

***Question: Is there any evidence outside of the Bible that Jesus really lived?***

In spite of the uninformed claims of some unbelievers, the actual historical evidence for Jesus is greater than that for any other historical figure of the same time period. Many volumes have been written about this topic, and space will not allow us to present and explain all of the evidence. Therefore, I recommend Lee Strobel's book, *The Case for Christ*, as a helpful summary for the average reader. For now, allow me to briefly summarize the evidence he cites.

We begin with the highly-esteemed writings of the Jewish historian Josephus who was not himself a Christian believer. Born in A.D. 37 he wrote four books near the end of the first century detailing the history of the Jewish people from creation to his own time. In his *Antiquities*, Josephus told about a priest named Ananias who "convened a meeting of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ." In another passage, Josephus wrote: "About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. . . . And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared" (*Antiquities 18.63-64*). Archeological excavations at Masada as well as statements by other historians have demonstrated the general reliability of the writings of Josephus.

Several early Roman writings also provide corroboration for the biblical story of Jesus. For example, the Roman historian Tacitus described in A.D. 115 how Emperor Nero persecuted Christians and blamed them for the fire that burned Rome in A.D. 64. In A.D. 111, Pliny the Younger, the Roman governor of Bithynia, wrote to his friend Emperor Trajan about the rapid spread of Christianity and how he sent Christians who were Roman citizens to Rome for trial. Another historian named Thallus wrote a history of the eastern Mediterranean in A.D. 52 in which he made reference to the darkness that the gospels had written about (Matthew 27:45), attributing it to an eclipse.

In addition, there are references to Jesus in the Jewish Talmud (finished in A.D. 500) and Mishnah (compiled about A.D. 200). They called him a false Messiah who practiced magic and who was condemned to death. They also report the rumor that Jesus was the son of a Roman soldier and Mary. Although this is negative evidence, it does provide corroboration for the life of Jesus. Even his enemies did not deny that he lived.

When we add to the above the writings of the Second Century Apostolic Fathers, we have more evidence for the life of Jesus than for any character in ancient history. In his book *The Verdict of History*, Gary Habermas gives details on thirty-nine ancient sources and lists more than one hundred facts concerning the life, teachings, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. But no matter how great the evidence, in the end each of us must make our own decision. We can choose to believe or not to believe. The choice to believe in him has been a life-transforming decision for many of us. We would like to think that the evidence of changed lives would lead many to want to honestly consider the evidence and find God's blessings through faith in Jesus. What will you decide my friend?

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