

CHRIST-RELATED WRITINGS OF THE FIRST 3 CENTURIES in which “Jesus” is either not mentioned at all or is outnumbered at least ten-to-one by other designations

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Annotations (**) below give reasons for believing the writer/editor was or was not an advocate of docetism. If docetic, he might, according to one hypothesis, have been avoiding mention of “Jesus” because he believed it would signify an earthly, bodily form for the Savior that suffered the crucifixion rather than escaping it.

A. Gnostic and Pseudepigraphic Cases (32) (from [Early Christian Writings](#) website and [The Gnostic Society Library](#) website)

- [Apocryphon of James](#) (“Jesus” once; “Savior” 6 times, “Lord” 14 times, “Son” or “Son of Man” 6 times)

**“And five hundred and fifty days after he arose from the dead, we said to him...” i.e., the Savior had been human and died, as opposed to a docetic viewpoint

- [Apocryphon of John](#) (“Jesus Christ” once, tacked on at very end; “the Savior” 8 times, “Lord” 9 times, “Christ” 6 times, “Master” once)

**And it happened one day, when John, the brother of James - who are the sons of Zebedee - had come up to the temple, that a Pharisee named Arimanius approached him and said to him, "Where is your master whom you followed?" And he said to him, "He has gone to the place from which he came." The Pharisee said to him, "With deception did this Nazarene deceive you (pl.), and he filled your ears with lies, and closed your hearts (and) turned you from the traditions of your fathers. When I, John, heard these things I turned away from the temple to a desert place...." This Pharisee had known that the “master” was a human and a Nazarene, and hence not a docetic phantasm. And John did not deny it..

- [Dialogue of the Savior](#) (no “Jesus”; “the Savior” 5 times, “the Lord” 42 times)

**Here the Savior responds to questions from his disciples, in particular Matthew, Judas and Mary (Magdalene presumably). This is prior to the crucifixion (since Judas is alive), and there is no hint that the Savior was not in his normal human body.

- [Elcesaites](#) (apparently no “Jesus”; but according to Hippolytus: “Son of God” once, “His Son the great King” once, and “Christ” once)

**From John Chapman’s summary in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*: According to Hippolytus, Alcibiades, who possessed the book of Elchasai used by the Ebionites, had taught “that Christ was a man like others” among other things (i.e., no docetism there). St. Paul and his writings were said to be rejected by Alcibiades.

- [Eugnostos the Blessed](#) (no “Jesus”; Savior” 3 times, “Son of God“ once, “Son of Man” 3 times)

**Highly Gnostic, too slight a Christian influence to say anything about docetism

- [Excerpts of Theodotus](#) (no “Jesus”; “the Savior” 6 times, “our Savior” once, “Lord” frequently, “Christ” 2 times, “the Son” 5 times)

**The Savior is repeatedly treated as having had a physical body. Also, “Now the Lord with His precious blood redeems us, freeing us from our old bitter masters, that is, our sins,” Hence it is non-docetic.

- [Gospel of Mary](#) (no “Jesus”; “the Savior” 13 times, “Lord” 3 times, “Blessed One” once, “Son of Man” 2 times)

**The Savior tells his disciples things from Matthew or the other Gospels spoken before the crucifixion. In particular, “They wept greatly, saying, How shall we go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel of the Kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare Him, how will they spare us?” I.e., their Savior had not been spared from being crucified, so the disciples feared for their own lives.

- [Gospel of Peter](#) (no “Jesus”; “Savior” once, “Lord’ 14 times, “Son of God” 4 times)

**It’s all about the crucifixion of “the lord,” hence not at all docetic: “Give him to drink gall with vinegar. And they mixed and gave him to drink”; “they drew out the nails from the hands of the “Lord.”

- [Gospel of the Egyptians](#) (no Jesus; ”the Lord” 5 times; “the Saviour” or “Savior” 3 times)

**The surviving fragments show a resemblance to the Gospel of Thomas, with the Saviour making some enigmatic statements which, however, do not speak one way or the other about a belief that the Saviour was or was not human. (On the other hand, the Gospel of Thomas, which is lengthy, does not speak of the crucifixion or resurrection yet mentions “Jesus” over 100 times.)

- [Gospel of the Savior](#) (Papyrus Berolinensis 22220) (no “Jesus”; “Savior” 8 times, “Lord” 3 times: as confirmed by Charles Hedrick, Oct. 2 & 10, 2013 emails).

**Though very fragmentary, its reference to the Savior rising in three days indicates acceptance of the crucifixion of his human body.

- [Julius Cassianus](#), as quoted by Clement of Alexandria in *Stromateis* (III.13.91-92) (no “Jesus”; “the prophet” once, “the Saviour” once, “the Lord” once, “Christ” once)

**The few available, very short quotes do not seem to allow any judgment on whether or not Julius Cassianus consider the Savior to have had a human body or not. However, he is believed to have been a [student of docetism](#).

- [Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840](#) (no “Jesus”; “the Savior” 3 times)

**In this non-canonical fragment, a Pharisee complains to the Savior that he and his disciples had not bathed were not clean enough to be walking around in the temple; hence the writer was describing a savior who was of human flesh and not any docetic phantasm.

- Ptolemy the Gnostic: [Letter to Flora](#) and the [Proem to the Gospel of John](#) (no “Jesus”; “Savior” 19 times, “Christ” once, “the Lord” once, “Son” 6 times)

**The former emphasizes the teachings of the Savior, and quotes so much from Matthew, that it seems apparent it treated the Savior as the human he was portrayed as in the Gospels during his ministry (non-docetic). The latter discourses on John 1:1-5. Ptolemy quotes, favorably, from Paul but does not quote any of his sentences containing the name “Jesus.” He is said to have been a pupil of Valentinus, hence I find no definite conclusion here on docetism status..

- [Shepherd of Hermas](#) (no “Jesus,” “the Master” 21 times, “His Son” 8 times, “the glorious man” 2 times, “the Lord” a few times as in “when you heard the revelation which the Lord revealed unto you”)

**It is concerned with Christian virtues, not theology, and so does not have anything to say about docetic beliefs. Of special interest here is the statement, “no one shall enter into the kingdom of God, except he receive the name of His Son,” which is repeated: “a man cannot enter into the kingdom of God except by the name of His Son that is beloved by Him.” However, the name of the Son is not supplied (no “Jesus,” no “Immanuel.”).

- [Sophia of Jesus Christ](#) (no “Jesus” except in the title; “Savior” 25 times, “Lord” 16 times)

**It commences with, “After he rose from the dead, his twelve disciples...” So there was no docetism here.

- [Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs](#) (no “Jesus”; “Saviour” 6 times, “Lamb of God” 2 times, “Christ” once, “His Son” once)

**The following indicates there was no docetism here either: “For our father Israel shall be pure from the ungodliness of the chief priests who shall lay their hands upon the Saviour of the world.”

- [The 1st Apocalypse of James](#) (no “Jesus”; “Lord” 14 times)

**It is considered to be Gnostic Christian. It obliquely mentions the crucifixion, and so its writer was probably not a believer in docetism..

- [The 2nd Apocalypse of James](#) (no “Jesus”; “Lord” 5 times)

**The following indicates that “the Lord” was raised in the flesh: “He said to me [James], “Hail, my brother; my brother, hail.” As I raised my face to stare at him, (my) mother said to me, “Do not be frightened, my son, because he said ‘My brother’ to you (sg.). For you (pl.) were nourished with this same milk. Because of this he calls me “My mother”. For he is not a stranger to us. He is your step-brother.” According to [Charles Hedrick](#), “The document clearly falls within the Christian-Gnostic tradition. Yet the author shows remarkable restraint in treating the usual Gnostic themes and draws extensively from Jewish-Christian tradition.”

- [The Apocalypse of Peter](#) (“the living Jesus” once; “the Savior” 7 times, “Son of Man” once, “Lord” 2 times, “Christ” once)

**The Risen Savior discourses with Peter and the faithful. Nothing is mentioned about his corporeality, though the risen Savior is evidently in bodily form since he was sitting in the temple.

- [The Book of Thomas the Contender](#) (“Jesus” 2 times; “Savior” 15 times, “Lord” 10 times)

**A Gnostic text without hints of docetism,

- [The Concept of Our Great Power](#) (no “Jesus”; “the man” who: “will speak in parables,” “he raised the dead”; “he destroyed his dominion -- that of the ruler of Hades -- ,” “He is from the Logos of the power of life.”)

**This Gnostic treatise is docetic: “the nature of his flesh could not be seized.”

- [The Interpretation of Knowledge](#) (“Jesus” once; “Christ” 3 times, “the Son” 5 times, “Great Son” once, “Savior” 2 times, “our Head” once, “the Head” 8 times)

**It is probably not a docetic treatise, as it speaks of Christ having been crucified, and as having suffered. However, it does perhaps use the metaphor of Christ having been “held on to” in the church to reflect having been nailed to the cross.

- [The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah](#) (“Jesus” once, plus two times in the context of “...who will be called Jesus”; “Lord” some 20 times often as “my Lord,” “the Lord’s Beloved” once, “Son” 2 times, “Christ” 2 times, “Lord Christ” 4 times, an indescribably “glorious angel” once, the “Only-begotten” once)

**It may be more Pseudepigraphic than Gnostic. “Who will be called Jesus” need not be interpreted as his having been named “Jesus” at birth. Instead it is consistent with: “When I [the glorious angel] have raised thee [Isaiah] on high ... degrees] and made thee see the vision, on account of which I have been sent, then thou wilt understand who I am: but my name thou dost not know.” I.e., before being called “Jesus” he had had a different name not divulged.

- [The Odes of Solomon](#) (no “Jesus”; “the Savior” 2 times, “Messiah” once, “Son of the Most High” once, “Son of God” once, “the Lord” several times)

**The Odes seem more Christian than Jewish, and slightly [more Gnostic than orthodox](#).

Although the “Odes explicitly refers not only to Jesus, but also to the ideas of virgin birth, harrowing of hell, and the Trinity,” it never mentions the name “Jesus.” It seems uncertain if its writer was docetic, in that it speaks of “you who are saved in Him who was saved,” which doesn’t say how that the Savior was saved from death..

- [The Report of Pilate to the Emperor Claudius](#) (no “Jesus”; God’s “holy one” once, “Son of God” once)

**Though a Christian forgery, it briefly summarizes Christ’s ministry, arrest, crucifixion and arising from the tomb from Pilate’s point of view as derived apparently from the Gospel of Matthew. Although the *Report* never mentions Jesus by name, the Matthean text it follows calls him Jesus some 13 times from the trial before Pilate to his rising from the tomb

- [The Sibylline Oracles](#) (no “Jesus” except once in the (later) Preface; Christ is referred to in various ways: (bk VI): “great Son,” “pure flower,” “God... outstretched”; bk VIII: no “Jesus”; “He himself who is born the mighty God”; “a holy Lord of all the earth,” “the King...to judge all flesh,” “the rod of David”; possible exception – an acrostic formed from first letters of 34 lines in Greek preceding line 184 secretly spells out “Jesus”....)

**They are a “[chaotic medley](#)” of Gnostic, Jewish and Christian ramblings attributed to the oracle. Non-docetic..

- [The Sophia of Jesus Christ](#) (“Jesus” appears only in front & end titles; “Savior” 25 times, “Son” 12 times, as in “the Son,” “Son of God,” “Son of Man”; “Lord” about 8 times, “Christ” once, “First Begetter” once)

**It doesn’t deal with docetic topics, and starts out, “After he rose from the dead, his twelve disciples and seven women continued to be his followers, and went to Galilee onto the mountain called “Divination and Joy”. When they gathered together...

- [The Testament of Solomon](#) (no “Jesus”; “Son of God” once, “Saviour” once, “The great among men,’ who is to suffer many things at the hands of men,” “For never before doth arise a king like unto him, one frustrating us all [us demons], whose mother shall not have contact with man.”)

**It is evidently non-docetic. It names “Immanuel” explicitly 3 times as representing the secret name-number 644, thereby exposing the secret of the author; this indicates that these three brief explanations of 644 were insertions by a later redactor..

- [The Traditions of Matthias](#) (no “Jesus”; “Lord” 2 times, “the Savior” once, “the Son of man” once)

**No indication of docetism

- [The Tripartite Tractate](#) (“Jesus” 2 times; “Savior” 18 times, “Son of God” or “the Son” 2 times, “Lord” at least 5 times, “Redeemer” 3 times, “Christ” 7 times, “the Well Pleasing One” once, “the Beloved” once)

**It is Gnostic but accepts that the Savior existed in the flesh: “he had let himself be conceived and born as an infant, in body and soul.

- [Trimorphic Protennoia](#) (“Jesus” once; “Christ” 4 times, “the Perfect Son” 2 times, “the Son of God” 2 times, “the God who was begotten” 2 times)

**Docetism uncertain, as Jesus was placed on the cross then carried off the cursed wood and taken to the dwelling place of the Gnostic Father. Did he suffer? Was he carried off dead or alive?

- [Zostrianus](#) (no “Jesus”; “the Savior” once)

**This Gnostic work is too slightly Christianized to determine if it has docetic implications. Its one reference to “the Savior” sent by the kind Father nevertheless raises the question of why was “Jesus” or “Jesus Christ” not used instead of “Savior”? If a Christian editor inserted the “Savior” word, the same implication arises: he knew that many Gnostics much preferred “Savior” over “Jesus/”

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B. NON-GNOSTIC & NON-PSEUDEPIGRAPHIC CASES (9)

(from [Early Christian Writings](#) website)

- [Apollonius of Ephesus](#)) (no “Jesus”; “our Lord” once, “the Lord” 3 times, “Christ” once)

**He was possibly a Bishop of Ephesus. Seems to have been very orthodox.

- [Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus](#) (no “Jesus”; “Saviour” 2 times, “the Lord” once, “Son” 7 times, “the Word” 5 times)

**An anonymous apologia for Christianity

- [Mara Bar-Serapion](#) (no “Jesus”; “Wise King” 2 times)

**The Wise King was executed by the Jews but lives on because his “new law” lives on; his execution was avenged by God because afterwards the Jewish kingdom was abolished (in 70 CE?). So this king had to be “Jesus.” He may have been known as the Wise King instead of the King of the Jews.

- [Papias](#), Bishop of Hierapolis (via Eusebius) (no “Jesus”; “the Lord” some 18 times—3 via Irenaeus, “Christ” 4 times, “Saviour” 2 times, “the Son” 4 times)

**Papias may have known what the Gnostics knew concerning the name “Jesus.” But having been a Bishop, he can hardly be considered to have been a Gnostic, or docetic Gnostic himself. His reference to “Mary the mother of the Lord” (i.e., he had been born as a human baby) suggests he did not hold docetic views.

- [Pliny the Younger](#) (late 1st-century Roman lawyer and magistrate) (no “Jesus”; “Christ” 3 times)

- [Quadratus](#), Bishop of Athens (no “Jesus”; “our Saviour” once, “the Saviour” once)

- [Suetonius](#), a biographer on Pliny’s staff, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, in *V. Claudius* (no “Jesus”; “Chrestus” once)

- [Tacitus](#)^m, late 1st-century Roman senator and historian, in *Annals*, bk 15 (no “Jesus”; “Christus” once)

- [The Teachings of Silvanus](#) (“Jesus” once; “Christ” 43 times, “Lord” 4 times, “Son” 3 times)

**“One of the Nag Hammadi texts. However, it is [not a Gnostic text](#), but has some anti-gnostic warnings, along with orthodox Christian teachings”

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Conclusion:

Avoidance of the name “Jesus” was much too prevalent among early Christ-related writings that acknowledged the Savior’s existence in the flesh to attribute the practice to a belief in docetism. And in *A Valentinian Exposition* (presumably of docetic authorship) Jesus” is used 10 times – more than any other title.,

contain no Christ figure.