

A. Cornelius Tacitus (55-120 AD) was a Roman historian who wrote about the history of Rome just after the days of Jesus. One of his books, which is called The Annals, was written about 115 AD. In it, he refers to Christ and to His followers. The following excerpt deals with events connected with the burning of Rome.

“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.

⁽¹⁾Christus, from whom the name had its origin, ⁽²⁾suffered the extreme penalty ⁽³⁾during the reign of Tiberius ⁽⁴⁾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. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.

⁽⁵⁾Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

What do we learn about Jesus from this document?

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B. Flavius Josephus (37-97 AD) was a Jewish historian who wrote a history of the Jewish people, including the period around the time of Christ. In his book, Antiquities, he wrote:

“At this time there was ⁽¹⁾a wise man who was called Jesus. ⁽²⁾His conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And ⁽³⁾many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. ⁽⁴⁾Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that ⁽⁵⁾he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly ⁽⁶⁾he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”

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