persecute them, and lie about them. Jesus would experience all of this. Later, He explained to His followers that they should expect nothing different.

Jesus told His followers that they should respond to persecution in a far different way than the world does. They were to be happy about it and be very glad! This, of course, refers to deep spiritual joy that is unhindered and unchanged by what happens in this present life. A person with righteous character can rejoice and be glad because of the promise: a great reward awaits you in the future, when Christ returns and establishes the Kingdom of God.

During the later first century and in the second century, A.D., persecution of the Christians was common in the Roman Empire. An early reference to Christ was made by Pliny the Younger, who was governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. He wrote letters to Emperor Trajan inquiring about how Christians should be dealt with. One such letter, written about A.D. 111–113, shows that both Caesar and the governor accepted that Jesus Christ lived and that His followers, when publicly accused, were to be put to death if they did not renounce their belief in Christ and curse Him.

Also, within this letter, Pliny describes Christians as coming together at fixed seasons and singing a hymn to “Christ, as to a god.” This phrase clearly indicates that Pliny, in writing to Caesar, considered Christ to have been a historical figure. Both leaders knew that Jesus was a real person who lived and taught in the Roman Empire less than a hundred years earlier!

Conclusion

The apostle Paul gives us the following witness: “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures: And that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, He was seen of above *five hundred brethren at once*; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (1 Corinthians 15:1–8).

The apostle Peter also writes, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

The sheer number of eyewitnesses, more than five hundred at one time, should give cause to doubters to stop and rethink their position before dismissing Jesus Christ and His resurrection as being non-historical.

Paul affirmed to the governor that he was not insane. “For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26). Paul was letting the king know that he was teaching nothing except what the prophets and Moses said would happen concerning the suffering Messiah and the promise of His resurrection

“For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulcher. But God raised Him from the dead: And He was seen many days of them which came up

with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people” (Acts 13:27–31). This resurrection, which followed the rejection and murder of the Messiah, would serve as a beacon, a light to Jews and Gentiles alike. They should all remember, that Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us. Continuing in sin shows a complete disregard for Christ’s sacrifice.

Paul’s statement that this was not done in a corner is simply an idiomatic way of reminding his audience that Christianity had been a very public movement from the moment of the inception of the church on that first Pentecost, when three thousand people had been converted in the temple courts at Jerusalem in one day.

As the apostles were gathered together in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, the time had come for the fulfillment of Christ’s promise to send His Spirit completely and permanently upon all believers. This marvelous outpouring of God provided the supernatural power for believers to take the life-changing message of the gospel to the ends of the earth. This is the day Christ made good on His promise to send the Helper—the Comforter, the Holy Spirit—to take up permanent residence in those who put their faith in Christ.

All the evidence that we have just examined should prove to any fair-minded individual that the record of the Bible is true, and all of its promises are assured. *Jesus Christ* really did live and do all of the things God’s Word reveals. With that in mind, there is no other alternative than to accept *Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, High Priest, and soon coming King!* And, of course, we do!

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