

## ***Quotes about Jesus from 1st & 2nd Century Non-Biblical Historians***

### ***Titus Flavius Josephus 37-100AD***

*"Now there arose at this time a source of further trouble in one Jesus, a wise man who performed surprising works, a teacher of men who gladly welcome strange things. He led away many Jews, and also many of the Gentiles. He was the so-called Christ. When Pilate, acting on information supplied by the chief men around us, condemned him to the cross, those who had attached themselves to him at first did not cease to cause trouble, and the tribe of Christians, which has taken this name from him is not extinct even today."*

### ***Tacitus - 56-117 AD***

*"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."*

### ***Thallus - 52AD / Julius Africanus 160-240AD***

"Thallus, a Samaritan-born historian who lived and worked in Rome about A.D. 52, wrote to offset the supernatural element which accompanied the crucifixion. Though the writings of Thallus are lost to us, Julius Africanus, a Christian chronographer of the late second century, was familiar with them and quotes from them. In a comment on the darkness that fell upon the land during the crucifixion (Mark 15:33), Africanus says that *"Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun."* [F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, Eerdmens, p. 113.] Africanus stated his objection to the report arguing that an eclipse of the sun cannot occur during the full moon, as was the case when Jesus died at Passover time. The force of the reference to Thallus is that the circumstances of Jesus' death were known and discussed in the Imperial City as early as the middle of the first century. The fact of Jesus' crucifixion must have been fairly well known by that time, to the extent that unbelievers like Thallus thought it necessary to explain the matter of the darkness as a natural phenomenon. Will Durant observed that Thallus' "argument took the existence of Christ for granted." [Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, Simon and Schuster, p. 555.] Neither Jesus nor the darkness at his death were ever denied as factual. Durant summed up the matter of Christ's historical existence for himself by saying that it never occurred to the early opponents of Christianity to deny the existence of Jesus. [Ibid]. Ironically, Thallus' efforts have been turned into the mainstream of historical proof for Jesus and for the reliability of Mark's account of the darkness at his death."

### ***Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus AD 61-113***

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (AD 61-113), or Pliny the Younger, was the governor of Bithynia (AD 112) and a Roman senator. He wrote to emperor Trajan asking for guidance on how he should treat the Christians in his province.

*-Christians were "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 wicked deeds, never commit fraud, theft, adultery, not to lie nor to deny a trust. . ."*

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### ***Gaius Seutonius Tranquillas -117-138AD***

Seutonius was the chief secretary to Emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD). Seutonius first mentions the Christians when he refers to a series of riots that broke out in Rome in 49 AD during the reign of Emperor Claudius (41- 54 AD). He wrote, *"Because the Jew sat Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city."* (Seutonius, Life of Claudius, 25.4) In a second reference, he writes regarding Nero's persecution of the Christians. *"After the great fire at Rome .... Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief."* (Seutonius, Life of Nero, 16)

From these two brief references we learn the following. First, the Jews were expelled from Rome during the reign of Claudius (which coincides with Acts 18:2). Second, Christ was the reason for the Jewish riots. Christians referred to believers who followed Christ.

### ***Lucian -125ad-180ad***

Lucian was a second century Greek satirist. He spoke very negatively of Christians accusing them of being gullible and believing in a charlatan. He wrote, *"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 law giver 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 a common property."*

[From this passage we learn the following. First, Jesus was known to have lived as a historical person. Second, Jesus was worshiped by the Christians. Third, Christians believed in eternal life. Fourth, Christians were willing to die for what they believed about Christ. Fifth, Jesus was crucified. Sixth, Christians lived according to the teachings of Christ. Finally, Christians did not mix their faith with the gods of Greece. This goes against skeptics who promote the idea that Christians borrowed their beliefs from Greek mythology.]

### ***Mara Bar-Serapion- sometime between 1st and 3rd centuries AD***

Mara Bar-Serapion was a Syrian who wrote a letter to his son encouraging him to follow the courageous example of wise men who courageously died for the truth they proclaimed. Mara Bar-Serapion's letter was written some time between the first to third centuries AD. It reads as follows: *"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 incomplete 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."*

[From this passage we learn the following. First, Jesus was a historical figure. Second, Jesus was considered by many to be a wise and virtuous man. Third, the Jews unjustly killed Jesus. Fourth, Christ's teachings were followed and spread by His followers.]

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### ***Celsus -177AD***

Celsus was a Roman Philosopher who wrote a work in 177 AD, criticizing the Christians in what he saw as a contradiction of monotheism. He scoffed at Christians who were worshipping a man as God.

*“Now if the Christians worshipped only one God they might have reason on their side. But as a matter of fact they worship a man who appeared only recently. They do not consider what they are doing a breach of monotheism; rather they think it perfectly consistent to worship the great God and to worship his servant as God. And their worship of this Jesus is the more outrageous because they refuse to listen to any talk about God, the father of all, unless it includes some reference to Jesus: Tell them that Jesus, the author of the Christian insurrection, was not his son, and they will not listen to you”* [British Museum, Syriac ms, add. 14, 658; cited in Gary Habbermas, *The Historical Jesus*,(Joplin, MO.: College Press Publishing 1996), 200.when they call him Son of God, they are not really paying homage to God, rather they are attempting to exalt Jesus to the heights.]

Although Celsus clearly misunderstood Christian teachings, from the work of Celsus we learn several things. First, Christians were monotheists, like the Jews polytheism was rejected. Second, the Christians worshipped Jesus as God. Here is evidence of the doctrine of the Trinity, one God revealed in three persons. In this passage the Holy Spirit is not mentioned but the Son, the second member of the Trinity, is worshipped as equal in nature to the Father. Third, Christians held very strongly to the belief in the deity of Christ.

### ***Talmud***

The Jewish Talmud records the oral traditions of the Jews. This compilation began in the first century AD and was completed by 200 AD. In Sanhedrin 43, a reference is made of Christ.

*One the eve of the Passover, Yeshu (Jesus) 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. Any one who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover.*

From this passage we learn several facts. First, Jesus was killed (“hanged” is an alternate expression referring to crucifixion) on the eve of the Passover. Second, Jesus was accused of apostasy. Finally, Jesus gathered a significant following of Jews.<sup>3</sup> James Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, 95; cited in Gary Habbermas, *The Historical Jesus*,(Joplin, MO.: College Press Publishing 1996), 193-194.