

**Written by Brad Lippincott
September 2011**

The following are just notes for now. This is just a base for more in-depth research about the historical evidence that Jesus existed and what was believed about Jesus using, primarily, extra-biblical documentation.

Dating of Material

If Plutarch can write about Alexander the Great three hundred years after he lived and have that be considered great history; then **HOLD ON TO YOUR HATS WHEN YOU READ BELOW!!**

Ancient history is very unique. A source dating around three hundred years after an event has occurred is actually considered good.

Suetonius

“Suetonius was chief secretary to Emperor Hadrian (who reigned from A.D. 117-138) and he writes about couple of instances concerning Christ.¹

Suetonius, Christ and Emperor Claudius

Acts 18:2 states that Emperor “Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome”. Suetonius confirms this fact when he wrote about Emperor Claudius in his work *Life of Claudius* 25:4. Suetonius records that there was a Christus whether by an individual or an individual who posses the title “Christus”. Suetonius writes:

“Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.”²

Suetonius and Acts 18:2 both agree that Claudius commanded all the Jews to leave Rome, and Suetonius says these disturbances was because of a man named, or with the title, Chrestus.

From the above we can gather that (1) Claudius did make people leave Rome because they were Jewish. (2) There was a person known as Chrestus in Rome when Jewish people were expelled from Rome in A.D. 49 by Emperor Claudius.³ (3) There was an individual who either had a title called Chrestus, or his name was known as Christus (4) This Chrestus was involved with the Jewish people in some way or another.

¹ Josh McDowell *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 55.

² Source from the writings of Suetonius Tranquillus: *The Life of Claudius* 25:4. Translation from: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/Claudius*.html

³ Trent C. Butler. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2003), 307.

Fun fact: Emperor Claudius reigned as Emperor from A.D. 41-54.⁴

Tacitus and Suetonius tag team in their knowledge about Christ and Emperor Nero

Tacitus and Nero both write a reference about Jesus as it relates to Emperor Nero. This is excellent history when you have two references saying the same thing.

Tacitus

“Cornelius Tacitus (ca. AD 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.“” Tacitus is best known for his two works: the *Annals* and the *Histories*.⁵

The following is a writing of Tacitus from the *Annals* which was composed around AD 115.⁶ The context of the following text concerns Tacitus recounting the great fire of Rome that occurred during the reign of Emperor Nero in the AD 60s.

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in 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 centre and become popular.⁷

Conclusions about Tacitus writing from the Annals

In referring to the origins of Christianity in Judaea, Tacitus calls the beliefs of the Christians “evil”, and yet, he still admits the following:

1. Tacitus writes that people who are believers of Jesus Christ are called “Christians by the populace”, showing that the believers of Jesus Christ were called Christians at least since the AD 60s, believers of Jesus did not coin the term “Christians”.
2. These Christians are present in Rome during the reign of Nero in the 60s; when the great fire of Rome occurred. (Emperor Nero reigned from AD 54 – 68).
3. Christus is described as an actual person. (The name Christus is the Latin word for Christ. “Christ” is Greek, “Christus” is Latin).
4. Christus is the person where the term “Christians” comes from.
5. Christus was put to death as is explained by the term “suffered the extreme penalty”, shows that Christus was crucified by orders of Pontius Pilatus.

⁴ Ibid., 307.

⁵ Gary R. Habermas *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 187.

⁶ Gary R. Habermas *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 188.

⁷ Quoted from McDowell *Evidence Demands a Verdict*, 55. McDowell quoted from Cornelius Tacitus *Annals* 15.44.

6. Christus was put to death when Emperor Tiberius was reigning. Emperor Tiberius reigned from AD 14 – 37. Emperor Tiberius is listed as the Emperor in the Biblical texts.
7. Christus was put to death under “Pontius Pilatus” (Latin name), under whom the Biblical accounts agree.
8. The “mischievous superstition” is thought to be an inadvertent reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ showing that this is what the early Christians believed. Scholars such as J.N.D. Anderson also hold to this view.⁸
9. The “mischievous superstition” appears to be the main driving point of the Christians.
10. The “mischievous superstition” had its origins in Judaea.⁹

Suetonius: With Vengeance II

Suetonius writes in his book *Life of Nero* the following: “Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a body of people addicted to a novel and mischievous superstition”.

Pliny the Younger

Pliny the Younger was “a Roman author and administrator who served as the governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor....Ten books of Pliny’s correspondence are extant today. The tenth book, written around AD 112, speaks about Christianity in the province of Bithynia and also provides some facts about Jesus”.¹⁰

Pliny writes an entire letter to Emperor Trajan to explain how he is dealing with the Christians.¹¹ In writing about Jesus directly, Pliny writes:

They (the Christians) were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food – but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.¹²

Habermas writes about the conclusions we get from Pliny’s letter. Here are some of them.

(¹) Christ was worshiped as deity by early believers. (²) Pliny refers late in his letter to the teachings of Jesus and his followers as “excessive superstition” and “contagious superstition,” which is reminiscent of the words of both Tacitus and Suetonius. (³) Jesus’

⁸ *The Historical Jesus*, 189-190.

⁹ Conclusions about Tacitus taken from Brad Lippincott *Basic Notes Concerning Historical Evidence of Jesus’ Physical Resurrection*, 8-9.

¹⁰ Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 197-198.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹² *Ibid.*, 199. This quotation from Habermas’ book was taken from: Pliny, *Letters*, transl. by William Melmoth, rev. by W.M.L Hutchinson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), vol II, X:96.

ethical teachings are reflected in the oath taken by Christians never to be guilty of a number of sins mentioned in the letter. ⁽⁴⁾ We find a probable reference to Christ's institution of communion and the Christian celebration of the "love feast" in Pliny's remark about regathering to partake of ordinary food. The reference here alludes to the accusation on the part of non-Christians that believers were suspected of ritual murder and drinking of blood during these meetings, again confirming our view that communion is the subject to which Pliny is referring. ⁽⁵⁾ There is also a possible reference to Sunday worship in Pliny's statement that Christians met "on a certain day."¹³

Emperor Trajan responded to Pliny. Nothing about Jesus was directly stated, but Trajan did agree with Pliny's methodology of dealing with professing Christians.¹⁴ Emperor Trajan does not disagree with the practices of the Christians as explained by Trajan; and Trajan does refer to believers of Jesus Christ as "Christians."¹⁵ The fact that the term "Christians" is used by Emperor Trajan in his writings indicates that there is a group of people who are named after an individual with the title, or name, of Christ.

Mara Bar-Serapion

Mara Bar-Serapion was a Syrian "who was writing from prison to motivate his son Serapion to emulate wise teachers of the past".¹⁶

Mara Bar-Serapion writes between the last first and third centuries AD:¹⁷

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 statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given.¹⁸

(1) From the above we gather that it was known in Syria that Jesus was a "wise king", this is mentioned twice. (2) We see that Jesus was listed among the wise teachers; we can therefore conclude that people believed Jesus to be a wise teacher. Habermas writes concerning Jesus being called wise that this is "possibly a reference to Jesus' own teachings about himself,

¹³ Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.

¹⁴ Trajan's response is found in: Pliny, *Letters*, X:97. But in this paper it comes from Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, X:97.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁸ This portion was cited from Habermas, *Historical Jesus*. Which in turn was cited from: British Museum, Syriac Manuscript, Additional 14,658. For this text, see Bruce, *Christian Origins*, p. 31. You could also obtain a translation of Mara Bar-Serapion online at: <http://earlychristianwritings.com/text/mara.html>

EarlyChristianWritings.com cites the date range of Mara Bar-Serapion from AD 73-300AD.

to that of his followers or even to the working on the *titulus* placed over Jesus' head on the cross.¹⁹ (3) If Jesus was considered to be a wise teacher he did exist. (4) Mara Bar-Serapion believed that God avenged the deaths of these actual men. (5) Habermas writes: "Jesus was executed unjustly by the Jews, who paid for their misdeeds by suffering judgment soon afterward, probably at least as reference to the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman armies."²⁰

Lucian

"Lucian of Samosta was a second-century Greek writer whose works contain sarcastic critiques of Christianity".²¹ Lucian writes:

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.²²

Concerning the above quote from Lucian, Habermas states:

(1) We are told that Jesus was worshiped by Christians. (2) It is also related that Jesus introduced new teachings in Palestine (the location is given in another unquoted portion of Section II) and (3) that he was crucified because of these teachings. Jesus taught his followers certain doctrines, such as (4) all believers are brothers, (5) from the moment that conversion takes place and (6) after the false gods are denied (such as those of Greece). Additionally, these teachings included (7) worshiping Jesus and (8) living according to his laws. (9) Lucian refers to Jesus as a "sage," which, especially in a Greek context, would be to compare him to the Greek philosophers and wise men. Concerning Christians, we are told (10) that they are followers of Jesus who (11) believe themselves to be immortal. Lucian explains that this latter belief accounts for their contempt of death. (12) Christians accepted Jesus' teachings by faith and (13) practiced their faith by their disregard for material possessions, as revealed by the holding of common property among believers.²³ The portion of Lucian not quoted presents some additional facts (14) The Christians had "sacred writings" which were frequently read. (15) When something affected their

¹⁹ Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 208.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

²¹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence*, 58.

²² *Ibid.*, 58-59. Josh McDowell cites this from: Lucien of Samosta. "Death of Pelegrine." In *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, 4 vols. Trans. By H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1949.

²³ Habermas. *The Historical Jesus*, 206-207.

community, “they spare no trouble, no expense.”⁽¹⁶⁾ However, Lucian notes that Christians were easily taken advantage of by unscrupulous individuals.²⁴

It is interesting to note that according to Lucian, these early Christians accepted everything about Jesus by faith. Lucian does write: “All this they take quite on faith”.²⁵

Lucian is an extra-biblical source, yet, he gives tremendous detail about what Christians believe about Jesus. And not once does Lucian deny the existence of Jesus!! In fact no one in ancient history denies the existence of Jesus; they just deny his divinity at most!!

The Talmud

What is the Talmud?

“The Jews handed down a large amount of oral tradition from generation to generation. This material was organized according to subject matter by Rabbi Akiba before his death in AD 135. His work was then revised by his student, Rabbi Meir. The project was completed about AD 200 by Rabbi Judah and is known as the Mishnah. Ancient commentary on the Mishnah was called the Gemaras. The combination of the Mishnah and the Gemaras form the Talmud.”²⁶

Concerning the Talmud and Jesus, Habermas writes: “It would be expected that the most reliable information about Jesus from the Talmud would come from the earliest period of compilation – AD 70 to 200, known as the Tannaitic period. A very significant quotation is found in *Sanhedrin 43a*, dating from just this early period.”²⁷ The following is what the Talmud states about Jesus Christ:

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, “He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.” But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!²⁸

To understand the significance of the Talmud mentioning Jesus, please remember that most Jewish people do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, nor raised from the dead.

At a Minimum the following facts can be ascertained by the Talmud:

1. The Jewish writers of the Talmud admit that Jesus is a historical person.
2. The Jewish writers of the Talmud twice admit that Jesus was crucified on the eve of Passover.

²⁴ Ibid., 206-207.

²⁵ Ibid., 58-59. Josh McDowell cites this from: Lucien of Samosta. “*Death of Pelegrine*.” In *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, 4 vols. Trans. By H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1949.

²⁶ Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 202.

²⁷ Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 202-203.

²⁸ Concerning this citation Habermas writes in the footnotes: “this quotation was taken from the reading in *The Babylonian Talmud*, transl. by I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935), vol. III, *Sanhedrin 43a*, p. 281. This material is found under Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 202-203.

3. The Jewish writers of the Talmud admit that Jesus had some sort of power as is denoted by their use of the term “sorcery”.

4. The Jewish writers of the Talmud admit that Jesus had a teaching that was convincing to many other Jews. This is denoted by the phrase in the quoted part of the Talmud above: “enticed Israel to apostasy”.

Additional data that can be gathered from the Talmud concerning Jesus includes:

5. The word “hanged” is used to describe crucifixion. This terminology is shared in the Apostle Paul’s writings. The Apostle Paul uses the term “hanged” to also describe crucifixion in Galatians 3:13. This terminology shows that Paul the Apostle and this data from the Talmud share the same cultural understandings of crucifixion.

6. Forty days before Jesus was crucified, it was announced that Jesus was to be executed by stoning. Stoning in ancient Jewish culture was a typical practice. This can additionally be seen in the Gospel accounts of John on two separate occasions (John 8:58-59; 10:31-33, 39), and in the book of Acts 7:59.²⁹

7. It is very odd that Jesus was crucified instead of being stoned. The Romans were the only ones with the authority to crucify. A crucifixion required a Roman capital offense. Sorcery and Jewish apostasy is not considered a capital offense under Roman law for there is no other record showing that people got crucified for such practices. The Jews in Jesus’ time could have stoned Jesus, and that was their intent according to this document from the Talmud, but somehow Rome was able to crucify Jesus. Interestingly, it is written in the Old Testament that the Messiah will be crucified (See Psalms 22, Isa 53, Zechariah 12).

1 Corinthians 15:3-7 (Again!!)

1 Corinthians 15:3-7 (New American Standard Bible)

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James.

We know that 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 is an oral creed because

1. “Paul Introduces it with the words *received* and *delivered*, which are technical rabbinic terms indicating he’s passing along holy tradition.”³⁰ Paul got this creed from somewhere else; he *received* it from somewhere.

²⁹ Ibid., 203.

³⁰ Lee Strobel. *The Case For Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 309.

2. This creed was stylized in such a way to be memorized. The triple *Hoti* (“and that”) appears three times. “And that” (καὶ ὅτι) appears three times in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. This triple *hoti* (ὅτι) shows that this creed was stylized in such a way to be memorized.
3. The text uses *Cephas* for Peter’s name which is his Aramaic name.³¹ This shows that the creed has its origin in Judea. Paul writing to a Greek city like Corinth would normally transliterate *Cephas* to *Peter*, but he did not in this case.
4. “The creed uses several other primitive phrases that Paul would not customarily use, like: ‘the twelve’, ‘the third day’, ‘he was raised’”.³²

How we know the Creed can be traced to A.D. 30

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received”. Paul got this information from somewhere else by saying he “received” it.

- The great majority of scholars agree that 1 Corinthians was written in A.D. 55 by the Apostle Paul himself.

- Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:3 that he “delivered” this material that is in the creed. When did Paul first deliver this material? Paul originally delivered this data, and creed, to the Church of Corinth in A.D. 51 because that is the year Paul arrived at Corinth and preached. Since Paul “received” this data as he explains, it means, Paul got this creed somewhere else before A.D. 51.

- Where in the world did Paul “receive” this creed?

- Paul got this information two years after he became a Christian from the Apostle Peter and James in A.D. 35 as can be gathered from Galatians 1:17-18.

Galatians 1:17-18 states: nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.”

Commentary on *historeō istopéō*

Notice the word “acquainted” in Galatians 1:18, some other translations will use the word “saw”. The Greek word for “acquainted” is *historeō (ιστορέω)* where you get the word “history”. This word means exactly that, history. *Historeō* means to inquire of things. Paul was inquiring with Peter about the resurrection. It was here that Paul got the creed in AD 35. Twenty years later, Paul put this creed into writing.

- So where did the Apostle Peter and James get this data?

- Peter and James got this data sometime before AD 33 or even three months after Jesus was crucified, and believed to be seen physically resurrected from the dead.

- Also remember it takes time for a creed to become established. Thus, it shows that the facts of the creed were being circulated before the creed was shared to Paul the Apostle. The facts of the creed is focused on the resurrection appearances of Jesus to multiple witnesses.

³¹ Ibid., 309.

³² Ibid., 309.

This data **1)** shows that the original teaching of the early Church is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead **2)** and that there were many witnesses to His resurrection starting in AD 30. **3)** There are multiple sightings in multiple locations concerning Jesus' physical resurrection. **4)** This data contains showing more than two independent sources because it is an oral creed. This data dramatically adds to the historical evidence showing that Jesus Christ rose physically from the dead. **4)** This creed is the earliest account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ pre-dating Paul's conversion (liberal scholars will agree with this by the way).