

CHAPTER 1

SOURCES FOR THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Some collections and discussions of sources:

- Daniel J. Theron, *Evidence of Tradition*, 1958
- Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 1963
- F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, 1974
- R. T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus*, 1986
- Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson, *He Walked Among Us*, 1993
- Excellent summary of evidence with photos – Lawrence Mykytiuk, “Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible,” *BAR* 41:1 (Jan/Feb 2015) 44-51, 76

Jewish sources

Josephus (A.D. 37-100+)

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, wrote several works, including his *Antiquities of the Jews* (ca. A.D. 93-94), which claimed to trace the history of the Jews from the time of the creation up to the time of their rebellion from Rome. Several passages in the *Antiquities* deal with matters that are mentioned in the NT (cf. France, pp. 25-32):

Ministry and death of John the Baptist

“Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s [Antipas] army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the *Baptist*; for Herod slew him, who was a good man,* and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away, [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body: supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness. Now, when [many] others came to

crowd about him, for they were greatly moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise,) thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it should be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure against him." (*Ant.* 18:5:2 [Whiston ed., p. 382; Theron, p. 7 #3])

= Matt 14:1-12 = Mark 6:14-29 = Luke 9:7-9

*John a good man; cf. Matt 21:26 = Mark 11:32 = Luke 20:6

Death of James the Just, brother of Jesus called Christ

"When, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned; but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done." (*Ant.* 20:9:1 [p. 423; Theron, p. 5 #2])

James the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13; 21:18; Gal 2:9, 12)

James a brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55 = Mark 6:3; Gal 1:19)

Archaeological evidence for James?

There has been much excitement about the discovery of an ossuary from the first century (dated A.D. 63) with the inscription in Aramaic "James son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." It is favorably presented in *BAR* 28:6 (Nov./Dec. 2002), and then more guardedly in *BAR* 29:5 (Sep./Oct. 2003).

Two other archaeological finds are much more reliable witnesses to personages named in the NT:

- An inscription in Caesarea with the name of Pontius Pilate (discovered ca. 1960)

- The tomb of the family and ossuary of Caiaphas, including his bones (discovered 1990)

Life and death (and resurrection) of Jesus

(quotation as it appears in extant copies of Josephus:)

“Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it 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 many 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 the 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 from him, are not extinct at this day.” (*Ant.* 18:3:3 [p. 379; Theron, p. 5 #1])

Josephus was not a Christian (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1:47), therefore, Origen did not use the citation (cf. Theron, p. 7 #4).

Joseph Klausner’s version (Jewish scholar):

“Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise 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 many of the Gentiles. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first ceased not so to do; and the race of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct even now.” (quoted in F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins*, 38-39; Bruce cites as his source J. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* [London, 1929], pp. 55ff)

F. F. Bruce’s version:

“Now there arose about this time a source of further trouble in one Jesus, a wise man who performed surprising works, a teacher of men who gladly welcome strange things. He led away many Jews, and also many of the Gentiles. He was the so-called Christ. When Pilate, acting on information supplied by the chief men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had attached themselves to him at first did not cease to cause trouble, and the tribe of Christians, which has taken this name from him, is not extinct even today.” (Bruce, p. 39; for reasons for these readings cf. F. F. Bruce, *NT Documents, Are They Reliable?*, pp. 108-12)

Summary of data from Josephus

[cf. Bruce, *NT Documents*, p. 112]

- Existence of Jesus
- Date of Jesus' life
- Jesus' being the brother of James
- Ministry and death of John the Baptist
- Jesus' reputation as a wonder-worker and a teacher
- Jesus' crucifixion by Pilate at the instigation of the Jewish leaders
- Jesus' messianic claim
- Jesus' founding of "the tribe of the Christians"
- (possibly) The claim of Jesus' resurrection (in Bruce, *NT Documents*; not in his *Jesus & Ch. Origins*, nor in Klausner's reconstruction)
- Death of James the brother of Jesus

Babylonian Talmud

Jesus was hanged on Passover Eve. Forty days previously the herald had cried, 'He is being led out for stoning, because he has practiced sorcery and led Israel astray and enticed them into apostasy. Whosoever has anything to say in his defence, let him come and declare it.' As nothing was brought forward in his defence, he was hanged on Passover Eve." (*Sanhedrin* 43a, quoted and discussed in Bruce, *Jesus & Ch. Origins*, p. 56-57)

Before the Mishnah was codified (ca. A.D. 200), there was the Tannaitic period (from *tanna'im*, "repeaters, teachers"), ca. A.D. 70-200. Many of the traditions stemming from that time were included in the Mishnah. Traditions from that time which were not included were called *baraitoth*, "external things." This particular *baraita* was preserved later in the Gamara.

Bruce appends an interesting remark concerning this ruling by the Jews made by a later rabbi:

“To this *baraitah* are appended some remarks by ‘Ulla, a later rabbi, who flourished about the end of the third century:

“Ulla said: ‘Would you believe that any defence would have been so zealously sought for him? He was a deceiver, and the All-merciful says: “You shall not spare him, neither shall you conceal him.” It was different with Jesus, for he was near to the kingship.’” (Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins*, p. 56)

This passage mentions the following concerning the death of Jesus:

- Hanged (stoning usual for blasphemers)
- Executed on Passover Eve
- Practiced “magic”; cf. Mark 3:22
- Disagreed with official Judaism
- (R. Ulla added, ca. A.D. 300) Related to the royal line and thought to be a king, “close to the kingship”

The Babylonian Talmud agrees with many of the basic facts of the crucifixion of Jesus as found in the NT. The matters which are added, or are in disagreement (as the herald, the 40 days’ grace period) seem clearly to be written to improve the Jewish polemical debate with the Christians.

Jerusalem Talmud

Aboda Zara 40d

Cf. Harrison, *Short Life*, p. 16; Bruce, *Jesus & Ch. Origins*, pp. 57-58

Klausner dates A.D. 100; found in several *baraitoth*

In these segments Jesus is called *Ben-Pandira*, or *Ben-Panthera*. The desire was to show that Jesus was illegitimate, his father being Panthera, a Roman soldier (cf. John 8:41).

According to Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (4th ed., p. 74), Panthera was a widespread name. Klausner and Bruce believe the Jewish writing altered the word *parthenos* (“virgin”) for satire.

These references show the early belief that Jesus was a human, and not the natural son of Joseph.

Summary of Jewish testimony

1. The Jewish testimony is very important; for one thing, there is no denial of Jesus' existence.
2. The Jewish testimony is valuable since it mostly is hostile.
3. The Jewish testimony is valuable since it is close to the source.
4. The Jewish testimony includes the basic outline of Jesus' life, including his unusual birth, teaching, works/miracles, messianic claim, crucifixion under Pilate, perhaps the belief in his resurrection, Jesus as the source of Christianity
5. Discrepancies are easily explained by the viewpoint or position of the source.

Roman sources

There are not many Roman sources for the life of Jesus. The reason appears to be that Christ or Christianity was not considered important by the historians of the empire until the second century. Even at that, the existence of Jesus and basic truths about him are noted in ancient Roman writings.

Tacitus

Lived ca. A.D. 55-120; during the end of Trajan's reign (A.D. 98-117) he wrote *Roman Annals* (AD 115-17).

“Therefore, in order to disprove the rumor [that he had started the fire], Nero falsely accused culprits and subjected to most unusual punishments those whom, hated for their shameful deeds, the populace called Christians. The author of this name, Christ, was put to death by the procurator, Pontius Pilate, while Tiberius was emperor; but the dangerous superstition, though suppressed for the moment, broke out again not only in Judea, the origin of this evil, but even in the city [Rome], where all atrocious and shameful things flow together from all sides and are practised. First, therefore, those were seized who confessed [that they were Christians]; then, upon their information, a great multitude was convicted not so much upon the charge of setting fire [to the city] as for hatred of the human race.” (*Ann.* 15:44 [Bettenson, pp. 1-2; Theron, pp. 11-13])

Tacitus had access to court records. He was the first extant Roman author to check into the origin of Christianity.

Statements made by Tacitus about Jesus:

1. *Christus* used as a name
2. Jesus lived in Judea
3. Jesus executed under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius (A.D. 14-37)

Tacitus in the same paragraph describes the cruel punishments inflicted on the Christians by Nero, who publicly blamed them for the great fire of Rome.

Suetonius

Suetonius wrote ca. A.D. 120. He wrote biographies of the first twelve caesars, from Julius Caesar to Domitian of his own day. The biographies of two of them contain bits about Christ and the early church.

(1) Jews expelled from Rome

“He [Claudius] expelled from Rome the Jews who were constantly stirring up a tumult under the leadership of Chrestus.” (*Life of Claudius* 25:4 [Bettenson, p. 3; Theron, p. 13 #7])

Claudius’ reign, A.D. 41-54. Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49, after riots in the Jewish section. This expulsion is referred to in Acts 18:2; cf. Heb 10:34.

According to Suetonius the cause of this action was a man named *Chrestus*, which was a common name for slaves. That name was also a popular misspelling of *Christus* (Bruce, *Jesus & Ch. Origins*, p. 21; cf. France, pp. 40-42). Most scholars believe that the “tumult” in the Jewish community was caused by strife between Christian and non-Christian Jews, as was common throughout the empire, and that Suetonius was only partially informed, thinking that the person at the center of the controversy was then living in Rome.

(2) Nero’s persecution of Christians

“The Christians were put to death, a ‘sect’ of men of a recent and wicked superstition.” (*Life of Nero* 16:2 [Bettenson, p. 3; Theron, p. 13 #8])

Nero reigned A.D. 54-68. Suetonius mentions how Nero executed Christians, “a novel and mischievous superstition.” He does not give here information about Christ himself.

Pliny the Younger

Letter to Trajan, in *Letters* 10:96 (Trajan’s reply in *Letters* 10:97). Bettenson, pp. 3-6; Theron, pp. 13-17

Pliny was the imperial legate to Bithynia (A.D. 111-13) under the emperor Trajan. According to 1 Pet 1:1 Christians lived there during Apostolic times.

This correspondence speaks more of Christian customs of the early second century, rather than of Jesus himself; but it does reflect on beliefs and practices which the NT says were instituted by Jesus:

Sunday (?), weekly services

“Sacrament” as an oath

Lord’s Supper (?)

Rather die than curse Christ

Lost archives of Augustus

Some early Christian writers claimed that the registration of Joseph and Mary and the birth of Jesus could be found in the records of the census held by Augustus.

Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 34:2 (ca. A.D. 150; *ANF* 1:174)

Tertullian, *Contra Marcion* 4:7, 19 (ca. A.D. 200; *ANF* 3:352, 378)

Lost records of Pontius Pilate

For discussion, see Bruce, *Jesus & Ch. Origins*, pp. 19-20.

Very few records of the Roman provincial governors are extant, but there is evidence that they were required to send annual reports back to Rome. If so, it could be expected that Pilate might have included the crucifixion of Jesus and its circumstances in his report.

According to Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 150), this was the case. He claimed that Jesus' miracles and crucifixion were recorded in the *Acts of Pilate*, and were available for public inspection (*First Apology* 35:7-9; 48:3; Bruce, pp. 19-20).

These records might have been the source for Tacitus' comments about Jesus' crucifixion.

Many pseudepigraphal "Acts of Pilate" were written later—from both the anti-Christian and pro-Christian standpoints. They can be read in Hennecke, *NT Apocrypha*, 1:449-70.

Lost history of Thallus

discussion in Bruce, *Jesus & Ch. Origins*, pp. 29-30

Thallus was a historian in Rome who wrote ca. A.D. 52, shortly after the Jews were expelled for rioting. He wrote a general history of the eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War to his time. His history has subsequently disappeared.

Thallus was known to Julius Africanus, a Christian writer on chronology (ca. A.D. 200-250; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, ch. 7). According to Africanus, Thallus attributed the darkness at the time of Christ's crucifixion to an eclipse of the sun. Africanus noted that an eclipse at Passover time is impossible, since the moon would be full.

It seems likely that Thallus had discussed Jesus' crucifixion, and had sought an explanation for the Christian belief that there was unnatural darkness at that time.

Letter of Mara bar Serapion

Theron, p. 21; discussion in Bruce, *Jesus & Ch. Origins*, pp. 30-31; France, pp. 23-24

This letter, written by a non-Christian with a philosophical bent, has been copied and is now preserved in a 7th century Syriac manuscript, which is in the British Museum. The original has been lost. Mara bar Serapion himself definitely wrote it after A.D. 73, probably during the 2nd or 3rd century, though Theron dates it from the first or second centuries.

The author, who was in prison as he wrote, sent this letter to his son. The letter compares the virtues and troubles of Socrates, Pathagoras, and Christ.

Facts mentioned:

- Jesus executed by Jews (not Romans)

- Claim of kingship
- Reputation of wisdom

Summary of Roman evidence

- Existence of a person, “Christus,” who founded Christianity
- Lived in Judea
- Reputation as a leader: miracles, teachings
- Crucifixion under Pontius Pilate
- Belief of the early church in his deity, and practice of his ordinances

Many false ideas as well:

- “Chrestus” living in Rome (Suetonius)
- Wicked practices of Christians (cf. Bettenson, p. 2, n. 3)

Christian and quasi-Christian evidence

—for a good summary of this evidence, see Bruce *Jesus and Christian Origins*, ch. 6-8

Textual additions to the NT

There are several examples of words, phrases, or longer passages which have been added by copyists to the original NT. Some of these have been printed in later editions of the NT, while others have not been. These textual additions may go back to true reports of the life of Jesus. It is known that the early church kept true traditions about Jesus which were not included in the gospels (e.g., an *agraphon*, unwritten saying, from Jesus, recorded only in Acts 20:35).

- (1) John 7:52 - 8:12 (woman taken in adultery)
- (2) Mark 16:9-20 (post-resurrection appearances of Jesus)
- (3) Western text after Luke 6:5,

“The same day, seeing a certain man working on the sabbath, he said to him, ‘Man, if indeed you know what you are doing, happy are you; but if not, you are accursed and a transgressor of the law.’” (Bruce, 83)

(4) Western text after Matt 20:28,

“But do you seek to increase from smallness, and not from the greater to become less.” (Bruce, 83)

(5) Codex W after Mark 16:14,

“And they excused themselves, saying, ‘This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under Satan, who by his unclean spirits does not allow the true power of God to be comprehended. Therefore now reveal your righteousness.’ So they spoke to Christ; and Christ addressed them thus: ‘The limit of the years of Satan’s authority has been fulfilled, but other terrible things are drawing near, even to those sinners on whose behalf I was handed over to death, that they may turn to the truth and sin no more. In order that they may inherit the spiritual and incorruptible glory of righteousness in heaven, go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation . . .’” (Bruce, 84)

Quotations from Papias

Papias was one of the earliest church fathers, a disciple of the apostle John. His work *An Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord* has been lost, but portions of it are preserved in the writings of Irenaeus and of Eusebius.

(1) Identity of several apostles (Papias calls them “elders”)

Identifies by name Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, John, Matthew (quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3:39:1-7 [Theron, 29b])

(2) Subsequent history of Judas Iscariot

“Judas walked about in this world a sad example of impiety; for his body having swollen to such an extent that he could not pass where a chariot could pass easily, he was crushed by the chariot, so that his bowels gushed out.” (Fragment 3; <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.vii.ii.iii.html>)

Referred to by Apollinarius of Laodicea, comments on Matt 27:5 and Acts 1:18 (Bruce 86)

Apocryphal accounts of Jesus' infancy and childhood

[See them collected and discussed in E. Hennecke, *NT Apocrypha*, Vol. 1]

(1) Protevangel of James (Hennecke, 370-88)

ca. A.D. 150

(2) Infancy Story of Thomas (Hennecke, 388-401)

(3) Gnostic infancy legends (Hennecke, 401-04)

(4) Later infancy accounts (Hennecke, 404-17)

Obviously, these accounts are purely fictional, and of no historical value for the life of Jesus. They do tell us something about the mind-set of some of the early Christians, and the tendency they had to ignore the humanity of Jesus and over-emphasize their concept of his deity.

Other apocryphal accounts

Gospel of Thomas

See Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins*, 110-58; Hennecke, vol. 1, 511-22; France, pp. 60-72; and Andrew K. Hembold, *The Nag Hammadi Gnostic Texts and the Bible*.

About A.D. 1900 the Oxyrhynchus Papyri were discovered in Egypt, consisting of thousands of fragments. Three of them (P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655) contained about fifteen isolated sayings of Jesus, some of them not reported in the Gospels. They seemed to be part of a larger work, and mention these words to have been given by Jesus to Thomas. These fragments are dated from the 3rd century A.D.

In 1945 near the village of Nag Hammadi by the Nile River, some Egyptian peasants discovered by accident in a cave by the river bank a jar containing thirteen papyrus codices bound in leather. Eventually most of these manuscripts were obtained by the Cairo Museum. These codices were written in Coptic in various dialects, during the 4th century A.D. They contained a writing called the Gospel of Thomas, which had the same sayings of Jesus found in the Greek Oxyrhynchus Papyri. The Coptic document had 114 of these sayings of Jesus.

Scholars date the original Gospel of Thomas about A.D. 150. Its contents reveal it as a Gnostic document. Hippolytus probably referred to it early in the 3rd century. The sayings of Jesus are of doubtful historical value. Bruce discusses each of them (pp. 112-54).

Later apocryphal writings

These documents are of even less importance to understanding the actual history of the life and teachings of Jesus. They do give important and interesting insight into early Christian history.

Examples: *Acts of Pilate*, *Gospel of Nicodemus*, *Christ's Descent into Hell* (see Hennecke 444-81 ff).

Note on non-canonical sources

F. F. Bruce (*Jesus and Christian Origins*, p. 203) notes the vast difference between the biblical and non-biblical sources regarding the life of Jesus:

“Let them [the readers] be assured that he [Bruce, the author] is not trying to ‘prove’ anything; he is concerned to give an account of references to Jesus and the Christian origins, factual or fictitious, outside the New Testament. He is certainly not concerned to establish the historicity of Jesus or the trustworthiness of the received account of Christian origins on such data as these: such an exercise would be based on the study of the primary sources, the New Testament writings themselves. And the treatment of the New Testament writings as primary sources is due to nothing in the nature of dogmatic preference. No body of literature, we said in our introduction, has been subjected to such intensive critical analysis as the New Testament writings, and the methods of criticism which confirm the historical inferiority of the apocryphal Gospels and related material are the methods which confirm the superiority of the New Testament writings.”

Canonical sources outside the Gospels

Although the four canonical Gospels are the primary source for the life of Jesus, much about his life can be determined from the rest of the NT.

Witness of Paul

Paul's qualifications

A contemporary of Jesus, may have known him (cf. 2 Cor 5:16)

“Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more.” (KJV)

But cf. NIV: “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.”

In any case, wide contact with people who knew Jesus

Dates of Paul’s writings

Most of his epistles probably were written before the canonical Gospels.

(Christ’s death, A.D. 30)

- Galatians, maybe as early as A.D. 49
- 1-2 Thessalonians, A.D. 49-50
- Soteriological epistles—Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans; (all these are undisputed), A.D. 52-54
- Christological epistles—Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians, A.D. 57-59
- 1 Timothy, Titus, A.D. 59-64
- 2 Timothy, A.D. 64-67

Paul’s witness to various events in Jesus’ life

- Jesus’ human birth, Gal 4:4
- Jesus’ Jewish and Davidic descent, Rom 1:3; 9:5; 2 Tim 2:8
- Jesus as the brother of James, Gal 1:19 (cf. 2:9)
- Identity of “pillars” as Peter and John, Gal 2:9
- Many teachings of Jesus:

Many parallels between Matt 5-7 and Rom 12-15

Cf. 1 Cor 7:10 and vv. 12, 25

Agraphon in Acts 20:35 (Luke wrote in book of Acts)

- Institution of Lord's Supper, 1 Cor 11:23-25
- Trial before Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea and Samaria, A.D. 26-36, 1 Tim 6:13
- Jesus' death by crucifixion, Phil 2:8, and many references to "the cross"
- Death, burial, resurrection appearances of Jesus, 1 Cor 15:3-8
- Ascension of Jesus, Eph 1:20 (cf. 2:6); 1 Tim 3:16

Witness of Peter

Peter is universally recognized as a close apostle to Jesus. His two epistles are dated by conservatives in the early or mid-sixties A.D. The book of Acts, which quotes him, probably was written earlier than that.

Peter's speeches recorded in Acts

- 2:22-24, 32, Nazareth, Jesus' miracles, crucifixion, resurrection, appearances
- 3:13-15, Pilate, (Barabbas) "a murderer" released, Jesus' death, resurrection
- 4:10, Nazareth, crucifixion, resurrection
- 5:30-32, crucifixion, resurrection, appearances, ascension
- 10:37-42, baptism, Galilee, Judea, healing, crucifixion, resurrection on third day, appearances, eating and drinking after resurrection
- 11:16, quotation of Jesus after resurrection (from Acts 1:5)

Peter's witness to Jesus' life in his epistles

- Jesus' transfiguration, 2 Pet 1:16-18 (mountain, presence of Peter and others, glory, voice, quotation from Father)
- Jesus' perfect life, 1 Pet 2:22
- Jesus' sufferings and death, with Peter as witness, 1 Pet 1:11; 2:21-24; 3:18; 4:1; 5:1
- Jesus' resurrection and glory, 1 Pet 1:3, 21; 3:18, 21
- Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to Peter, 2 Pet 1:14 (cf. John 21:18)
- Jesus' ascension, 1 Pet 3:22

Witness of James

Highlights from the life of James:

- Brother of Jesus (probably oldest brother—listed first), Matt 13:55 = Mark 6:3
- Unbeliever at first, Matt 12:46-50 = Mark 3:21, 31 = Luke 8:19-21; John 7:5
- Jesus appeared to him after resurrection, 1 Cor 15:7; thus a disciple, Acts 1:14
- One of the first to meet Paul, three years after Paul's conversion, Gal 1:19
- Leader in the Jerusalem church, Acts 12:17; 15:12-21; 21:17-18; 1 Cor 9:5; Gal 2:9
- Executed under Sadducee high priest Ananus in A.D. 62, Josephus *Ant.* 20:9:1

Witness of the book of James

According to Jas 1:1, the author is “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” It is generally recognized that the author intended the readers to understand that he was James the brother of Jesus. The critical view is that the book was actually produced about A.D. 125-50 to counteract the newly-published Pauline corpus (ca. A.D. 95; see for example, *IDB* 2:795). Conservatives generally date the book very early, about A.D. 45-48 (cf. the term “synagogue” used in a good sense, 2:2).

James' testimony to Jesus is indirect, showing allusions and links to Jesus' teaching as recorded in the Gospels:

<i>Jesus (in Matthew)</i>	<i>James</i>	<i>Topic</i>
5:3	2:5	Poor in world, rich in faith
5:11	1:2	Count it joy when tried, persecuted
5:34-37	5:12	Let “yes” be “yes” and “no” be “no”
7:16	3:12	Figs not produce olive; grapes, figs, salt water, fresh
18:4	4:6	God opposes proud, gives grace to humble
Luke 6:24	5:1	The rich to weep and howl

Witness of Jude

Highlights from the life of Jude

- Brother of Jesus, Matt 13:55 = Mark 6:3; brother of James, Jude 1
- Unbeliever at first (see under James)
- Believer after the resurrection, Acts 1:14
- Traveled with his wife while preaching, 1 Cor 9:5
- Not an apostle, Jude 17-18; cf. v. 3
- Probably died by beginning of reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96), since Hegessippus mentions two of Jude’s grandsons as tried before Domitian (Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3:20)

Witness of the book of Jude

Jude’s short epistle perhaps was written about A.D. 50-60; probably 2 Peter quotes from it, rather than the other way around. The critical date is during the beginning of the 2nd century A.D.

Jude tells very little about Jesus’ life. There are a few general items:

- Existence and lordship of Jesus, vv. 1, 4, 25
- Reference to the apostles, vv. 17-18

- Predicted coming (“mercy”) of Jesus, v. 21

Witness of book of Hebrews

This book, anonymously written before the temple’s destruction in A.D. 70, speaks of Jesus in mostly theological terms. However, it does give a few general facts about the earthly life of Jesus. It mentions that he is of the tribe of Judah (7:14). It describes him as “suffering,” “being tempted,” “learning obedience,” and living “without sin” (2:18; 4:15; 5:8). Of special interest is Heb 5:7, which is the only reference in the NT to Jesus’ “loud cries and tears” which accompanied his prayers to the Father before his death.

“In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.” (Heb 5:7)

Witness of the canonical Gospels

Since the canonical Gospels are our primary witness to the life of Jesus, they will be dealt with in detail in the following chapter.