

CROSS EXAMINATION – WEEK 1: MURDER MYSTERY TAKE HOME INVESTIGATION GUIDE

CASE NUMBER: #00033AD
CASE STATUS: OPEN

Thank you for joining us in Week 1 of our investigative series, 'Cross Examination.' This guide is designed to help you reflect, research, and investigate further into the case of Jesus' crucifixion. Use it individually or as a family discussion tool.

YOUR NEXT STEPS

- Continue your investigation this week. Read one of the historical sources.
- Discuss your thoughts with a friend or family member.
- Stay connected with us on social media to stay updated on the case
- Scan the QR code below to access additional resources and recommended readings.



**EVIDENCE
DRAWER**



**MEET THE
SUSPECTS**

CASE OVERVIEW: WAS IT MURDER OR JUSTICE?



JESUS

Jesus of Nazareth was accused of two crimes:

- Blasphemy: Claiming to be the Son of God.
- Insurrection: Rebelling against Rome.

Based on the evidence, was He guilty of these charges or was He wrongfully convicted?

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE: DID JESUS REALLY EXIST?

The following non-biblical historical sources mention Jesus and His crucifixion. Under each source, take notes on how this evidence strengthens the historical validity of Jesus' life and death.

- **Flavius Josephus (Jewish historian, c. 93 AD)**

- **Tacitus (Roman historian, c. 116 AD)**

- **Pliny the Younger (Roman governor, c. 112 AD)**

- **The Babylonian Talmud (Jewish commentary, c. 500 AD)**

- **Lucian of Samosata (Greek satirist, c. 165 AD)**

- **Mara bar Serapion (philosopher, c. 73 AD)**

Challenge: How does this strengthen or challenge your understanding of His existence?

WHO WANTED JESUS DEAD? THE SUSPECTS & MOTIVES



Caiaphas
(Religious Leader)



Annas
(Religious Leader)



Judas
(The Betrayer)



The Sanhedrin
(The Religious Court)



Pontius Pilate
(The Governor)



Herod Antipas
(The Political Figure)



The Roman Soldiers
(Executioners)



The Crowd
(Chose Barabbas)

Motives for the Crime:

- **Fear** - The religious leaders feared losing influence (John 11:48).
- **Jealousy** - Jesus' growing popularity (Mark 15:10).
- **Power** - The Romans and Jewish elite wanted control (Matthew 23:1-12; Matthew 21:12-13).

Reflection Question: Which suspect(s) do you think played the biggest role in Jesus execution and why?

PROPHETIC FORESHADOWING **THE MESSIAHS DEATH FORETOLD**

The Old Testament prophesied details of the Messiahs rejection, suffering, and death hundreds of years before Jesus. Here are just a few examples:

- Born of a Virgin - Isaiah 7:14 -> Fulfilled in Matthew 1:22-23
- Born in Bethlehem - Micah 5:2 -> Fulfilled in Matthew 2:1-6
- Rejected by His Own People - Isaiah 53:3 -> Fulfilled in John 1:11, Luke 4:16-30
- Betrayed for 30 Pieces of Silver - Zechariah 11:12-13 -> Fulfilled in Matthew 26:14-16, 27:3-10 - Silent Before His Accusers - Isaiah 53:7 -> Fulfilled in Matthew 27:12-14
- Crucified with Criminals - Isaiah 53:12 -> Fulfilled in Luke 23:32-33
- Pierced Hands & Feet - Psalm 22:16 -> Fulfilled in John 20:25-27
- The Suffering Servant - Isaiah 53:5 -> Fulfilled in Matthew 27:26-31

Using this information, fill out the prophecy & fulfillment timeline in your packet

Challenge: Read Isaiah 53 and compare it to the crucifixion account in Matthew 27. What stands out to you?

THE UNSOLVED MYSTERY: **WHERE IS THE BODY?**

Every murder case relies on a body, yet in this case, there is no body. This raises a critical question: What happened to Jesus' body?

Theories We Will Investigate Next Week:

- He survived and died later
- Could He have faked His death?
- The body was stolen
- Did His disciples steal and hide the body?
- He resurrected
- Is there evidence for the resurrection?

Reflection: Based on what youve seen so far, what do you think happened to Jesus' body?

THE EVIDENCE DRAWER

WEEK 1: 03.16.2025

FROM JOSEPHUS

1. TESTIMONIUM FLAVIANUM

(Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, Chapter 3, Section 3)

This is the most well-known passage where Josephus references Jesus. However, many scholars believe parts of it were later modified by Christian scribes. Here is the standard version: "About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared." (Antiquities 18.3.3 [63-64])

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Affirms Jesus' existence.
- Acknowledges Jesus as a teacher and miracle worker.
- Confirms Pilate's role in Jesus' crucifixion.
- States that Jesus' followers persisted after His death.



FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

a 1st-century Jewish historian, made two key references to Jesus in his work Antiquities of the Jews

SCHOLARLY CONSIDERATION:

Many historians believe Christian scribes inserted phrases like "He was the Christ" and "He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life". A likely reconstructed version removes these elements but still affirms Jesus' execution under Pilate.

FROM JOSEPHUS

2. REFERENCE TO JESUS IN CONNECTION WITH JAMES

(Antiquities of the Jews, Book 20, Chapter 9, Section 1)

This passage is widely accepted as authentic: "So he (Ananus, the high priest) assembled the Sanhedrin of judges and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others. And when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned." (Antiquities 20.9.1 [200])

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- References James, the brother of Jesus.
- Calls Jesus "who was called Christ", indicating He was a well-known figure.
- Describes James' execution under the high priest Ananus around 62 AD.

FROM TACITUS

TACITUS' REFERENCE TO JESUS – ANNALS 15.44

Here's the key excerpt from Tacitus' writings: "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 Pilate; and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular." (Tacitus, Annals 15.44, c. 116 AD)



TACITUS

The Roman historian Tacitus (c. 56–120 AD) referenced Jesus in his work Annals (Book 15, Chapter 44), written around 116 AD. This passage is one of the earliest non-Christian accounts confirming Jesus' execution under Pontius Pilate and the existence of Christians in Rome.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM TACITUS' REFERENCE

- Confirms Jesus' Execution – Tacitus states that "Christus... suffered the extreme penalty" (a reference to crucifixion).
- Confirms Pontius Pilate's Role – Refers to Pilate as the official who sentenced Jesus to death during Tiberius' reign (14–37 AD).
- Confirms Christian Persecution – Describes Nero blaming Christians for the Great Fire of Rome (64 AD) and subjecting them to brutal persecution.
- Calls Christianity a "Superstition" – Indicates Christianity spread rapidly despite persecution, which Tacitus saw as troubling.

TACITUS' RELIABILITY AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE

- Tacitus was a Roman senator and historian known for his critical and skeptical writing style.
- He detested Christians, which means his account is unlikely to be biased in their favor.
- He relied on official Roman records, meaning his reference to Jesus' crucifixion under Pilate is considered highly credible.

FROM PLINY THE YOUNGER

PLINY THE YOUNGER'S REFERENCE TO JESUS – EPISTULAE 10.96

In this letter, Pliny writes to Emperor Trajan, asking for advice on how to deal with Christians in Bithynia-Pontus(modern-day Turkey). Here's the key passage: "They were in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before dawn and singing a hymn to Christ as to a god, and binding themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deed, but never to commit fraud, theft, adultery, never to break their word, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so."

(Pliny the Younger, Epistulae 10.96, c. 112 AD)
Pliny goes on to describe how Christians refused to worship the Roman gods and how, under interrogation, they would rather die than deny Christ.



PLINY THE YOUNGER

Pliny the Younger (c. 61–113 AD), a Roman governor, referenced Christians and their worship of Jesus in a letter to Emperor Trajan written around 112 AD. This reference is found in Pliny's Letters, Book 10, Letter 96 (Epistulae 10.96).

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM PLINY'S LETTER

- Confirms Christian Worship of Jesus – Pliny notes that Christians sang hymns to Christ "as to a god", showing their belief in His divinity.
- Confirms Early Christian Gatherings – Describes regular Christian meetings before dawn, likely for prayer and worship.
- Confirms Christian Ethics – Christians took moral oaths, emphasizing honesty and righteousness.
- Confirms Christian Persecution – Pliny asked whether to execute or pardon Christians, showing their faithfulness under pressure.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- Pliny's letter shows Christianity was well-established by the early 2nd century.
- It confirms Christians worshiped Jesus as divine, countering claims that Jesus' divinity was a later invention.
- Pliny describes Christians as peaceful, ethical, and law-abiding, contradicting Roman fears that they were dangerous.

FROM THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD

TALMUDIC REFERENCE TO JESUS – SANHEDRIN 43A

“On the eve of Passover, Yeshu (Jesus) was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone 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 Passover.” (Sanhedrin 43a, Babylonian Talmud, c. 500 AD)



BABYLONIAN TALMUD

Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a (c. 500 AD) The Babylonian Talmud, a collection of Jewish rabbinic writings compiled between the 3rd and 6th centuries AD, references Jesus' execution and the accusations made against Him.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE TALMUD'S REFERENCE

- Confirms Jesus' Execution – States that Jesus was "hanged" (a term used for crucifixion) on Passover Eve, aligning with the Gospels.
- Confirms Jewish Opposition to Jesus – Accuses Jesus of sorcery (likely referring to His miracles, which Jewish leaders rejected) and leading Israel astray.
- Acknowledges the Lack of a Defense – Indicates that no successful defense was made for Jesus before His execution.
- Confirms Jesus' Influence – Even in a hostile source, Jesus is acknowledged as a well-known figure.

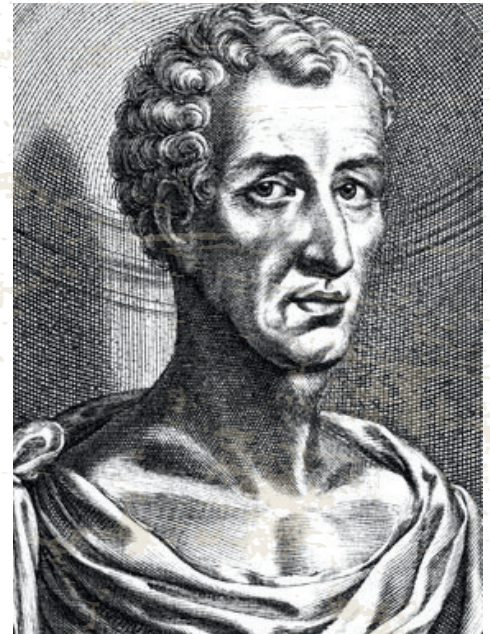
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- The Talmud does not deny Jesus' existence or crucifixion— instead, it confirms it while presenting the Jewish leaders' perspective.
- The charge of sorcery indirectly supports Jesus' reputation as a miracle worker.
- This source, though written centuries later, likely preserves earlier Jewish traditions about Jesus.

FROM LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA

LUCIAN'S REFERENCE TO JESUS

"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 lawgiver 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." (Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, Sections 11-13, c. 165 AD)



LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA

Lucian of Samosata, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, Sections 11-13 (c. 165 AD) Lucian of Samosata, a 2nd-century Greek satirist, wrote *The Passing of Peregrinus*, mocking Christians and their devotion to a crucified leader.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM LUCIAN'S REFERENCE

- Confirms Jesus' Crucifixion – States that Christians worshipped a man who was crucified.
- Confirms Early Christian Worship of Jesus – Notes that Christians viewed Jesus as their lawgiver and leader.
- Confirms Christian Moral Teachings – Describes how Christians were devoted to ethical living.
- Confirms Christian Perseverance Under Persecution – Highlights their willingness to suffer and die for their faith.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- Lucian was a skeptic and critic of Christianity, making his testimony unbiased in favor of Jesus' existence.
- His mockery confirms that Christians believed Jesus was divine and followed His teachings despite persecution.
- He acknowledges Christianity's rapid growth and distinct beliefs compared to Greek and Roman religions.

FROM MARA BAR SERAPION

MARA BAR SERAPION'S REFERENCE TO JESUS

“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 King [Jesus]? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three men... the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in complete 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.” (Mara bar Serapion's Letter to His Son, c. 70–100 AD, British Library, Manuscript Additional 14658)



MARA BAR SERAPION

Mara bar Serapion's Letter to His Son (c. 70–100 AD, Preserved in the British Museum, Manuscript Additional 14658) Mara bar Serapion was a Syrian philosopher who, in a letter to his son, compared Jesus to Socrates and Pythagoras, noting the destruction that followed His death.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM MARA BAR SERAPION'S REFERENCE

- Confirms Jesus' Execution — Refers to Jesus as the “wise King” whom the Jews executed.
- Confirms the Destruction of Jerusalem After Jesus' Death — States that the Jewish nation suffered after killing Jesus, aligning with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
- Confirms the Enduring Impact of Jesus' Teachings — Says that, like Socrates and Pythagoras, Jesus “did not die for good” but lived on through His teachings.
- Written by a Non-Christian Philosopher — Shows independent recognition of Jesus outside Christian and Jewish sources.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

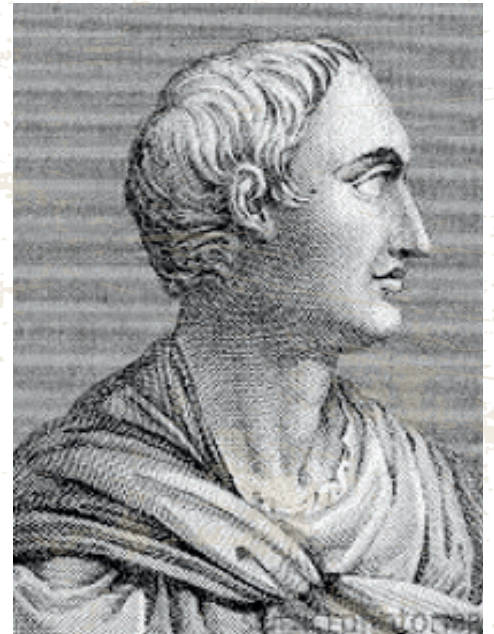
- Provides one of the earliest non-Christian references to Jesus.
- Unlike Tacitus or the Talmud, he does not mock Jesus but rather compares Him to great philosophers.
- Confirms that Jesus' execution was seen as significant even by non-Christians.

FROM THALLUS

THALLUS' REFERENCE TO JESUS' CRUCIFIXION (AS QUOTED BY JULIUS AFRICANUS IN CHRONOGRAPHY, C. 221 AD):

“On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness, Thallus, in the third book of his History, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.”

(Julius Africanus, Chronography 18.1, quoting Thallus, c. 52 AD)



THALLUS

Thallus (c. 52 AD, Quoted by Julius Africanus, c. 221 AD)
Thallus was an Eastern Mediterranean historian who wrote around 52 AD. Though his works are lost, Julius Africanus, a 3rd-century Christian writer, preserved a key reference where Thallus tried to explain the darkness at Jesus' crucifixion as a natural eclipse.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THALLUS' REFERENCE

- **Confirms the Darkness at Jesus' Crucifixion – Mentions the darkness that occurred during Jesus' death, as recorded in the Gospels (Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44).**
- **Attempts a Natural Explanation – Thallus does not deny the event but dismisses it as a solar eclipse.**
- **Shows Jesus' Crucifixion Was Known Outside of Christian Circles – Even a non-Christian historian felt the need to explain an event connected to Jesus.**

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- **Written only two decades after Jesus' crucifixion— one of the earliest extra-biblical mentions of Jesus.**
- **Since Jesus was crucified at Passover (during a full moon), a solar eclipse was impossible, strengthening the Gospel account of the darkness being supernatural.**
- **Confirms that Jesus' crucifixion was historically recognized outside of Christian sources.**

ADDITIONAL READING:

For more resources and information on this case, check out some of the QR codes attached below:



**LEE STROBEL'S
THE CASE FOR
CHRIST**



**GARY HABERMAS'
THE HISTORICAL
JESUS**



**J. WARNER
WALLACE'S COLD-
CASE CHRISTIANITY**



**J. WARNER
WALLACE'S COLD-
CASE CHRISTIANITY
FOR KIDS**

ILLEGALITIES IN THE TRIAL OF JESUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

For more resources and information on the illegalities in the trial of Jesus, scan the evidence drawer QR code located on page 1.

CONCLUSION

The trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin was a violation of multiple Jewish legal principles, showing that His conviction was not about justice but a rushed and unlawful attempt to secure His execution. These legal irregularities highlight the prejudicial nature of the proceedings, further reinforcing the question: Was Jesus truly guilty, or was He a victim of religious and political corruption?