

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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A Study for Judaism • Christianity • Islam*

DOCUMENT 10

FIRST-CENTURY JUDEA, THE COVENANT PEOPLE, AND THE HISTORICAL YESHUA

**A Covenant Deep Dive into Life Under the *Torah* (instruction / law), the Oral Tradition, and
the Origin of the Teaching That the Law Was Abolished**

***How Did the Covenant People Live in First-Century Judea, When Did the Claim That the
Law Was Abolished Appear, and Who Was the Historical Jesus? — A Three-Religion
Covenant Response***

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The Message is Sent to the World

REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☩ ISLAM
Rabbinic Judaism rests on the Mishnah (c. 200 CE) and the Talmuds, written down generations after the Temple fell. In the first century that tradition was still oral and disputed; the Sadducees rejected it. The written covenant stood before it and stands over it (Deuteronomy 4:2).	Much of Christianity teaches that the law ended at the cross. The historical record shows the first followers of Jesus in Jerusalem kept the Sabbath, the food laws, and circumcision, and that the first systematic rejection of the Tanakh came from Marcion, whom the church itself condemned.	The Qur'an presents <i>'Isa (Jesus)</i> as a prophet confirming " <i>what was before him of the Torah</i> " (Q. 5:46), not as its abolisher, and never as divine. On the Torah's continuing authority, Islam stands closer to the first-century record than the later creeds do.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where

any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Deuteronomy 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the Tanakh does so by addition or reinterpretation, never by overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed standard; and **Yahweh's** own words declare the covenant unchanging (Malachi 3:6; Psalms 119:89), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh's** covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written Tanakh to three questions: how the covenant people lived in first-century Judea, when the teaching that the Torah was abolished first appeared, and who the historical Jesus was. **Yahweh** (יהוה) and **Elohim** (אֱלֹהִים) appear in bold throughout. Tanakh books and Hebrew personal names are given in English. Hebrew transliterations appear in ***bold italic*** with English meaning in parentheses. Scripture references are bold. Verse numbers follow the English version; where the Hebrew numbering differs, it is given in brackets on first citation. Scripture is rendered in a literal working translation from the Hebrew. Because much of this study is history, the two-or-three-witness standard is applied to historical claims as well as textual ones: each finding is graded **Corroborated** (two or more independent witnesses), **Single witness**, or **Not in the text** (for doctrine) / **Not corroborated** (for history). Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Ancient historians are cited as historical witnesses; rabbinic literature, the New Testament, church writers, and the Qur'an are cited as historical and comparative reference — not as binding authority. The Written Tanakh governs all conclusions.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	The covenant signs of Sabbath, clean food, and circumcision; separation from the nations; one law for all; do not add or take away; the test of a prophet
Nevi'im (Prophets)	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Malachi	The word stands forever; the Torah goes out from Zion; foreigners who keep the Sabbath; the Torah written on the heart; remember the Torah of Moses
Ketuvim (Writings)	Psalms, Proverbs	The word settled in heaven; do not add to His words

COMPARATIVE TEXTS CITED — HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE REFERENCE ONLY

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Jewish historians	Josephus, Jewish War 2.119–166; Antiquities 13.297; 18.63–64; 20.200; Philo, Every Good Man Is Free 75–91; Agapius of Hierapolis (Arabic Testimonium)	The sects, the oral traditions, and the two references to Jesus and James
Roman and Greek writers	Tacitus, Annals 15.44; Histories 5.4–5; Suetonius, Claudius 25.4; Nero 16.2; Pliny the Younger, Letters 10.96; Pliny the Elder, Natural History 5.73; Juvenal, Satire 14; Seneca (in Augustine, City of God 6.11); Livy 39.8–19; Plutarch; Velleius Paterculus; Dio Chrysostom	Roman testimony to Jesus, to the early movement, and to Jewish covenant practice; the Roman world around Judea
Rabbinic literature	Mishnah (c. 200 CE); Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds; Talmud Gittin 56b (Yavneh); Talmud Sanhedrin 43a	When the oral tradition was written; the Yavneh tradition; a hostile rabbinic witness to the execution
New Testament and church writers	Matthew 15:1–9; Mark 7:1–13; Acts 15; 18:2; 21:20; Galatians 1:19; Irenaeus, Against Heresies 3.3.4; Tertullian, Against Marcion; Nicene Creed (325); Edict of Thessalonica (380)	The earliest followers; Marcion; Nicaea; the imperial church

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Qur'an	Q. 3:50; 4:157; 5:46; 5:72–75	'Isa, the Torah, and the crucifixion in the Islamic witness
Modern scholarship	Paula Fredriksen; David Flusser; Bart D. Ehrman; John Dominic Crossan; N. T. Wright; Louis H. Feldman; Adin Steinsaltz; Robert Van Voorst; Encyclopaedia Judaica; Jewish Encyclopedia; Britannica	Consensus on the historical Jesus, the earliest community, Josephus, and the Mishnah

I. FRAMING THE QUESTION — HISTORY TESTED BY THE COVENANT

I-A. The Questions as They Are Usually Asked

When much of modern Christianity declares that the covenant of **Yahweh** was nailed to a cross and that the Torah was done away with through the death of Jesus, it makes a claim that deserves historical examination, not only theological debate. The questions put to this Institution are direct:

First: how did the Jewish people actually live in first-century Judea? Did they keep the covenant, eat clean food, and keep themselves separate from their Greek and Roman neighbors?

Second: had the Oral Torah been written down in the lifetime of Jesus?

Third: when did the teaching that the Torah was abolished first appear — with Jesus himself, or later, shaped by Roman politics, Greek philosophy, and a man named Marcion of Sinope?

Fourth: who was the historical Jesus, according to Jewish, Roman, and Christian sources?

I-B. The Questions in the Tanakh's Own Terms

The Tanakh gives the plumb line before any historian is heard. It names the covenant's signs, forbids adding to or taking from the covenant, declares its words everlasting, and supplies a test for any teacher who would lead the people away from it:

"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of Yahweh your Elohim" (Deuteronomy 4:2)

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder ... saying, Let us go after other elohim ... you shall not listen to the words of that prophet" (Deuteronomy 13:1–3)

History cannot overrule the covenant. What history can do is show when, where, and by whom the covenant was set aside. Every finding below is graded. A finding is **Corroborated** when two or more independent witnesses carry it (**Deuteronomy 19:15**); **Single witness** when only one does; and **Not in the text** or **Not corroborated** when it is taught but the evidence does not carry it.

II. THE WORD STUDY — THE COVENANT’S OWN VOCABULARY

The terms below govern how this study reads the history.

HEBREW TERM	STRONG’S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>torah (instruction / law)</i> , תּוֹרָה	H8451	Yahweh’s instruction; the written covenant given through Moses	Deuteronomy 31:9; Malachi 4:4 [Heb. 3:22]
<i>brit (covenant)</i> , בְּרִית	H1285	A binding covenant; Yahweh’s pledged relationship with Israel	Exodus 19:5; Jeremiah 31:33
<i>ot (sign)</i> , אוֹת	H226	A visible mark of the covenant — used of circumcision and the Sabbath	Genesis 17:11; Exodus 31:13
<i>olam (forever / age-lasting)</i> , עוֹלָם	H5769	Lasting into the unseen future; in <i>chuqqat olam (everlasting statute)</i>	Exodus 31:16; Deuteronomy 29:29
<i>badal (to separate)</i> , הִבְדִּיל	H914	To set apart; Yahweh separating Israel from the peoples	Leviticus 20:24–26
<i>yasaph (to add)</i> , תִּסְפוּ	H3254	To add; forbidden to be done to the commanded word	Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32 [Heb. 13:1]
<i>gara (to take away)</i> , תִּגְרָעוּ	H1639	To diminish or subtract from the commanded word	Deuteronomy 4:2

Two lexical observations govern what follows.

First, the three practices that marked Israel in the eyes of Rome are the ones the Torah itself calls signs. Circumcision is “*a sign of the covenant between Me and you*” (**Genesis 17:11**); the Sabbath is “*a sign between Me and you throughout your generations*” and “*an everlasting covenant*” (**Exodus 31:13, 16**); and the clean-food law closes with **Yahweh’s** reason: “*I am Yahweh your Elohim, who has separated you from the peoples*” (**Leviticus 20:24**; compare **Leviticus 11:44–45**).

Second, the covenant guards itself from both directions. *Yasaph (to add)* and *gara (to take away)* stand side by side in **Deuteronomy 4:2**. An oral tradition raised to the level of the written word adds; a doctrine that the written word has ended takes away. The same verse judges both.

III. THE COVENANT PEOPLE IN FIRST-CENTURY JUDEA

III-A. The People, the Land, and the Roman Occupation

The Roman general Pompey took Jerusalem in 63 BCE, bringing Judea under Roman power. Estimates of the Jewish population of the Roman world in the first century vary widely — commonly four to eight million — spread by war, exile, and trade across the Mediterranean and the East. The most important Jewish historian of the period, Josephus (Yosef ben Mattityahu), recorded the political, social, and religious life of the nation in *The Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*.

The Jewish population was not uniform. Communities in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee spoke Aramaic and Hebrew; the Greek-speaking communities of Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome read the Torah in the Greek Septuagint. Both kept the basic marks of covenant identity.

III-B. Were They Covenant Keepers?

The historical record is consistent. The three practices that most clearly marked the Jews as a distinct covenant people — and that drew the most ridicule from Greek and Roman writers — were the three the Torah names as signs.

The food laws. The clean and unclean laws of **Leviticus 11** and **Deuteronomy 14** were kept in the Land and in the dispersion. Tacitus called Jewish customs *"sinister and shameful"* and noted their abstinence from pork (*Histories* 5.4–5); the satirist Juvenal mocked Jews who *"see no difference between eating swine's flesh ... and that of man"* (*Satire* 14). The mockery is itself the evidence: the practice was visible enough to be ridiculed.

The Sabbath. Roman writers treated the seventh-day rest as idleness. Seneca complained that the Jews lose a seventh of their lives in idleness (preserved in Augustine, *City of God* 6.11); Juvenal ridiculed the father who *"spent every seventh day in idleness"* (*Satire* 14); Tacitus traced it to sloth (*Histories* 5.4). The synagogue, found in cities throughout the empire, was the center of Sabbath gathering and Torah reading. The Torah's own word for it is *ot (sign)*: *"Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations"* (**Exodus 31:13**).

Circumcision. Greeks and Romans regarded circumcision as a mutilation, and Tacitus names it as a mark by which the Jews set themselves apart (*Histories* 5.5). Two centuries earlier, some Hellenizing Jews had tried to hide it in order to join the gymnasium (1 Maccabees 1:14–15, cited as history only).

In the first century it remained the covenant sign of Jewish men throughout the world, as **Yahweh** commanded: *"My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant"* (Genesis 17:13).

N. T. Wright, in *The New Testament and the People of God*, describes first-century Torah observance not as an attempt to earn favor but as the badge of belonging to the chosen people. That is the Torah's own framing:

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own treasure among all the peoples ... and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5–6)

Finding — first-century covenant practice: That first-century Jews widely kept the Sabbath, the food laws, and circumcision is attested by Jewish writers (Josephus, Philo) and by hostile Roman ones (Tacitus, Juvenal, Seneca). **Corroborated.**

IV. SEPARATION AND ITS SPECTRUM — THE SECTS OF THE PERIOD

Did the covenant people mingle with Greeks and Romans? The honest answer is that they did so to different degrees, and the sects of the period are defined by where they drew the line. The Torah itself grounds the question: *"I am Yahweh your Elohim, who has separated you from the peoples ... you shall be holy to Me"* (Leviticus 20:24, 26).

The Pharisees. Their name is generally derived from *perushim* (*separated ones*), פְּרוּשִׁים. Josephus calls them the most exact interpreters of the laws (Jewish War 2.162). They kept the written Torah strictly, held to an unwritten body of ancestral tradition, and refused participation in pagan worship.

The Sadducees. Centered on the Temple and the priestly aristocracy, they cooperated politically with Rome, accepted the written Torah as binding, and rejected the Pharisees' oral traditions (Antiquities 13.297). They did not survive the fall of the Temple in 70 CE as an organized party.

The Essenes. Described by Josephus, by Philo of Alexandria, and by the Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder, who places them on the western shore of the Dead Sea (Natural History 5.73). They withdrew most fully from society and kept the strictest observance. Most scholars connect them with the community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, though the link is debated.

The people of the land. The *am ha-aretz* (*people of the land*), עַם הָאֶרֶץ, appear in rabbinic literature as ordinary country people who were lax about purity and tithes, and they were criticized by religious leaders for it. They were the exception that the leaders complained about, not the norm.

The Greek-speaking dispersion. The Jews of Alexandria and the wider dispersion were most shaped by Greek culture, yet they kept their covenant identity. The Torah had been translated into Greek so that they could keep reading it — not so that they could stop.

Finding — separation: Across its sects and regions, first-century Jewish society kept the covenant as its defining mark; the argument was over how to keep it and whose interpretation governed, not whether it still bound them. Carried by Josephus, Philo, Pliny the Elder, and the Roman critics of Section III. **Corroborated.**

V. HAD THE ORAL TORAH BEEN WRITTEN? — THE TIMELINE OF THE MISHNAH

V-A. The Oral Tradition Before 70 CE

Rabbinic Judaism today rests on the Mishnah and the Talmuds, not on the Tanakh alone, so the date of those texts matters for understanding what Jesus encountered. In the first century the Pharisees kept a body of interpretive tradition they held had been handed down from the fathers. It was not yet written; it circulated orally and was debated between the schools of Hillel and Shammai. The Sadducees rejected it. Josephus is direct: the Pharisees *"have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses"* (Antiquities 13.297). That is the oral tradition in its first-century form — unwritten, disputed, sectarian.

V-B. The Fall of the Temple (70 CE)

In 70 CE Roman forces under Titus destroyed the Second Temple. The Sadducees, whose authority rested on the Temple, faded from history; the Essenes disappear from the record; the Pharisaic movement and its interpretive tradition became the surviving form of Judaism. Johanan ben Zakkai founded an academy at Yavneh, near the coast west of Jerusalem, which became the center of post-Temple Jewish life (the account of how he obtained it is preserved in rabbinic tradition; see Section IX). Scholars such as Adin Steinsaltz describe the destruction as forcing a complete reconstruction of Jewish religious life, and the preservation of the oral traditions became urgent.

V-C. When Was the Mishnah Written?

The Mishnah, the first written codification of the oral traditions, was completed about 200–220 CE under Judah the Prince — roughly 130 years after the Temple fell and nearly two centuries after the ministry of Jesus. The Mishnah became the base of the two Talmuds.

DATE	EVENT
63 BCE	Pompey takes Jerusalem; Judea under Rome
c. 6–4 BCE to c. 30–33 CE	Life of Jesus of Nazareth
70 CE	Destruction of the Second Temple; the Temple-centered order ends
c. 70–200 CE	The Tannaitic period: oral traditions debated and gathered at Yavneh and other academies
c. 200–220 CE	The Mishnah completed under Judah the Prince
c. 400 CE	The Jerusalem Talmud compiled in Galilee
c. 500–600 CE	The Babylonian Talmud compiled and edited

The oral tradition as a written legal code, therefore, did not exist in the lifetime of Jesus. The traditions he met among the Pharisees were unwritten and contested. The Gospels record him rebuking those who *"make void the word of Elohim through your tradition"* (Matthew 15:6; Mark 7:13, cited as historical record) — a dispute between the written covenant and oral tradition, not a rejection of the Torah. The Torah had already ruled on that dispute:

"Whatever I command you, be careful to do it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32 [Heb. 13:1])

Finding — the Oral Torah: That the oral traditions were unwritten and disputed in the first century and first codified in the Mishnah about 200 CE is carried by Josephus, by the Mishnah's own date and attribution, and by modern scholarship. **Corroborated.**

VI. WHEN DID "THE TORAH IS DONE AWAY WITH" APPEAR?

VI-A. What the First Followers of Jesus Believed

The earliest community of Jesus's followers, based in Jerusalem and led by his brother James, were observant Jews. They kept the Sabbath and the food laws, circumcised their sons, and worshiped at the Temple. Acts itself records the Jerusalem leaders telling Paul that thousands of believers *"are all zealous for the Torah"* (Acts 21:20, cited as historical record). Paula Fredriksen, in *When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation*, shows that the first generation's disputes about Jesus were framed entirely inside the categories of Second Temple Judaism.

The Jerusalem council of Acts 15, deciding what Gentile believers must keep, did not declare the Torah abolished. It laid on them a short list of requirements that many scholars trace to the laws for the stranger in **Leviticus 17–18**, the same chapters that bind *"the stranger who sojourns among you"*.

Paul — Saul of Tarsus, who called himself a Pharisee — is the earliest writer in whom the teaching of justification apart from *"works of the law"* appears. Many historians hold that Paul himself continued to live as an observant Jew and was arguing a framework for Gentile inclusion; later readers, cut off from his Jewish setting, built a full rejection of the Torah on his letters.

VI-B. Marcion of Sinope: The Man Who Rejected the Tanakh

The clearest and best-documented origin of the teaching that the Torah is abolished — and that the **Elohim** of the Hebrew scriptures is a lesser being than the Father of Jesus — is Marcion of Sinope (c. 85–160 CE). Born on the Black Sea coast of what is now Turkey, reportedly the son of a bishop, he came to Rome around 140 CE, gave the congregation there a gift of 200,000 sesterces, and began teaching a new system. The Roman church expelled him in 144 CE and returned his money.

First, Marcion taught two gods: the Creator of the Hebrew scriptures, whom he regarded as a just but harsh and inferior deity, and a higher, previously unknown Father revealed in Jesus.

Second, he rejected the entire Tanakh as the work of the lesser god.

Third, he formed the first known Christian canon: an edited Gospel of Luke and ten edited letters of Paul, with the connections to the Hebrew scriptures cut away.

Fourth, he held Paul to be the only true apostle, and the Twelve to be corrupted by Jewish practice.

The response was fierce. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian wrote against him; Irenaeus reports that Polycarp called him *"the firstborn of Satan"* (Against Heresies 3.3.4); Tertullian answered him in five books, Against Marcion (c. 207–208 CE). Yet his central premise — that the coming of Christ ended the authority of the Torah and severed the faith from its Hebrew covenant — outlived his condemnation and colored the popular framing of Christianity for centuries.

VI-C. Constantine, Nicaea, and the Imperial Church

In 325 CE Emperor Constantine, not yet baptized, convened and opened the Council of Nicaea. His aim was the unity of the empire. The council's main business was the teaching of Arius of Alexandria that the Son was a created being — *"there was a time when he was not."* Bishop Alexander and his deacon Athanasius opposed him. The council produced the Nicene Creed, which declared the Son *homoousios (of one substance)* with the Father — a term drawn from Greek philosophical vocabulary, not from the Hebrew of the covenant.

Bart Ehrman and other historians stress that Nicaea did not invent the belief that Jesus was divine — most present already held it; the argument was over in what sense. What imperial patronage did bring was the power of the state behind one party. Dissenting Christian groups were excluded and pursued, and under the Christian emperors a growing body of law restricted the Jews. The Edict of Thessalonica (380 CE) made Nicene Christianity the religion of the empire; Judaism remained legal, but the laws collected in the Theodosian Code steadily narrowed Jewish life.

VI-D. The Timeline of the “Torah Abolished” Teaching

DATE	DEVELOPMENT
Before 70 CE	The Jerusalem followers of Jesus remain Torah-observant. No credible evidence that Jesus taught that the Torah was abolished.
70 CE	The Temple falls. Jewish life reorganizes around the rabbinic movement; Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus draw apart.
c. 90–140 CE	Paul’s letters are increasingly read apart from their Jewish setting. The Gospel of John (usually dated c. 90–110) carries the sharpest language against <i>“the Jews.”</i>
144 CE	Marcion expelled at Rome. His canon — the first formal rejection of the Tanakh as Christian scripture — forces the wider church to define its own.
c. 200–220 CE	The Mishnah completed; rabbinic Judaism codifies the oral tradition.
325 CE	Council of Nicaea defines the nature of Christ under imperial sponsorship in Greek philosophical terms.
380 CE	Nicene Christianity made the religion of the empire; restrictions on Jews multiply in imperial law.

Finding — the origin of the teaching: That the first systematic rejection of the Tanakh came from Marcion in the second century, not from the first Jerusalem community, is carried by the church’s own opponents of Marcion (Irenaeus, Tertullian), by the record of the Jerusalem community, and by modern historians. **Corroborated.**

Finding — the claim that the Torah was abolished: The Tanakh declares its words everlasting (Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 119:89, 152) and forbids taking away from them (Deuteronomy 4:2). **Not in the text.**

VII. WHO WAS THE HISTORICAL JESUS?

VII-A. Did He Exist?

The scholarly consensus across Jewish, Christian, and secular scholarship is that a Jewish teacher named Jesus (Yeshua) of Nazareth lived in first-century Galilee and Judea and was executed under Pontius Pilate. Bart Ehrman, an agnostic critic of traditional Christianity, states that virtually every competent scholar of antiquity, Christian or not, agrees that he existed. The evidence comes from several independent sources written within decades to a century of his death.

WITNESS	DATE	WHAT IT RECORDS
Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> 18.63–64 (the Testimonium)	c. 93–94 CE	A passage on Jesus as a teacher executed under Pilate. The surviving Greek text was expanded by later Christian copyists; most scholars hold that an authentic core stood behind it. The Arabic version quoted by Agapius (10th century) reads more cautiously: <i>"he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders."</i>
Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> 20.200	c. 93–94 CE	The stoning of <i>"James, the brother of Jesus who was called Christ"</i> in 62 CE. Accepted as genuine by nearly all scholars; Louis Feldman notes that few have doubted it.
Tacitus, <i>Annals</i> 15.44	c. 116 CE	<i>"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."</i> Its hostility to Christians rules out a Christian insertion.
Suetonius, <i>Claudius</i> 25.4	c. 121 CE	<i>"Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."</i> Most scholars read Chrestus as Christus; compare Acts 18:2.
Pliny the Younger, <i>Letters</i> 10.96	c. 111 CE	Christians in Bithynia met before dawn to <i>"sing a hymn to Christ as to a god"</i> and bound themselves by oath not to steal or commit adultery.

On Josephus the standing rule of this Institution applies: he wrote under the patronage of the Flavian emperors and carries a documented pro-Roman bias, so his claims are accepted only where another witness stands with them. Here they do. Tacitus independently confirms the execution under Pilate; Paul independently names *"James the Lord's brother"* (Galatians 1:19, cited as historical record). One detail needs correcting in Tacitus himself: an inscription found at Caesarea in 1961 shows Pilate's title was *prefect*, not procurator, which was the later title of the office. John Dominic Crossan has written that the crucifixion under Pilate is *"as sure as anything historical can ever be."*

What the non-Christian sources establish, taken together: he existed; he was a Jewish teacher in Judea and Galilee; he was executed by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, who governed 26–36 CE; his movement continued and reached Rome within a generation; he had a brother named James; and his followers called him the Messiah.

Finding — existence and execution: Jesus’s existence and his execution under Pilate are carried by Josephus and Tacitus independently, with Suetonius and Pliny confirming the movement. **Corroborated.**

Finding — his brother James: Carried by Josephus (Antiquities 20.200) and Paul (Galatians 1:19) independently. **Corroborated.**

Finding — Suetonius’s “Chrestus” as Christ: Probable, and widely accepted, but it rests on one ambiguous passage. **Single witness.**

VII-B. What Kind of Jew Was He?

This is where the historical record parts from much popular teaching. David Flusser (1917–2000), professor of early Christianity and Second Temple Judaism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and an Orthodox Jew, read the Gospels against the Jewish sources of the period and concluded that Jesus worked entirely within the categories of Second Temple Judaism; his debates with the Pharisees were arguments inside Judaism, not a rejection of it.

The Tanakh supplies the test that settles the doctrinal question. Any prophet — however great his signs — who draws the people away from the commandments is not to be followed (**Deuteronomy 13:1–5**). A true prophet speaks the words **Yahweh** commands, and the words stand (**Deuteronomy 18:18–22**). And the covenant itself declares:

“The secret things belong to Yahweh our Elohim, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Torah” (Deuteronomy 29:29 [Heb. 29:28])

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our Elohim stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8)

“Forever, O Yahweh, Your word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89)

Forever — not until a Messiah comes, and not until a death on a Roman cross. Even the promised new covenant does not replace the Torah; it writes the same Torah on the heart: *“I will put My Torah within them, and write it on their hearts”* (Jeremiah 31:33). If the historical Jesus was a Jew who upheld the written Torah and challenged the oral traditions of his day, then the teaching that his death abolished the Torah did not come from him. On the historical evidence it came later — in the second

century, through Marcion, and was carried forward by an imperial church that framed its creed in Greek philosophical terms.

Finding — Jesus as a Torah-observant Jew of his time: Carried by the Jerusalem community’s own practice, by Jewish scholarship (Flusser), and by the consensus of modern historians. **Corroborated.**

VIII. THE WITNESSES — THE HISTORIANS OF THE FIRST CENTURY

The study of first-century Judea rests on primary testimony. The table sets out the principal witnesses, what each contributes, and the bias each must be read against. None of them was a theologian writing for or against the covenant; that is what gives their agreement its weight.

HISTORIAN	POSITION AND WORK	VALUE FOR THIS STUDY	BIAS TO WEIGH
Tacitus (c. 56–c. 120 CE)	Roman senator and historian; <i>Annals</i> , <i>Histories</i>	Roman confirmation of the execution under Pilate and of the movement’s spread to Rome; hostile witness to Jewish practice	Open contempt for Jews and Christians — which is why his confirmation cannot be a Christian invention
Suetonius (c. 69–after 122 CE)	Imperial secretary under Hadrian; <i>Lives of the Twelve Caesars</i>	The expulsion of Jews from Rome under Claudius over “ <i>Chrestus</i> ”; Nero’s punishment of Christians	Anecdotal biographer; his references are incidental, which adds to their credibility
Josephus (37–c. 100 CE)	Priest, former Jewish commander in Galilee, court historian of the Flavians; <i>Jewish War</i> , <i>Antiquities</i> , <i>Against Apion</i> , <i>Life</i>	The indispensable insider account of the sects, covenant practice, the Temple, and its fall; two references to Jesus	Wrote under Roman patronage after surrendering in the revolt; every claim must be independently corroborated
Livy (c. 59 BCE–17 CE)	Roman historian; <i>History of Rome</i> (142 books, 35 surviving)	Background: Roman law, religion, and the Senate’s suppression of the Bacchanalia (186 BCE) — the pattern later applied to foreign movements	A moralist who wrote Rome’s history as a story of virtue; background only

HISTORIAN	POSITION AND WORK	VALUE FOR THIS STUDY	BIAS TO WEIGH
Plutarch (c. 45–c. 125 CE)	Greek philosopher, biographer, priest at Delphi; Parallel Lives, Moralia	The Greek philosophical world in which later theology — including the vocabulary of Nicaea — took shape	Selects facts to teach moral lessons; context, not a neutral recorder

Four further writers fill in the setting. **Velleius Paterculus** (c. 19 BCE–after 30 CE), an officer who served under Tiberius, gives a contemporary portrait of the emperor under whom Pilate governed. **Pliny the Elder** (23–79 CE) describes the geography of Judea and places the Essenes by the Dead Sea (Natural History 5.73). **Pliny the Younger** (c. 61–113 CE) supplies the Bithynia letter. **Dio Chrysostom** (c. 40–115 CE) shows the Greek political and philosophical thought of the period.

The Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press) gives the Greek or Latin text of these writers with facing English. Josephus is freely available in the Whiston translation at gutenberg.org, ccel.org, and penelope.uchicago.edu. Read together, the witnesses agree: the covenant people lived by the covenant; Jesus lived, taught, and was executed under Pilate; his movement spread; and the philosophical world of Greece and the power of Rome, not the first Jerusalem community, pulled the later church away from the written Torah.

IX. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — HOW EACH TRADITION HANDLES THIS HISTORY

The table sets the three traditions against the findings of this study. Comparative texts are cited as historical reference only, in keeping with the standing rule of this document.

ELEMENT	✡ JUDAISM	✝ CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
Practice today	Rabbinic Judaism, normative since late antiquity, is built on the Mishnah and the Babylonian Talmud. Karaite Judaism holds the written Torah alone as binding.	Most churches teach that the Torah ended with the cross, confess the Nicene Creed, and read the Tanakh through the New Testament.	The Qur'an presents 'Isa as a prophet and messenger, born of Maryam, who confirmed the Torah and was given the <i>Injil (Gospel)</i> (Q. 5:46); it denies that he was God (Q. 5:72–75).

ELEMENT	✧ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	✧ ISLAM
Covenant strength	Kept the Sabbath, the food laws, and circumcision through every persecution; preserved the Hebrew text.	Preserved the memory of a Jewish teacher who rebuked those who <i>"make void the word of Elobim"</i> by tradition (Matthew 15:6).	Holds that 'Isa confirmed the Torah and did not abolish it — closer to the first-century record than the later creeds.
Covenant departure	The oral tradition, codified long after the first century, is treated as binding alongside the written Torah — an addition Deuteronomy 4:2 forbids. The Yavneh story (Talmud Gittin 56b) and the execution notice (Sanhedrin 43a) are later rabbinic witnesses, not covenant authority.	The teaching that the Torah was abolished — traced historically to Marcion, not to Jesus — and a creed framed in Greek philosophical terms under imperial sponsorship.	The Qur'an does not use the Name Yahweh ; and its denial of the crucifixion (Q. 4:157) stands against the corroborated testimony of Tacitus and Josephus.
Covenant witness	The survival of the covenant people is the living proof that the covenant was never withdrawn (Jeremiah 31:35–37).	Read from the Tanakh outward, the Jerusalem community of Acts 21:20 — <i>"all zealous for the Torah"</i> — is the first Christian witness against the abolition teaching.	The Qur'an's <i>"confirming what was before him of the Torah"</i> is a third witness that the prophet from Nazareth did not come to end it.

X. CORRECTIONS TO EARLIER LIBRARY MATERIAL

The Library's rule is that its own earlier work is tested by the same standard as everyone else's. The March 2026 edition of this study needed the following refinements, now made in the text above.

Correction 1 — the Roman critics. The March edition called Tacitus a *"Roman administrator"* and listed Ovid and Suetonius among those who ridiculed the Sabbath. Tacitus was a senator and historian; the clearest ridicule of the Sabbath comes from Seneca, Juvenal, and Tacitus (Section III-B).

Correction 2 — circumcision and the gymnasium. The embarrassment of circumcised men in the Greek gymnasium belongs to the Hellenizing crisis of the second century BCE (1 Maccabees 1:14–15), not to first-century Greek athletes.

Correction 3 — the people of the land. The *am ha-aretz (people of the land)* are described in rabbinic literature; the March edition attributed this to Josephus.

Correction 4 — dates. The Jerusalem Talmud is now dated c. 400 CE and the Babylonian c. 500–600 CE; the Gospel of John is usually dated c. 90–110 CE, not 100–140.

Correction 5 — Marcion's gift and Constantine's role. The claim that 200,000 sesterces equaled "*more than 100 years' wages*" is removed as unsourced; the amount itself stands. Constantine convened and opened Nicaea while unbaptized; the March edition said he "*presided as a catechumen,*" which the sources do not establish.

Correction 6 — the Jews under the Christian emperors. The March edition said the Edict of Thessalonica began systematic state persecution of the Jews. Judaism remained a legal religion; what followed was a growing body of restrictive law (Section VI-C).

Correction 7 — the Islamic witness. The March edition called 'Isa a messenger of "*Yahweh (Allah)*" and said he "*upheld the Torah (Injil)*." The Qur'an does not use the Name **Yahweh**, and the *Injil* is the Gospel given to 'Isa, not the Torah. The Qur'an says he confirmed the Torah (Q. 5:46).

Correction 8 — attributions. The phrase "*as sure as anything historical can ever be*" is John Dominic Crossan's. The March edition credited Yechezkel Kaufmann with the position that oral tradition is merely human interpretation; that is the Karaite position, not Kaufmann's, and the attribution is withdrawn. Pilate's title was prefect (Section VII-A). Quotations attributed to Wright, Ehrman, Fredriksen, Steinsaltz, Feldman, and Britannica are now given as summaries, because their exact wording could not be checked against the printed page.

Correction 9 — non-Tanakh sources as support. Under the standing rule, the Talmud (Gittin 56b, Sanhedrin 43a) and the New Testament now appear as historical and comparative reference only; the doctrinal findings are carried by the Tanakh.

XI. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON THE COVENANT AND ITS HISTORY

Per the **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard, no doctrine may stand on a single text. Each declaration below draws on more than one witness.

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
I	Yahweh gave Israel visible signs of His covenant — the Sabbath, circumcision, and separation in food — and the first-century people kept them.	Genesis 17:11–13; Exodus 31:13–17; Leviticus 11:44–45; 20:24–26
II	No one may add to the covenant or take away from it — neither an oral tradition raised to the level of Scripture nor a doctrine that the Torah has ended.	Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:6
III	The words of the covenant stand forever, for us and for our children.	Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 119:89, 152
IV	Any prophet or teacher, however great his signs, who draws the people away from the commandments is tested and refused.	Deuteronomy 13:1–5; 18:18–22
V	The new covenant writes the same Torah on the heart; it does not replace it.	Jeremiah 31:31–33; Ezekiel 36:26–27
VI	There is one Torah for the native and the stranger; the nations come into the covenant, not around it.	Exodus 12:49; Numbers 15:15–16; Isaiah 56:6–7
VII	The Torah goes out from Zion to the nations, and the last word of the Prophets is to remember it.	Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2; Malachi 4:4

XII. THE COVENANT RESPONSE — WHAT THE TANAKH SAYS TO THE ONE WHO ASKS

Behind these questions there is usually a person who has been told that the law was nailed to the cross, and who has begun to suspect that the history is more complicated than the sermon. The Tanakh's answer is fivefold.

First: the covenant people kept the covenant. Friend and enemy alike testify that first-century Jews kept the Sabbath, the food laws, and circumcision — the very signs **Yahweh** called everlasting (**Exodus 31:16; Genesis 17:13**).

Second: the oral law was not yet written. What Jesus met was unwritten, disputed tradition, and the Torah had already ruled that nothing may be added to its word (**Deuteronomy 4:2**).

Third: the abolition teaching has a date and a name. It does not come from the first Jerusalem community. Its first systematic form is Marcion's, in the second century, and the church that condemned him still inherited his premise.

Fourth: test every teacher by the covenant. Whoever teaches that **Yahweh's** commandments have ended — whatever name he speaks in — is weighed by **Deuteronomy 13** and found wanting.

Fifth: return to the written covenant. It is not far off: *"The word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it"* (Deuteronomy 30:14).

An empire tried to break the covenant. The covenant stands.

SCRIPTURE INDEX

REFERENCE	SUBJECT	SECTION
Genesis 17:10–13	Circumcision, the sign of an everlasting covenant	II; III-B; XI; XII
Exodus 12:49	One Torah for the native and the stranger	XI
Exodus 19:5–6	A kingdom of priests and a holy nation	III-B
Exodus 31:13–17	The Sabbath, a sign and an everlasting covenant	II; III-B; XI; XII
Leviticus 11; 20:24–26	Clean food; separated from the peoples	II; III-B; IV; XI
Leviticus 17–18	Laws binding the stranger	VI-A
Numbers 15:15–16	One law for you and the stranger	XI
Deuteronomy 4:2	Do not add or take away	I-B; II; V-C; VI-D; IX; XI; XII
Deuteronomy 12:32 [Heb. 13:1]	Do not add to it nor take from it	II; V-C; XI
Deuteronomy 13:1–5	The test of a prophet who leads away	I-B; VII-B; XI; XII
Deuteronomy 14	The clean and unclean	III-B
Deuteronomy 18:18–22	The prophet who speaks Yahweh's words	VII-B; XI
Deuteronomy 19:15	Two or three witnesses	Opening; I-B; XI

REFERENCE	SUBJECT	SECTION
Deuteronomy 29:29 [Heb. 29:28]	The revealed things belong to us forever	II; VI-D; VII-B; XI; Closing
Deuteronomy 30:14	The word is very near you	XII
Deuteronomy 31:9	Moses wrote this Torah	II
Isaiah 2:3	The Torah goes out from Zion	XI
Isaiah 40:8	The word of our Elohim stands forever	VI-D; VII-B; XI
Isaiah 56:6–7	Foreigners who keep the Sabbath	XI
Jeremiah 31:31–37	The Torah on the heart; Israel never cast off	VII-B; IX; XI
Ezekiel 36:26–27	A new heart to walk in My statutes	XI
Micah 4:2	The Torah from Zion	XI
Malachi 4:4 [Heb. 3:22]	Remember the Torah of Moses	II; XI
Psalms 119:89, 152	Your word is settled in heaven; founded forever	VI-D; VII-B; XI
Proverbs 30:6	Do not add to His words	XI

“The secret things belong to Yahweh our Elohim, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Torah.”

Deuteronomy 29:29 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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