THE R.U.S.H. BIBLE STUDY

THE ARGUMENTS FOR A HISTORICAL JESUS

READ UNDERSTAND SPREAD HARVEST

APOLOGETICS PROJECT

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT FAST

DREAM CITY CHURCH

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"And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life." **1 John 2:25 THE R.B.S.**

ARGUMENT FOR A HISTORICAL JESUS, AND THE CLAIMS MADE REGARDING HIS LIFE

Before we dive into the arguments for Jesus life and ministry, I want to emphasize why I even broached the topic in the 1st place. We are living, I believe, in the end times. There is coming, and maybe even is alive today on earth, the Antichrist. The Bible preaches it and not only one antichrist but many are coming.

*"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. Little children, it is the last time: and as **ye have heard that antichrist shall come**, even now are there **many antichrists**; whereby we know that it is the last time."* **1 John 2:15-18**

How will we know who he is?

*"I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but **he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.** Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also."*
1 John 21-23

That is why I wrote this positional paper and that is why we are covering it today in class. The antichrist will deny Jesus. If we are in the end-times and we want to go out with a bang, this topic will be the hill we die on.

The 1st evidence for the historical Jesus is obviously scripture, more precisely, the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Since we cover this chapter and verse in class, we will not cover them here. The purpose here is to lay out a case for those who dismiss the Bible as biased.

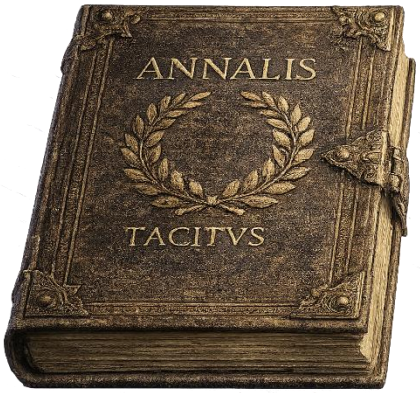
This is more important of a subject than you may realize at 1st glance. Why? Because denying the physical existence of Jesus Christ is the calling card of the Anti-Christ.

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed)? This is the antichrist [the enemy and antagonist of Christ], the one who denies and consistently refuses to acknowledge the Father and the Son. **1 JOHN 2:22 AMP**

……and every spirit that does not confess Jesus [acknowledging that He has come in the flesh, but would deny any of the Son's true nature] is not of God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and is now already in the world. **1 JOHN 4:3**

The 1st extra biblical evidence we will cover is Tacitus.

Caius/Gaius (or Publius) Cornelius Tacitus (55/56–c. 118 C.E.) & his final treatise, Annals.
Tacitus was a Roman senator, orator and ethnographer, and arguably the best of the Roman historians.
His name is based on the Latin word *tacitus*, "silent," from which we get the English word *tacit*. Interestingly, his compact prose uses silence and implications in a masterful way. One argument for the authenticity of the quotation below is that it is written in true Tacitean Latin.



Tacitus's last major work, titled *Annals*, (pictured above) written c. 116–117 AD, includes a biography of Nero. In 64 C.E., during a fire in Rome, Nero was suspected of secretly ordering the burning of a part of town where he wanted to carry out a building project, so he tried to shift the blame to Christians. This was the occasion for Tacitus to mention Christians, whom he despised. This is what he wrote—the following excerpt is translated from Latin by Robert Van Voorst:

"[N]either human effort nor the emperor's generosity nor the placating of the gods ended the scandalous belief that the fire had been ordered [by Nero]. Therefore, to put down the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits and punished in the most unusual ways those hated for their shameful acts … whom the crowd called "Chrestians." The founder of this name, Christ [Christus in Latin], had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate … Suppressed for a time, the deadly superstition erupted again not only in Judea, the origin of this evil, but also in the city [Rome], where all things horrible and shameful from everywhere come together and become popular."

The previous passage shows 4 details that confirms what we know from scripture about Jesus from a source that hated him and His followers, thus confirming the authenticity of the living Jesus Christ.

1.*Christus*, used by Tacitus to refer to Jesus, was one distinctive way by which some referred to him, even though Tacitus mistakenly took it for a personal name rather than His title.

2.This *Christus* was associated with the beginning of the movement of Christians, whose name originated from his.

3. He was executed by the Roman governor of Judea.

4. The time of his death was during Pontius Pilate's governorship of Judea, during the reign of Tiberius. Many New Testament scholars date Jesus' death to c. 29AD. Pilate governed Judea in 26–36AD, while Tiberius was emperor 14–37AD.

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More on Tacitus for the historians among us.

Famous Works

- **The Annals (*Annales*)**: Covers the reigns of Roman emperors Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero from 14 CE to 68 CE.
- **The Histories (*Historiae*)**: Focuses on the turbulent year 69 CE (the Year of the Four Emperors) and the Flavian dynasty.
- **Germania (*De origine et situ Germanorum*)**: Describes the lands, customs, and tribes of ancient Germanic peoples outside the Roman border.
- **Agricola (*De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae*)**: A biography of his father-in-law, who led the Roman military conquest of much of Britain
- **Critical View of Power**: He wrote honestly about the corruption, tyranny, and loss of freedom under Roman emperors.
- **Brilliant Writing Style**: His Latin style is famous for its dramatic force, sharp insight, and extreme brevity.

Famous Quotes by Tacitus

"They make a desert and call it peace."
(Spoken as a critique of Roman imperialism through the fictional speech of the Caledonian chieftain Calgacus).

"The more numerous the laws, the more corrupt the government" (from the [Annals]).

"Men are more ready to repay an injury than a benefit, because gratitude is a burden and revenge a pleasure" (from the [Histories]).

"It is the rare fortune of these days that one may think what one likes and say what one thinks." (from the [Histories]).

"If you would know who controls you see who you may not criticize."

"Men are more ready to repay an injury than a benefit, because gratitude is a burden and revenge a pleasure."

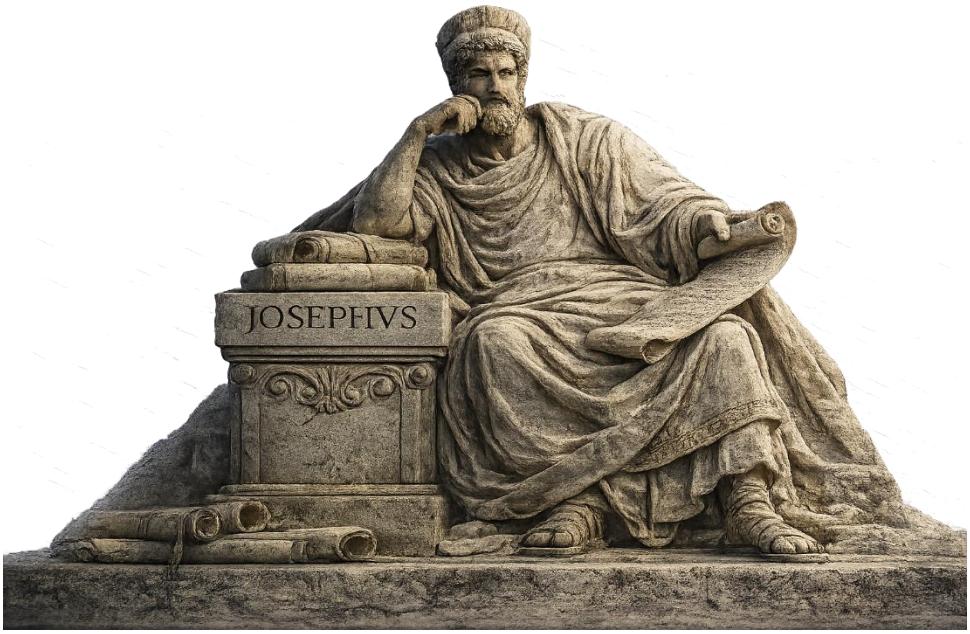
"Formerly we suffered from crimes; now we suffer from laws."

"We accomplish more by prudence than by force." [Lat., Plura consilio quam vi perficimus.]

"Viewed from a distance, everything is beautiful."

"Things are not to be judged good or bad merely because the public think so."

The 2nd example of extra biblical evidence is Josephus



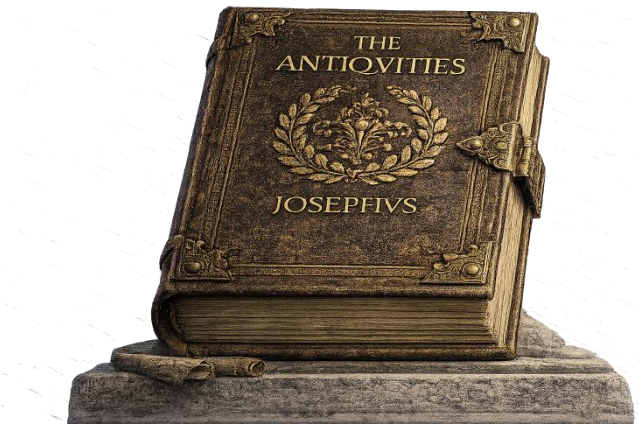
Titus Flavius Josephus
(born Yosepf ben Matityahu, his father was of priestly descent, his mother was of royal ancestry)

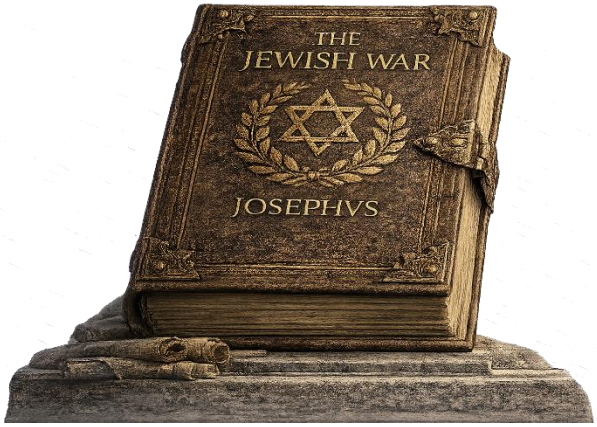
Josephus, a Jewish priest who grew up as an aristocrat in first-century Palestine, and later lived in Rome. He was supported by the patronage of three successive emperors. In the early days of the first Jewish Revolt against Rome (66–70AD), Josephus was a commander in Galilee but soon surrendered and became a prisoner of war. He then predicted that his conqueror, the Roman commander Vespasian, would become emperor. When this actually happened, Vespasian freed him. "From then on Josephus lived in Rome under the protection of the Flavians and there composed his historical and apologetic writings" (Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz). He even took the name Flavius, after the family name of his patron, the emperor Vespasian, and set it before his birth name, becoming, in true Roman style, Flavius Josephus.

Most Jews viewed him as a despicable traitor and hate him still to this day. It was by command of Vespasian's son Titus that a Roman army in 70AD destroyed Jerusalem and burned the Temple, stealing its contents as spoils of war, which are partly portrayed in the imagery of their gloating triumph on the Arch of Titus in Rome. After Titus succeeded his father as emperor, Josephus accepted the son's imperial patronage, as he did of Titus's brother and successor, Domitian.

Yet in his own mind, Josephus remained a Jew both in his outlook and in his writings that extol Judaism. At the same time, by aligning himself with Roman emperors who were at that time the worst enemies of the Jewish people, he chose to ignore Jewish popular opinion.

In his two great works, *The Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*, both written in Greek for educated people, Josephus tried to appeal to aristocrats in the Roman world, presenting Judaism as a religion to be admired for its moral and philosophical depth. *The Jewish War* doesn't mention Jesus except in some versions in likely later additions by others, but Jewish Antiquities does mention Jesus—twice.





The shorter of these two references to Jesus (in Book 20) is incidental to identifying Jesus' brother James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem. In the temporary absence of a Roman governor between Festus's death and governor Albinus's arrival in 62AD, the high priest Ananus instigated James's execution.

Josephus described it:

Being therefore this kind of person [a heartless Sadducee], Ananus, thinking that he had a favorable opportunity because Festus had died and Albinus was still on his way, called a meeting [literally, "sanhedrin"] of judges and brought into it the brother of Jesus-who-is-called-Messiah … James by name, and some others. He made the accusation that they had transgressed the law, and he handed them over to be stoned.

This is the second time Jesus Christ is mentioned early in extra biblical accounts that verify the scriptural accounts. In Josephus work Antiquities (pictured above) He states this about Christ.

"Around this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who did surprising deeds, and a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who in the first place came to love him did not give up their affection for him, for on the third day, he appeared to them restored to life. The prophets of God had prophesied this and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, have still to this day not died out."

From just these 2 sources (Tacitus and Josephus) we have at least 9 contemporary statements concerning the historicity of Christ Jesus.

1. He existed as a man.
2. His personal name was Jesus.
3. He was called Christos by the Greeks.
4. His brother's name was James.
5. He had both Jewish and Greek followers.
6. Jewish leaders of the day hated Him.
7. Pilate had Him executed.
8. He was executed via crucifixion.
9. This was carried out during Pontus Pilates term as Governor.

***There exists not even one ancient record of any person denying the existence of Jesus Christ, even among those that were the enemies of the Gospel and hated the new religion. Not one contemporary Jew, Roman or Greek. Zero that claimed Jesus never existed or that He was simply a myth*.**

Another reference to Jesus was a pagan satirist called Lucian of Samosata (115-200AD). He also mentions "the Christians books" that you can reasonably assume to be The New Testament.

Lucian of Samosata

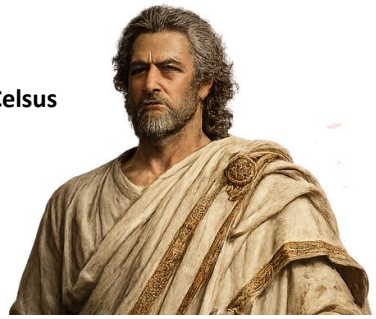
His work that references Jesus is titled "*The Passing of Peregrinus" The following is the reference, made in contempt, yet never questions that Jesus existed.*

"It was then that he learned the marvelous wisdom of the Christians, by associating with their priests and scribes in Palestine. And—what else?—in short order he made them look like children, for he was a prophet, cult leader, head of the congregation and everything, all by himself. He interpreted and explained some of their books, and wrote many himself. They revered him as a god, used him as a lawgiver, and set him down as a protector—to be sure, after that other whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world. For having convinced themselves that they are going to be immortal and live forever, the poor wretches despise death and most even willingly give themselves up. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshiping that crucified sophist himself and living according to his laws."

Here are some more very early references to the actual person of Jesus.

Celsus c.175AD, the Platonist philosopher, considered Jesus to be a magician who made exorbitant claims.

Celsus



Pliny

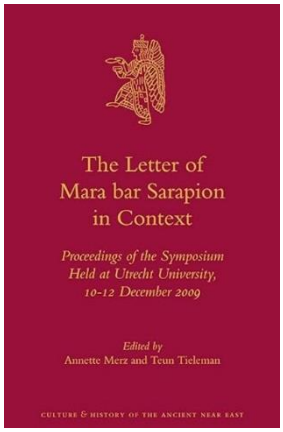
Pliny the Younger 61-113AD, *(a Roman governor and friend of Tacitus*)**, wrote about early Christian worship of Christ "as to a god."**

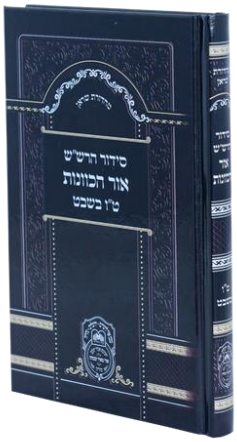
Suetonius

Suetonius, a Roman writer, lawyer and historian, wrote of riots in 49 AD among Jews in Rome which most likely had been *about Christus* but which he thought were incited *by* "the instigator Chrestus," whose identification with Jesus is not completely certain, most historians feel he simply got the name wrong.

Mara bar Serapion, a prisoner of war held by the Romans, wrote a letter to his son that described "the wise Jewish king" in a way that seems to indicate Jesus but does not specify his identity.

Mishna/Gemara written by Jewish Rabbi's circa 200 AD, portray Him as a wizard/sorcerer as does The Jewish Talmud, but never questions that Jesus existed.





Of course, for those of us that believe in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, the eye witness testimony of the writers of the New Testament, along with the Martyrs of the early church rather than to recant, suffices beyond a shadow of a doubt. Fox's Book of Martyrs documents 1,000 martyrs for everyday on the calendar excepting January 1st. That's a tremendous group of Martyrs, many of whom died in the 1st century, who could escape merely through recantation. Just by saying, "we made it up," but would rather die.
You should be aware also that today in, 2023, 2.2 billion people on earth believe not only that He existed, but also that He is The Son of God, The Messiah, the Second Person in The Trinity, and that He has changed their lives. I am one of them.

So, in conclusion we have:

1. Flavius Josephus (c. 93–94 CE): A 1st-century Jewish-Roman historian. He mentions Jesus twice in Antiquities of the Jews: A reference calling James "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ" (almost universally accepted by scholars as authentic). The Testimonium Flavianum, which records Jesus' execution under Pontius Pilate and his role as a teacher. (Though later Christian scribes added minor interpolations, most modern scholars agree an authentic core text by Josephus sits underneath).

2. Tacitus (c. 116 CE): A premier Roman historian who recorded in his Annals that "Christus" suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate.

3. Suetonius (c.49) who wrote of the riots in Rome being falsely blamed on Jesus followers. (c. 121 CE): A Roman biographer who noted in Lives of the Twelve Caesars that Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome due to disturbances instigated by "Chrestus" (a common early spelling variant of Christ).

4. Pliny the Younger (c. 112 CE): A Roman governor who wrote letters to Emperor Trajan detailing his interrogations of early Christians who sang hymns "to Christ as to a god."

5. Mara bar Serapion (post-73 CE): A Stoic philosopher from Syria who wrote a letter to his son comparing the executions of Socrates, Pythagoras, and the "wise King" of the Jews.

6. Lucian of Samosata (c. 165 CE): A Syrian-Greek satirist who wrote critically about the man crucified in Palestine who initiated the Christian movement.

8. Rabbinic Literature (The Mishna Gemara/Talmud): Compiled across later centuries, several passages in the Babylonian Talmud preserve traditions referring to Yeshu as a figure who gathered followers and was executed on the eve of Passover.

Primary Early Christian Sources:
From a historical methodology perspective, early Christian texts written within living memory of the events are evaluated as primary documentary evidence:

9. The Epistles of Paul (c. 48–62 AD): Written starting roughly 15 to 25 years after Jesus' death. Paul mentions personally meeting Jesus' inner circle, including his apostle Peter and his brother James.

10. The Four Canonical Gospels (c. 35–100 AD): **Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John** serve as four distinct ancient biographies (bios). Scholars treat the sources behind them (such as the early oral traditions and hypothetical earlier source documents) as multiple independent attestations.

11. Early Apostolic Fathers (c. 90–120 AD): Writings from early church figures like **Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch**, who lived in the late 1st century and cited traditions about Jesus' life and leadership. **Polycarp, Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Hippolytus, Origen, Evaristus, Linus, Sixtus, Hermas, the Didache etc.**

Scholarly Consensus:
Because of this multi-layered framework of independent texts—spanning supportive, hostile, and neutral secular authors—the overwhelming consensus among modern secular and religious historians is that a historical Jewish man named Jesus of Nazareth lived in 1st-century Judea and was executed by Pontius Pilate.

And most important of all….the empty tomb. DH