One of the most common but very incorrect assumptions is that Jesus is only mentioned in the Bible. There are a number of non-Christian sources from the ancient world that speak of Jesus. You will need to read these carefully, and probably more than once.

**Jesus as mentioned in the ancient, non-Christian sources**

**Julius Africanus (AD 221)**

While the above date is obviously many years after Jesus, Julius Africanus refers to a much earlier historian, Thallus. His work is now lost. Thallus was writing in 52 AD. Thallus writes about the darkness that covered the land at Jesus’ crucifixion (Mark 15:33). Here is the quote from Julius Africanus:

‘Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun – unreasonably, it seems to me.’

**Tacitus (AD 110)**

Tacitus is regarded as one of the most useful and reliable historians of ancient Rome. He writes about Emperor Nero’s blaming of the Christians for the great fire of Rome:

*Therefore to scotch the rumour, Nero substituted as culprits and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men loathed for their vices whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, from whom they got their name, had been executed by sentence of procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor; and the pernicious superstition was checked for a short time, only to break out afresh, not only in Judea, the home of the plague, but in Rome itself, where all the horrible and shameful things in the world collect and find a home.*

**Suetonius (AD 120)**

In his *Life of Nero* he writes: ‘Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men addicted to a novel and mischievious superstition.’ In his *Life of Claudius* he writes, ‘As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.’

**Pliny the Younger (AD 111-113)**

Pliny was a governor in Bithynia (part of the Roman Empire). He writes a letter to the emperor asking for advice on how to deal with Christians:

*They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed, but to abstain from all fraud, theft and adultery, never to break their word, or deny a trust when called upon to honour it; after which it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary kind.*

**Mara Bar Serapion (shortly after AD 70)**

Mara Bar Serapion was in prison. He wrote a letter to his son about how he felt comforted knowing that the great ones of the past had also been persecuted:

*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 wise King? It was just after that their Kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras 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.*

**Lucian of Samosata (AD 115-200)**

Lucian of Samosata was a famous Greek writer. He was scathing in his criticism of Christians:

*These deluded creatures, you see, have persuaded themselves that they are immortal and will live forever, which explains the contempt of death and willing self-sacrifice so common among them. It was impressed on them too by their lawgiver that from the moment they are converted, deny the gods of Greece, worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws, they are all brothers. They take his instructions completely on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods and hold them in common ownership. So any adroit, unscrupulous fellow, who knows the world, has only to get among these simple souls and his fortune is quickly made; he plays with them.*

**Origen (c 200AD)**

Origen is a Christian writer but writes a large work called *Against Celsus.* It is a rebuttal against a pagan writer called Celsus who write his own work *Against the Christians*. Because Origen quotes so much of *Against the Christians* historians have been able to piece together huge sections of what that work said and argued. In the following quote the parts that are underlined are all direct quotes or references to the arguments of Celsus. The other parts are the words of Origen. Celsus himself wrote *Against the Christians* in around AD 175

*A few years ago he [Jesus] began to teach this doctrine, being regarded by Christians as the Son of God.*

*For he [Celsus] represents the Jew disputing with Jesus, and confuting Him, as he thinks, on many points; and in the first place, he accuses Him of having invented his birth from a virgin, and upbraids Him with being born in a certain Jewish village, of a poor woman of the country, who gained her subsistence by spinning, and who was turned out of doors by her husband, a carpenter by trade, because she was convicted of adultery; that after being driven away by her husband, and wandering about for a time, she disgracefully gave birth to Jesus, an illegitimate child, who having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt on account of his poverty, and having there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves, returned to his own country, highly elated on account of them, and by means of these proclaimed himself a God.*

*But let us now return to where the Jew is introduced, speaking of the mother of Jesus, and saying that "when she was pregnant she was turned out of doors by the carpenter to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery, and that she bore a child to a certain soldier named Panthera.*

**Josephus (AD 94-93)**

Josephus is a major historian of this period. He writes:

*Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, for he was a doer of surprising deeds – 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 amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct to this day.* (*Antiquities* 18.63-64)

Later Josephus writes this:

*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 sanhedrim of 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:* (*Antiquities* 20.200)

From these sources alone, write a list of everything a historian could know about Jesus, without even opening a Bible: