

No one noticed Jesus in his day.

As most of the readers of this article know, Christian apologists, world-wide, have “pointed with pride” to a handful of early extra-biblical writings which directly mention Jesus, John the Baptist, and/or James the Just, a.k.a. James the Brother of the Lord as a real first-century historical persons. “Ah ha,” they say. “Since you skeptics erroneously believe that the four Gospels are works of fiction, how can you account for these writings of reliable, unbiased historians who wrote about or referred to Jesus at or very near the time when he was alive?”

Just to mention the one “main gun” that Christian apologist have been firing at us skeptics for the past 1,800 years, (The difficulty of defending the Gospels has been a well-recognized problem for the church since they first were apparently “noticed” by anyone around the middle of the second century.), I will briefly discuss the famous “Testimonium Flavium.” This Latin phrase refers to a single paragraph of about twelve sentences which appears to most critics to have been inserted awkwardly between two paragraphs which make perfectly good sense without the insertion. The reference is in a book by the well-known first century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus [37 - c95 CE]. The reference is contained in his book, *The Antiquities of the Jews*. This book is—appropriately enough for the reference to be contained in—a book about the early history of the Jews in the area where Jesus is supposed to have preached, and in the time when he was supposedly alive.

As Frank R. Zindler says, “Although Flavius Josephus was born too late to be an eyewitness of the lives of Jesus or John the Baptist nevertheless he was a contemporary of the evangelists [assuming they existed] who wrote of these characters. He should have heard of Paul [if he existed, whom he never mentions]. Furthermore, from his priest-craft father, Matthias [b 6 CE] he should have known about the religious ferment supposedly stirred up by the doings of Jesus.” (Zindler, Frank R., *The Jesus The Jews Never Knew*, p. 35). Yet this well-respected historian mentions none of this with the single exception of the paragraph referred to above. In that paragraph only, he names a man called Jesus. “He was the Christ,” Josephus is made to say. He was a “doer of wonderful works” and that “Pilate condemned him to the cross.” The paragraph concludes that, “The tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.” “This day” would be about the year 90 CE, approximately when Josephus wrote his history book. This phrase, at the very least, is an obvious later interpolation as there was no “tribe of Christians” during Josephus’s time. Christianity did not get off the ground until the second century.

It is also interesting that the mention of this particular Jesus, “Jesus the Christ,” is divulged by Josephus with no more emphasis than he gives to the other 20 Jesuses he speaks of in his writings. (See Leidner, Harold, *The Fabrication of the Christ Myth*, p. 19 - 20).

In summary, let me just say that the single paragraph referred to above has been one of the most thoroughly researched and debated topics in all of biblical criticism. Those that want a more detailed analysis can refer to Zindler’s entire chapter on it in the above cited book, (“Faking Flavius”, p. 31 to 73.) Additionally, Earl Doherty’s book supporting the mythical Christ theory, *The Jesus Puzzle* discusses this and other early likely Christian interpolations in chapter 21, “Flavius Josephus” p. 205 to 222. Referring to another oft-quoted reference to Jesus in the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus [c55CE-c120 CE], Doherty says, “If the silence on Jesus in the earlier works of both Tacitus and Josephus casts doubt on the authenticity of their later references, then we truly have lost every clear non-Christian reference to Jesus as a human being [emphasis added] before the latter half of the second century.” (p. 222)

Think about that sentence for a minute. Dozens of books of Christian apologists will offer long lists of citations about Jesus from early writings. However, most of these citations refer to either clearly awkwardly done interpolations, whereas others were written by authors who lived anywhere from a century and a half up to several centuries past the time when Jesus was supposed to have lived. These quotations referring to Jesus and other Gospel characters simply repeat stories that the writer has heard from other Jesus cult enthusiasts. As such, they are of no value whatsoever.

In addition to the above noted refutation of the most important references to a supposed historical Jesus written near Jesus’ time, I should also mention at least two “deafening silences” by highly regarded writers of the same time period. I am referring to the writings of Philo, an eminent Jewish philosopher and historian who lived during the early first century, and Justus of Tiberias, a native of Galilee who wrote a history covering the period in which Jesus is said to have lived.

Neither one of them ever mentioned a “Jesus.” The works of Justus have all perished now. However, we have the writings of a ninth century Christian Bishop and scholar of Constantinople, Photius, who says that he had read Justus’ works. He reports, in utter amazement one might imagine, that, “He (Justus) makes not the least mention of the appearance of Christ, of what things happened to him, or of the wonderful works he did.” (Jackson, J. G., Pagan Origins of the Jesus Myth, p. 8.) Personally, I find that quote absolutely jaw-dropping.