

DID JESUS EVEN EXIST? THE PROBLEMATIC ARGUMENT FROM SILENCE

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Many of Christianity's online critics opine the notion that Jesus never even existed. These individuals generally fall either into atheist or New Age camps. Part of their argumentation involves an argument from silence. In brief, this argument states that Jesus did not exist, because no contemporary writer ever mentions Jesus. Proponents of this view emphasize that many contemporary authors would have written about Jesus, if Jesus truly performed miracles and had such a massive following. The reality, however, is that this argument is a logical fallacy. Although an argument from silence can be logically valid in some cases, it is not legitimate when applied to the question of Jesus's existence.

This article contends that the standard methods historians use to draw conclusions regarding antiquity can be applied to Jesus, showing it is reasonable to concur with the vast majority of scholars that Jesus existed during the first century C.E. By "Jesus" I mean a Jewish man who was crucified under Pontius Pilate's authority during the reign of Tiberius Caesar. This Jesus was also a reputed miracle worker. For the purposes of this article, I will not assume that the New Testament gospels are factually accurate in every single detail that they describe. Instead, I will approach these texts the way the majority of scholars approach them: They are ancient documents and historians must apply careful methodological principles when mining through the gospels' material. I will expound upon those methods below.

The discussion will begin with a crash course on ancient history and the basic methodological principles historians use to study ancient history. Second, focus will be directed on details that early Roman sources provide concerning the early Christian

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movement and I will use them to reconstruct a picture of the apostle Paul's historical position in the first century C.E. Third, I shall conduct a brief survey of the data Paul provides concerning Jesus. Fourth, I will discuss some additional Jewish material that corroborates what the New Testament sources teach concerning Jesus.

Ancient History

In a perfect world, scholars would possess written documents from most of the ancient people who ever lived. In an ideal world, historians who study antiquity would have reports from writers who either knew the person under analysis or knew their close friends or family members. Unfortunately, however, these ideals are rarely the case for most ancient individuals. Although ancient authors generally valued eyewitness testimony and consulted eyewitnesses whenever possible while compiling their various histories, many Greek, Roman, and Jewish historical accounts are nevertheless predicated upon secondhand reports at best.

W. Walbank notes that Greek historians typically did not identify their sources.²² Thucydides (460-404 B.C.E.?) is one example. His exact date of death is unknown. M. I. Finley says, "All that we know about Thucydides is found in the few scraps he tells us about himself, and in a short, eccentric and unreliable biography from late antiquity credited to someone named Marcellinus."²³ Betty Radice relays, "For much of the period he describes *The Peloponnesian War* is the only source that survives."²⁴ Thucydides frequently relied on secondhand information and he never named his informants. Finley

²² Polybius *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert, selected with an introduction by F. W. Walbank (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 33.

²³ Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner with an Introduction and Notes by M. I. Finley (Penguin Books, 1954, 1972), p. 9.

²⁴ Ibid., very first page.

explains, “Unlike Herodotus, Thucydides never names his informants, and on only two occasions does he say that he was a direct participant: he suffered from the plague and he was a general at Amphipolis.”²⁵

Polybius’s (circa 200-118 B.C.E.) exact birth date is uncertain.²⁶ Polybius preferred to be an eyewitness himself to the events he records or to obtain his information from people who were eyewitnesses (*Histories* IV.2.2). Polybius, however, writes about events pre-dating his time in the first two books of his work titled *The Rise of the Roman Empire*.²⁷ These two books briefly recount the events of the First Punic War, the subsequent war between Carthage and its mercenary army in revolt, and the construction of a Carthaginian empire in Spain. They also report on what occurred in Greece, such as Achaea’s rise and the war between the Achaean League and Cleomenes of Sparta, which led to Macedonia’s acquisition of southern Greece.²⁸ He claims that he consulted sources, but, nevertheless, all of these events predated Polybius. Moreover, historians no longer have access to Polybius’s purported sources.

Cornelius Tacitus was born circa 56 C.E. Tacitus’s version of events from the first century C.E., which he discusses in his *Annals*, (114-120 C.E.) likewise must be deemed second hand reporting. Even though Tacitus was born around 56 C.E., he purports to narrate events that occurred in the years 14-54 C.E. in books One through Six and books Eleven and Twelve (the intermediary books are missing).

Josephus was born in 37 C.E. but his date of death is unknown.²⁹ Books 1-17 of the 20 books of *Antiquities of the Jews*

²⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁶ Polybius *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, p. 12.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 23, 32.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

²⁹ *Josephus The Jewish War*, trans. G. A. Williamson, Revised with a new introduction, notes and appendixes, by E. Mary Smallwood (New York: Penguin Books, 1959, 1970, 1981), pp. 9, 13.

pertain to events and people predating Josephus's birth. Excepting the introduction section in which Josephus briefly introduces his reasons for writing *The Jewish War*, Book 1 of *The Jewish War* focuses on events and individuals that predated Josephus's time as well. Moreover, Josephus does not identify any of his sources in *The Jewish War*.³⁰ *Vita*, which is attributed to Josephus, says Josephus came from royalty (*Vita* 1). *The Jewish War* also claims Josephus resisted the Romans in Galilee and that the Roman general Vespasian sought to capture Josephus because Josephus had generated so much trouble for the Roman forces in Galilee (*The Jewish War* 3.340-347). Vespasian eventually became friends with Josephus, allowing Josephus to live within Rome to write his books. Vespasian eventually became Emperor of Rome in 69 C.E.

Despite these impressive claims, including Josephus's imperial tie to Emperor Vespasian, no other first century C.E. writer ever mentions Josephus or even the Jewish Revolt or "War" against the Romans. It is not until the next century that Roman authors even hint that there was a considerable struggle against the Jews in the first century C.E. Also, although archaeologists have recovered remains in Galilee suggestive of some battles, they have uncovered nothing to render the conclusion there was an actual war against the Romans. Mordechai Aviam, distinct archaeologist for eastern Galilee in the 'Akko office of the Israel Antiquities Authority, explains:

The problem of human remains from battle sites of the Revolt is well known. Besides Yodefat, three such sites have been excavated: Masada, Gamla, and Jerusalem. Only a very few human remains have been found at each. At Masada, a few skeletal remains were found in the northern palace and some complete skeletons were found in a cave below the cliff (Yadin 1966; Zias, Segal, and Carmi 1994; Zias 1998). From Jerusalem, only the bones of a human arm were found (at the 'Burnt House'; Avigad 1980: 123). From Gamla there is one

³⁰ *Josephus The Jewish War Books I-II*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. xix.

human jawbone (see p. 151). The preliminary finds from Yodefat were somewhat more numerous, though not substantially so.³¹

Aviam concludes that, “the number of the dead given by Josephus is without doubt highly exaggerated.”³² The archaeological evidence hardly corroborates the assertion that “the war of the Jews against the Romans was the greatest of our time; greater too, perhaps, than any recorded struggle whether between cities or nations.”³³

Despite this lack of external contemporary written attestation to Josephus’s existence and the First Jewish Revolt’s reality, Josephus’s writings remain the only first century sources of data about the vast majority of Judaea’s history as a whole. E. Mary Smallwood sums up the situation historians are left to deal with succinctly: “Thus not only for the war of 66-70 but also for the history of the province of Judaea, and for the story of the reigns of Herod the Great, his sons and his grandson, Josephus stands virtually alone, and must be judged on his own merits.”³⁴

Regardless of the resounding silence of contemporary Jewish and Roman writers, virtually no historian disputes that Josephus existed and that the First Jewish Revolt occurred. Using the common Christ-Myth requirement for external written contemporary attestation, however, one must necessarily conclude that Josephus did not exist and that there was never really a First Jewish Revolt against the Romans. Moreover, those who adhere to this criteria must dismiss many of the events—not necessarily all the characters—that are described in 17 of the 20 books attributed to Josephus in the *Antiquities*. Indeed, one could argue that all of the writings

³¹ Mordechai Aviam, “Yodefat/Jotapata: The Archaeology of the First Battle,” in *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, history, and ideology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 130.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

³³ *Josephus The Jewish War*, trans. G. A. Williamson, Preface, p. 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

attributed to Josephus were probably Roman forgeries, which they utilized as propaganda to intimidate the Jews, hoping to discourage the Jews from engaging in an actual war against the Romans. Recall the archaeological evidence suggests there were some minor battles between Jews and Romans. Indeed, Smallwood observes that the full title of *The Jewish War*, “views it from the Roman angle as a war fought against the Jews,”³⁵ suggesting Roman authorship. I henceforth refuse to accept any evidence attributed solely to Josephus, or any other ancient writer who relies on secondhand reports, from anyone who relies on the Christ-Myth method of external contemporary written attestation. The same applies to the relevant examples from history I reference above and any others of similar nature. In fact, there is no record of any anti-Christian writer ever questioning Jesus’s existence in either antiquity or late antiquity.

Historians’ Methodological Criteria

Due to the uncertain nature of a lot of history, such as the illustrations above, historians have devised some methodological principles that most historians agree should be applied to available sources. First, historians place preference on the earliest sources available, not necessarily contemporary sources. They strive to determine if the available sources reference or quote earlier sources as their informants, even though those sources themselves are not always available for analysis.

Second, whenever possible, historians frequently use the criterion of independent attestation.³⁶ The general logic behind this tool is that an event or person mentioned in several independent documents is more likely to be historical than an event or person mentioned in only one (They cannot always take advantage of this criterion, though, in the cases such as the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 192.

ones I mentioned above). Third, historians use the “criterion of contextual credibility” in an effort to determine how well a described event or person fits into the historical context the document purports to describe.

Finally, historians apply the principle of embarrassment, trusting that a writer typically would not include details that could potentially be embarrassing for his or her case. Not all events and historical figures meet all of these criteria, but historians do not automatically throw out historical personages’ existence or events’ occurrences as long as they meet at least some of them. My method for examining history incorporates these criteria throughout the rest of this analysis. One can apply most of the above criteria to Jesus much more effectively than they can to many other religious teachers.

All available information concerning multiple other reputed ancient religious teachers, such as Confucius, Honi the Circle Drawer, Hanina ben Dosa, Rabbi Hillel, and Rabbi Shammai is rooted in non-contemporary testimonies. There is no surviving eyewitness account for any of these religious figures. All details pertaining to Confucius stem from possibly from his followers and, more probable, their followers.³⁷ The first biography of Confucius dates 400 years after his life.³⁸ Honi, Hanina ben Dosa, Rabbi Hillel, and Rabbi Shammai were Jews and only Jewish sources mention them later (100-300 years later). All of the data above is why the vast majority of scholars conclude Jesus existed.

Evidence For the Apostle Paul’s Existence

In this section I will explain how an amalgamation of multiple lines of data imply that Paul existed in the mid-first century

³⁷ *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Wing-Tsit Chan, Translator and Compiler (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 19.

³⁸ Patrick S. Bresnan. *Awakening: An Introduction to the History of Eastern Thought. Second Edition* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003, 1999), p. 127.

C.E. I shall start reconstructing the historical situation by considering how secular sources viewed early Christians. Next, I will consider some early Christian testimony to Paul's life and authorship activities in the first century. Finally, I will compare some content in Paul's epistles to some cultural data in first century C.E. Corinth.

Tacitus briefly mentions Christians and "Christus" around 115 C.E. during his discussion of Rome burning in 64 C.E. Tacitus writes: "And so, to get rid of this rumor Nero set up as culprits and punished with the utmost cruelty a class *hated for their abominations*, who are commonly called Christians. *Christus*, from whom their name is derived, was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius (14-37 C.E.)" (*Annals* 15.44). Some people object that *Annals* 15.44 inappropriately calls Pontius Pilate a "procurator," so a Christian forger must have added this reference. However, first century Jewish authors Josephus (*War of the Jews* 2.9.2) and Philo of Alexandria (in *Legatio ad Gaium* 38) similarly call Pontius Pilate a procurator, too. In his account of the Jews' war against the Romans (66-70 C.E.).

Tacitus explains that the group called "Christians" derived its name from a person named Christus, who Pontius Pilate crucified sometime between 14 and 37 C.E. In the same passage, Tacitus also associates Christians with a "pernicious superstition" that originated in Judaea and spread to Rome. He further reports that the Christians were also persecuted during Nero's period (*Annals* 15.44).

Another Roman historian, Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, who was born in 70 C.E., also writes about how Christians were punished during Nero's reign, saying, "punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a set of men adhering to *a new and mischievous superstition*" (*Life of Nero* xvi). Suetonius indicates Christians espoused some kind of "superstition" that was new around Nero's reign (64 C.E.). This is consistent with Tacitus's report that Christians' founder was executed in the early (14-37 C.E.) first century. Suetonius's testimony also implies Christians were facing some type of persecution in the first century.

Pliny the Younger was born in 62 C.E. in Comum, a town at the base of the Alps near present-day Milan.³⁹ Pliny provides additional material regarding Christians in his *Letter to Trajan* 10.96, which he authored in 112 C.E.⁴⁰ Unlike Tacitus and Suetonius, Pliny is writing about Christians living in the early second century, asking for advice on how to treat them. Pliny mentions that he had tortured “two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses.” Romans 16:1 similarly mentions a woman being a deacon and Philippians 1:1 refers to other people in a church being called deacons. Pliny indicates that Christians’ presence had led to a drop in sacrificial animal sales and caused a significant reduction in attendance at pagan temples. This is consistent with the teachings in 1 Corinthians 8:4 and 1 Corinthians 12:2 that there is only one God and that people should not worship any other deities. These references in 1 Corinthians indicate that Paul strongly discouraged Christians from worshipping other gods. The Christians Pliny interacts with similarly refuse to worship other deities, which suggests they were familiar with Paul’s ideas. Yet, the Christians Pliny mentions “sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ as to a god.” In fact, Bart Ehrman explains that, “Many scholars believe that several of the earliest hymns to Christ have been inserted by the authors of the New Testament in appropriate places of their writings (e.g., John 1:1-18).”⁴¹ Ehrman briefly discusses Philippians 2:6-11 as one example, writing, “It has all the marks of an early hymn sung in worship to Christ, and Paul quotes it in full because it makes an important point for his Philippian readers (cf. the prologue of the Fourth Gospel).”⁴² Many New Testament scholars, in other words, believe the epistles attributed to Paul preserved some pre-Pauline hymns

³⁹ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them, Second Edition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings. Fourth Edition* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 350.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 351-352.

that were intended to serve as worship of Jesus. The early Christians, including Paul, believed that only God should be worshipped, so their decision to worship Jesus suggests that they considered Jesus to be divine.

Pliny additionally reports that the Christians “partake of food--but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.” 1 Corinthians similarly mentions the recipients coming together “as a church” to eat a special meal called “the Lord’s supper” (1 Cor. 11:18-21). Pliny does not use the same terminology, but his description suffices to show Christians consumed food together at a particular time.

The rituals, beliefs, and leadership positions in church structure among the Christians that Pliny describes are virtually identical to those found in the letters that the vast majority of scholars attribute to the apostle Paul. The particular Christians that Pliny deals with did not originate any of these elements. This means someone else had founded these things. In fact, Pliny reveals that these ingredients predated 112 C.E. by “as much as twenty-five years ago.” This traces these elements as far back as 87 C.E. (first century C.E.).

First Clement is a first century (mid-90s C.E.) Roman Christian epistle. It attributes itself to Christians in Rome writing to Christians in Corinth.⁴³ First Clement 5 states:

But to stop giving ancient examples, let us come to those who became athletic contenders in quite recent times. We should consider the noble examples of our own generation. Because of jealousy and envy the greatest and most upright pillars were persecuted, and they struggled in the contest even to death. We should set before our eyes the good apostles. There is Peter, who because of unjust jealousy bore up under hardships not just once or twice, but many times; and having thus borne his witness he went to the place of glory that he deserved. Because of jealousy and strife Paul pointed the way to the prize for endurance. Seven times he bore

⁴³ *The Apostolic Fathers Vol. I, Loeb Classical Library*, ed. and trans. Bart D. Ehrman (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 25.

chains; he was sent into exile and stoned; he served as a herald in both the East and the West; and he received the noble reputation for his faith. He taught righteousness to the whole world, and came to the limits of the West, bearing his witness before the rulers. And so he was set free from this world and transported up to the holy place, having become the greatest example of endurance.⁴⁴

This chapter is a goldmine of information. The author indicates that Paul and Peter lived “in quite recent times” and relays the apostles Paul and Peter were “examples of our own generation.” It also specifies that both Paul and Peter suffered on multiple occasions.

First Clement, like Pliny the Younger, Philippians 1:1, and Romans 16:1, also refers to deacons. 1 Clement 42.1-4 states:

The apostles were given the gospel for us by the Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. Thus Christ came from God and the apostles from Christ. Both things happened, then, in an orderly way according to the will of God. When, therefore, the apostles received his commands and were fully convinced through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and persuaded by the word of God, they went forth proclaiming the good news that the Kingdom of God was about to come, brimming with confidence through the Holy Spirit. And as they preached throughout the countryside and in the cities, they appointed the first fruits of their ministries as bishops and deacons of those who were about to believe, testing them by the Spirit.⁴⁵

First Clement 42, thus, reports that Jesus’s apostles appointed the first bishops and deacons. 1 Clement 47 reveals that Paul authored an epistle addressed to the Corinthians. First Clement 47.1-3 says:

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 43, 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 109, 111.

Take up the epistle of that blessed apostle, Paul. What did he write to you at first, at the beginning of his proclamation of the gospel? To be sure, he sent you a letter in the Spirit concerning himself and Cephas and Apollos, since you were even then engaged in partisanship.⁴⁶

This is material found in 1 Corinthians 1:12, which says, “What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul’, or ‘I belong to Apollos’, or ‘I belong to Cephas’, or ‘I belong to Christ.’” Corinth was inhabited during the mid-first century C.E. The Romans founded a colony at Corinth circa 44 BCE.⁴⁷ Even though Jews were not as prevalent in Corinth as Romans, there is nevertheless evidence that Jewish colonists lived in Corinth prior to 67 C.E. Benjamin W. Millis writes, “Philo includes Corinth in a list of places with Jewish colonies”⁴⁸ (*Quod Est De Legatione Ad Gaium* 281-282)⁴⁹. Philo of Alexandria lived from approximately 20 BCE to about 50 C.E.⁵⁰

First Corinthians contains some material that may imply the author is familiar with at least one major aspect of life in first century C.E. Corinth. In his article “The Apostle Paul and the Isthmian Games” the recently deceased archaeologist and University of Chicago professor Oscar Broneer argues that the Isthmia Games, which were held at the temple dedicated to Poseidon at Isthmia near Corinth, influenced some of Paul’s athletic illustrations.⁵¹ Specifically, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 says:

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

⁴⁷ Benjamin W. Millis, “The Social and Ethnic Origins of the Colonists in Early Roman Corinth,” in *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society*, ed. Steven J. Friesen, Daniel N. Schowalter, and James C. Walters (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), p. 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁹ *The Works of Philo Complete and Unabridged New Updated Edition*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), pp. 782-783.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. xi.

⁵¹ Oscar Broneer, “The Apostle Paul and the Isthmian Games,” in *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Feb., 1962), pp. 16-17.

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

Broneer explains that races (1 Cor. 9:24) were one of the events held during the Isthmia Games. He also highlights the phrase, “perishable garland” in 1 Cor. 9:25, hypothesizing that Paul may envision the wreath crown awarded to winners of the Isthmian Games.⁵² “Perishable” comes from the Greek term *phthartos*, which can be translated as “corruptible” or “perishable.” “Garland” (1 Cor. 9:25) comes from the Greek word *stephanos*, which means “a prize awarded in the public games” or “crown.” Broneer posits that Paul may utilize this analogy from the Isthmia Games, because he is aware that his letter’s recipients were familiar with those games. This information, therefore, serves as evidence that the author of 1 Corinthians is familiar with ancient Corinth’s culture. Both external and internal evidence indicates that Paul existed sometime in the mid-first century C.E. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the majority of historians agree that Paul was a real person. In addition to 1 Corinthians, the vast majority of scholars also attribute 2 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon to Paul.⁵³ I will limit my analysis in the third section to these epistles.

Paul’s Comments About Jesus

Paul preserves the earliest historical information concerning Jesus. Paul indicates that he revised his religious views after an experience that he interpreted as being the risen Jesus appearing to him (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:9). The very issue that Paul joined a

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament*, p. 293.

movement that he formerly persecuted must be accounted for (Gal. 1:23). The Christian understanding of Jesus succeeds in doing so quite easily. Paul relays that Jesus was born and raised as a Jew (Gal. 4:4) and that Jesus was one of Abraham's and David's descendants (Gal. 3:16; Rom. 1:3). Paul also reports that Jesus had a brother named James (Gal. 1:19). Josephus likewise mentions a man named James, identifying him as being "the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ" (*Antiq.* 20.200). In fact, Paul says he personally saw Jesus's brother on multiple occasions (Gal. 1:19; 2:9) and that he had at least one conversation with him in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). Mark 6:3 and *Antiquities* 20.200 corroborate Paul's report. Mark 6:3 states, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him." Utilizing the criterion of embarrassment, it is reasonable to conclude Jesus probably had a brother named James, because this information is potentially damaging to the book's portrait of Jesus. Not even the people Jesus supposedly grew up with believed in Jesus, according to Mark 6:3. Therefore, although this does not guarantee anything else is accurate in Mark, it does suggest that the detail that Jesus had a brother named James is correct. Concerning, *Antiquities* 20.200, the vast majority of scholars concur that the phrase, "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James" is authentic.⁵⁴

Some people online have claimed Josephus is referring to Jesus, the son of Damneus instead, because Josephus mentions this Jesus at the end of this paragraph. Both the immediate and larger context of the passage argues against this objection. First, the most straightforward reading indicates that Josephus names one Jesus, the one called Christ, to identify him as being the brother of James. Then, Josephus initiates a discussion of another Jesus by identifying this one as being the son of Damneus. The objection would be more compelling if

⁵⁴ *Josephus Jewish Antiquities Book XX General Index*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. Louis H. Feldman (Cambridge, Massachusetts/ London, England: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 108, Note a.

Josephus mentioned Jesus, the son of Damneus, earlier in this section before mentioning James, but he does not. Second, later on *Antiquities* 20.213 states, "And now Jesus, the son of Gamaliel, became the successor of Jesus, the son of Damneus." In this instance, Josephus mentions two men named Jesus consecutively in the same sentence. Surely, no one would conclude "the son of Gamaliel" is an interpolation merely because another man named Jesus is listed right after the first "Jesus." Therefore, there is no reason to conclude that "who was called Christ" is an interpolation in *Antiquities* 20.200 simply because Josephus includes the name "Jesus" twice in the same paragraph. Thus, on purely contextual grounds I agree with most scholars in their assessment that Josephus refers to a Jesus who was called Christ and that he had a brother named James.

Paul goes on to mention a group called "the twelve" (1 Cor. 15:5). Paul reports Jesus founded a memorial meal on the night when he was handed over (1 Cor. 11:23-25). He also declares Jesus died on a cross (Phil. 2:8). Crucifixion was a common Roman method of execution in the first century C.E. A number of important questions arise: Why would anyone invent a character that had allegedly been crucified? What could have possibly led the apostles to move away from viewing Jesus as being merely a crucified criminal or a man cursed by God to someone worthy of worship (i.e., Phil. 2:6-11)? Paul also says Jesus was buried (1 Cor. 15:4). Josephus likewise reports, "The Jews are so careful about funeral rites that even malefactors who have been sentenced to crucifixion are taken down and buried before sunset" (*The Jewish War* 4.317). The remains of a crucified victim named Yehohanan, who had been buried in a first century C.E. tomb, were discovered in 1968.⁵⁵ A nail was still wedged in the man's heel bone, because it was apparently too difficult to remove.

Paul also relays that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day (1 Cor. 15:4). After this, Jesus appeared to Cephas (Peter) and then to the twelve (1 Cor. 15:5). Paul reports that

⁵⁵ Joseph Zias and Eliezer Sekeles, "The Crucified Man from Giv'at ha-Mivtar: A Reappraisal," in *Israel Exploration Journal* 35 (1985): 22-27.

some of the people Jesus appeared to were still alive at the time of the epistle's writing (1 Cor. 15:6). Paul further says Jesus appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7) and, finally, to Paul (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8).

In addition, Paul also provides a clue to where he received at least some of his knowledge concerning Jesus. Paul declares that he is teaching the same message as the rest of the apostles (1 Cor. 15:9-11; Gal. 2:9). Although Paul declares he initially received the gospel from a revelation (Gal. 1:12), Paul says he later went up to Jerusalem to question Cephas (Peter) and that Paul stayed with him for 15 days (Gal. 1:18). The Greek term that Paul uses in Gal. 1:18 is *historesai*, which comes from the Greek verb *historeo* meaning "to learn by inquiry: to inquire of, question."⁵⁶ This is also the occasion on which Paul sees Jesus's brother, James (Gal. 1:19). Paul later returns to Jerusalem another time and meets with Cephas, James, and John in Jerusalem to ensure he has been preaching the correct message (Gal. 2:2-6). Cephas, James, and John all confirm that Paul is declaring the right content (Gal. 2:7-9).

Non-Christian Jewish Evidence For Jesus's Existence

Josephus provides other Jewish corroboration for Jesus's existence. In addition to the aforementioned section in which he identifies a man named James, who was the brother of the "so-called Christ" (*Antiquities* 20.200), Josephus provides additional supporting details in *Antiquities* 18.63-64. Contrary to the view commonly pontificated online, most scholars conclude that the first century C.E. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus also refers to Jesus in *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.63-64, which contains interpolations. Concerning *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.63-64, a small sampling of this scholarly majority includes: Bart Ehrman⁵⁷,

⁵⁶ Liddell & Scott Greek-English Lexicon Abridged Twenty-Sixth Edition Revised and Enlarged with An Appendix of Proper and Geographical Names prepared by George Ricker Berry, Ph.D. (Chicago, Illinois: Follett Publishing Company, 1949), p. 335.

⁵⁷ Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, pp. 227-228.

John Dominic Crossan⁵⁸, E. P. Sanders⁵⁹, Helen Bond⁶⁰, Geza Vermes⁶¹, and Paula Fredriksen. Fredriksen reports, “Most scholars currently incline to see the passage as basically authentic, with a few later insertions by a Christian scribe.”⁶² None of the material I mention below is one of the interpolations.

First, Josephus indicates that Jesus was reputed to have been a wise man. Second, Josephus relays that Jesus was a doer of wonders. The Gospel of Mark likewise identifies Jesus as being some kind of wonder-worker. Specifically, Mark 3:22 states, “And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.’” Utilizing the principle of embarrassment again, one can deduce that Jesus was some sort of exorcist, because this brief account portrays Jesus’s acts in an embarrassing way—his abilities are associated with evil forces. This does not demonstrate that the Gospel of Mark is historically reliable as a source overall, but it does lend credence to the view that Mark preserves earlier material in this case. In addition to Josephus and Mark, “Q,” which is what most scholars deem to have been a source containing material in Matthew and Luke, but that is absent in Mark, depicts Jesus as being an exorcist and a healer, too. Q 7:2-3, 6-10 relays a story about Jesus healing a centurion’s slave of a life-threatening illness. Q 11:14 records

⁵⁸ John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), pp. 161, 134.

⁵⁹ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 50.

⁶⁰ Helen Bond, “Josephus in Recent Research” in *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 8 (2000), 179. (2000), p. 179. See also Bond’s forthcoming monograph *The Historical Jesus: A Guide For the Perplexed*.

⁶¹ Geza Vermes, “The Jesus Notice of Josephus Re-examined,” in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987): 1-10.

⁶² Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 249.

Jesus casting out a demon that had earlier caused a man to be mute. Q 7:21-22 similarly states, “In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight.” Thus, Josephus, Mark, and possibly “Q” provide multiple attestation to Jesus’s reputation as some kind of wonder worker. Third, Josephus reports that Jesus drew many people after him. Fourth, Josephus testifies that Pilate condemned Jesus to be crucified as a result of some Jewish leaders’ input. Finally, Josephus reports Christians were still around during Josephus’s time period.

Conclusion

In closing, using historians’ understanding of, and approaches to, ancient history in general, one can effectively demonstrate a man named Jesus lived. If one applies the Christ-Myth mandate for external contemporary attestation consistently across the historical spectrum, one is forced to dismiss historical information provided by Thucydides, Polybius, Tacitus, and Josephus. Moreover, one must conclude the First Jewish War never happened, and even that Josephus never existed, because no other first century writer ever mentions the war or Josephus.

Multiple Roman sources provide sufficient evidence on the early Christian movement, enabling one to reconstruct the approximate period and cultural setting in which the apostle Paul lived in the first century C.E. Paul provides adequate information to confirm that Jesus existed. Unlike Thucydides, Paul names the sources he consulted to obtain information from. Two of these sources were apostles and one was Jesus’s own brother, James. In addition, non-Christian sources corroborate the core Christian descriptions of Jesus. Therefore, using standard historical methods, it is reasonable to concur with the vast majority of historians that Jesus existed during the first century C.E.