

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Did Jesus ever exist?

(Jerry Fite)

What do you believe about Jesus? If you ask me, I believe Jesus is the Son of God, who came to earth to save man from sin, and is presently at the right hand of the throne of God in Heaven (*John 20:30-31, Luke 19:10; Hebrews 12:2*). However to many, reaching such conclusions is a little premature. You are basing your conviction on what is declared in one Book, the Bible (*Romans 10:17*).

Could the writers be biased? Is there any secular sources providing historical evidence that Jesus actually lived? Are these non-Christian sources? Do we have evidence from maybe hostile sources instead of His friends?

Cornelius Tacitus was Roman senator and respected historian who lived from A.D.55/56 – 118). In his last major work titled *Annals* (116-117 A.D.), he writes of Nero being suspected of setting part of Rome on fire where he wanted to carry out a building project, and shifts the blame to Christians.

“...The founder of this name, Christ (Christus in Latin), had been executed in the reign of

Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate” (*Translated from Latin by Robert Van Voorst; Biblical Archaeology Review; Vol. 41; No. 1; January/February 2015; p. 46*).

Tacitus was no friend of Christ, nor of his followers called Christians. Yet, in recording events in the life of Nero, he validates Jesus’ actual earthly existence, and the historical accuracy of the Biblical accounts of Jesus. Jesus was put to death or executed in the days of the Emperor Tiberius (A.D. 14-37) by the order of Pilate (*cf. Luke 3:1, John 19:1, 15-16*).

Around A.D. 73 Mara Bar-Serapion, a philosopher wrote to encourage his son:

“What benefit did the Athenians obtain by putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as judgment for their crime. Or, the people of Samos for burning Pythagoras? In one moment their country was covered with sand. Or the Jews by murdering their wise king?...After that their kingdom was abolished. God rightly avenged these men...The wise king...lived on in the teachings he enacted.”

The Jews putting to death the “wise king”, who had a lasting influence on others after his death is a strong reference to Jesus. No doubt the reference to the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) was a recent historical event to bolster Mara’s argument regarding the consequences of putting their “wise king” to death. This stoic philosopher included this “wise king” alongside two other historically verifiable men: Socrates and Pythagoras.

Lucian of Samosata was a 2nd. Century Greek satirist. In writing of “*Peregrinus*”, a Christian turned Cynic and revolutionary, makes a definite reference to Jesus without naming Him:

“They revered him as a god, used him as a lawgiver, and set him down as a protector...the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world.”

Lucian is no Christian apologetic, for later in “*The Passing of Peregrinus*” he calls those who worship this god, lawgiver and protector “*poor wretches*”. Without trying to, these secular and even hostile writers attest to Jesus and the truth of the New Testament.