

Question: Are there texts other than the those in the Bible written in Biblical times that talk about Jesus?

Answer: There are several works that are not part of our official canon of books that make up the New Testament that talk about Jesus' life and works. It may be surprising to hear that these works are considered to be gospels in the most basic understanding of the word. That is, they proclaim the "good news" of who Jesus is. These works are called pseudipigrapha, from the Greek word meaning "written under a false name" (Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 4). These other books are still in existence today apart from the canon of scriptures we call the New Testament. The books that make up the pseudipigrapha are generally agreed amongst scholars to have been written much later than the gospels that we have presently in the New Testament. Instead of focusing on the pseudipigrapha, this article will focus on those works not considered to be gospels, written by people who were not followers of Jesus, but written contemporaneously with the present canonized gospels we have today.

Probably the most important extra-biblical work where comments are made about who Jesus is comes from the well known Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. Josephus lived from 37-100AD and is considered by most to be the most important writer of the first century world outside of the New Testament. Josephus had a special familiarity with the Galilee region (where Jesus did most of his ministry) as he assumed command of the Jewish rebellion against the Romans in that area in 66 AD. He was eventually captured and then released by the Roman emperor Vespasian in 69 AD (Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*, ix). Josephus is regarded by modern scholars to be a very reliable historian, his length and breadth of knowledge of the 1st century world is unmatched. Josephus' comments about Jesus are profoundly significant in that they give another testament to who Jesus is. It is important to note that this account of Jesus by Josephus is not being written in a faith context. Unlike the gospels, Josephus seems to be reporting history as such. Amazingly, even though he writes from someone outside of the Christian faith his words affirm Christians in their faith in Jesus. Josephus writes in Book 18 chapter 3 of *The Antiquities of the Jews*,

*Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, it if be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and may of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross those that loved him at first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named him, are not extinct at this day. (Taken from: *The Works of Josephus*)*

Another quote comes from the Roman historian Corneilius Tacitus who lived from 55-120 AD. Tacitus reflects on the brutality the Emperor Nero treated the Christians with between the years of 54-68 AD. Tacitus like most Romans despised the Christian sect primarily because he did not understand exactly who they were. Similar to Josephus, Tacitus affirms what happened to Jesus:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, 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 Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. (Taken from: carm.org)

Like Josephus, Tacitus talks about a man "Christus" or Jesus, who suffered under the reign of Tiberius. Tiberius was the Roman Emperor during Jesus' life and reigned from 14-37 AD. Though he himself never met Jesus he undoubtedly had heard of him. Like Josephus, Tacitus affirms that Jesus was put to death by the procurator Pontius Pilate. Though he does not go into the details of Jesus' life and works, we know from the concerns he expresses that the Christian faith was growing quickly and beginning to have profound impacts on the region of Judea. Not only are Christians taking over in Judea, but they are also becoming a prominent religion in Rome.

While extra-biblical texts are not the authority when it comes to our faith and belief in Jesus as the Messiah, they do help us in that they are another level of proof to who and what Jesus did in his life and death. These sources are signs, outside of our gospels that show not only that Jesus lived, but that he died, and rose on the third day.