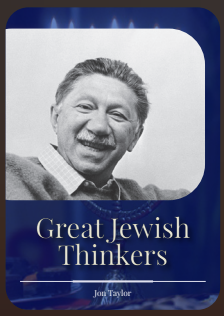
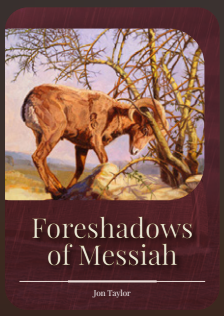


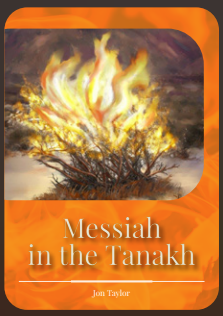
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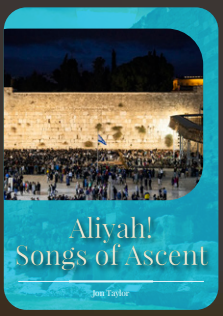
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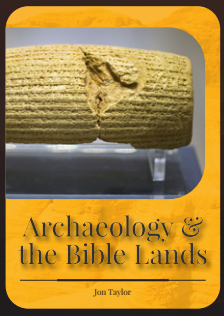
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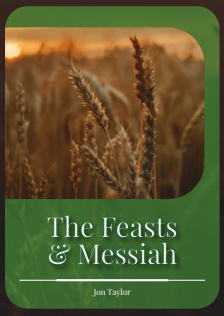




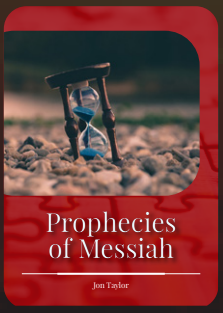




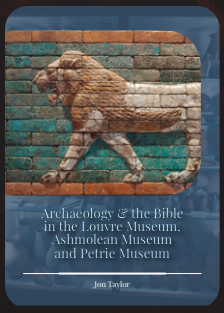












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The Classical Writers, Ancient History & the Bible

Ancient History Inevitably Relates to the Bible



Secular books on ancient history often engage the reader with the Bible. If one reads 'Egypt of the Pharaohs' by Sir Alan Gardiner, 'Assyria' by Eckart Frahm, 'Babylon' by Paul Kriwaczek or 'Persian Fire' by Tom Holland, it is soon apparent that each of these works draws from Bible narratives, cites Bible verses or references biblical characters. Interestingly Tom Holland has some sympathies with a Judeo-Christian worldview as being a positive influence for a moral society.

The same applies to atlases and encyclopaedias of the ancient world, irrespective of whether they are secular or religious. However, there are a number of publications that purposefully and intentionally parallel biblical history with ancient history or world

history. Probably the most famous example is James Ussher's 'The Annals of the World', although this is perhaps better known for calculating the age of the earth rather than for intensively corroborating numerous historical events.

Ussher records history from creation until just beyond the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in AD70. In his introductory epistle to the reader, Ussher explains that, "Of the many historians who lived before Julius Caesar, the passing of time leaves only four of note – Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and Polybius. The last one is poor and inaccurate in many places. These I esteemed the most authentic for their antiquity."[1] Reading Herodotus alongside the Bible is a compelling and worthwhile study in its own right in relation to Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia especially. Herodotus is a long read and a quick means to verify the above is to compare the biblical characters mentioned in the index with the text itself.

In the British Museum, in addition to several works on biblical archaeology, there are some other works relating to ancient history, world history and the Bible. These manuals tend to be A3-sized and take the forms of foldable illustrated charts that follow Ussher's chronology. Some include vital biblical archaeological discoveries and include timelines of biblical history, showing how that intersects with the history of various ancient empires. One is entitled, 'The Wall Chart Of World History From Earliest Times To The Present', providing fourteen colour panels opening up 15.5 feet of history!

When Layard and Botta, following their archaeological excavations wrote, 'The Buried City of the east, Nineveh', the third chapter was entitled, 'The Nineveh of the Classical Writers'. They valued and respected the accounts of the famous authors of antiquity, probably more so than many of their contemporaries who were heavily influenced by higher criticism. They cited the writings of Herodotus, the Father of History, Xenophon, Diodorus Siculus and Julius Africanus.[2] Interestingly the chapter that preceded this was called, 'The Nineveh of the Bible'.[3] Hence it is obvious that both the Scriptures and the classical writers informed their investigations and fieldwork.

How is the Bible Historically Reliable and Trustworthy as an Ancient Historical Source?

Today, many are suspicious of ancient historical accounts because of the underlying assumption that history is merely written by the victors. Egyptologists are keenly aware of statues or reliefs of pharaohs, which have been deliberately defaced over arguments concerning monotheism and polytheism in relation to the Amarna heresy.

Nebuchadnezzar's over-exaggerated appraisal of his abilities on the information board in the upper galleries of the British Museum would make many of the prominent world leaders today appear comparatively modest!

Herodotus relates Egyptian accounts that when Sennacherib invaded Egypt, thousands of field mice swept over the Assyrians at night and ate their quivers, bowstrings and leather handles of their shields so without arms to fight they retreated the following day.[4] Herodotus immediately explains to the reader that he was relying on the accounts given to him by the Egyptians and their priests, and on several occasions he comments when a report is incredulous or extremely unlikely.

In contrast however, we can historically confirm the account of 2 Kings 18 by stone tablets depicting the Siege of Lachish and even weapons from that battle, both displayed in the British Museum. King Tirharqa coming out to war is referenced in 2 Kings 19:9 and statues of him can be viewed in several museums, including the British Museum. Additionally, the Taylor Prism records that Sennacherib trapped Hezekiah like a bird in a cage in Jerusalem. However, the Assyrians were never able to actually attack Jerusalem and the Bible records that the Angel of the Lord slew 185,000 Assyrians in one night and that Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place (2 Kings 19:35-37). The Esarhaddon Prism confirming this historical figure, is placed next to the Taylor Prism in the same glass case at the British Museum.

In many narratives, historical accounts can be greatly skewed by the victors' selective reporting, but the Bible is different. The Bible is reliable since not only does it provide many detailed accounts that demonstrate the historicity of biblical characters, places and events, but moreover it does not shy away from recording military losses or embarrassing character faults even of its heroes.

To list a few examples, Abraham lied about his wife Sarah being his sister to avoid being murdered by Abimelech who wanted to take her as his wife (Genesis 20:11); Rachel deceptively stole her father's household idols and hid them under the camel's saddle (Genesis 31:34-35); Moses struck the rock twice instead of speaking to it and consequently failed to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 20:7-12); David arranged for Uriah to be positioned in the heat of the battle so he would be slain, since he had committed adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and made her pregnant (2 Samuel 11:15, 26-27); and Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3).

Israel's history in the Bible includes slavery in Egypt, battles won and lost and Babylonian Captivity. It is rare in ancient history to record losses as well as victories, and character faults as well as praiseworthy achievements of respected individuals!

Even a cursory reading of the Kings and Chronicles reveals a mixture of good kings and bad kings. In other civilisations the embarrassing records of rulers are often etched out or omitted or altered, but the Bible makes no attempt to hide the mistakes that we all make. Again, even a basic reading of the prophets would reveal that Israel was regularly drawn away by false gods and the prophets rebuked them. Would the victors want to include seventy years in Babylonian exile in their history and that it was foretold? Consider the origins of Purim from the book of Esther and how Haman tried to wipe them off the face of the earth.

Consider also the Messiah, born not in Jerusalem, but in Bethlehem; born not in a palace, but a stable; sat not on a throne, but in a feeding trough. Think of His disciples, ordinary men including fishermen and a tax collector. Peter disowned the Lord three times, before the Lord restored Him (Matthew 26:69-75; cf. John 21:15-19). Judas betrayed Him (Matthew 26:14-16), and shortly before Jesus was betrayed, the disciples were disputing between themselves which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24-30). Yet Jesus came among them as the One who served them; He would bestow a kingdom upon them that they would eat and drink in His kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Think of the apostle Paul who previously went out of his way to persecute believers. Is that the typical resume of an ideal candidate for turning the world upside down? Notwithstanding, he was great in learning and raised at the feet of Gamaliel. On one occasion when the apostles were on trial, Gamaliel wisely intervened stating, "And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or if this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it – lest you even be found to fight against God." (Acts 5:38-39) But the Lord changed Paul from the inside and he was willing to suffer and proclaim the gospel and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit wrote at least thirteen letters that are included in the New Testament.

Think of the Saviour who was crucified amongst criminals and the pain, isolation, humiliation and horror of that means of death. The King of the Universe left the glories of heaven not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. The Messiah died that those who trust in Him might live. The only One to be found without sin became a sin offering, that those who trust in Him might become righteous before God.

Considering the above and at the risk of stating the obvious, the Bible is not another case study of 'history written by the victors'. The Scriptures have an impressively detailed and accurate historicity – countless archaeological excavations have demonstrated a reliability and trustworthiness unparalleled in ancient history.

The Bible is also the objective standard of morality. It shows the depravity of human nature, the wickedness of the human heart and the urgent need to be reconciled with a holy God. Our sin problem is not merely a matter of gaining education, improving our immediate environment or becoming a developed society. We have a moral problem which we cannot atone for by ourselves and as mere humans, we are hopelessly inadequate to deal with it. We must seek the forgiveness of Jesus our Lord and Messiah and turn to Him, trust in Him and follow Him.

The study of ancient history will inevitably cross paths with the Bible. The God of the Bible is uniquely able to foretell future events accurately so that history is prophecy fulfilled and prophecy is history written in advance. Jesus the Jewish Messiah is the most worshipped Person in history, He fulfilled prophecy and He changed history. Our timeline is divided by the incarnation of the promised Messiah who came in accordance with specific prophecies, made atonement for sin through His blood and will return to judge the world. The questions remain, have you turned to Him, are you trusting in Him and will you be ready when He returns?

1. James Ussher, The Annals of the World, Revised and Updated by Larry and Marion Pierce (Master Books, 2007; Green Forest, AR, USA), p10
2. Austen Henry Layard & Paul Emile Botta, The buried city of the east, Nineveh: a narrative of the discoveries of Mr Layard and M. Botta at Nimroud and Khorsabad; with descriptions of the exhumed sculptures, and particulars of the early history of the ancient Ninevite Kingdom (ULAN Press, London; originally published prior to 1923), pp39-48
3. Ibid, pp23-38
4. Herodotus, The Histories (Penguin, 2003; London), p153

The Classical Writers, Ancient History & the Bible

Herodotus–Ancient History and the Bible

Herodotus (c.490-425BC) was one of the foremost writers in classical literature and some of his historical accounts relate to biblical settings, locations and characters. Cicero famously honoured him with the title, 'The Father of History'. Although his main focus was the wars and conflict between the Greeks and the Persians, he travelled and wrote extensively, particularly concerning Egypt and Persia and made a few contributions about Assyria, Babylon and other items of biblical interest.

Herodotus recorded both what he saw and heard, regularly updating the reader on the reliability of those accounts and his evaluation of them. He wrote and commented on both fact and fiction, thus providing historical accounts and culturally derived narratives, but gives reason for doing so. Therefore, he listed important factual information regarding historical figures or rulers, but also included the famous outlandish reference about dog-headed men and headless men with eyes in their breasts! In the same paragraph he concisely states, "(I merely repeat what the Libyans say)" and on the next page adds, "I merely record the current story, without guaranteeing the truth of it."[1]

Earlier on, Herodotus explains to the reader that until that point, he wrote concerning what he had directly observed or researched. Nevertheless, thereafter he was relating accounts from the Egyptians combined with what he saw first-hand.[2] Similarly, he states, "Anyone may believe these Egyptian tales, if he is sufficiently credulous; as for myself, I keep to the general plan of this book, which is to record the traditions of these various nations just as I heard them related to me."[3]

Egypt

Necho II was a 26th dynasty pharaoh mentioned both in Herodotus and the Bible. Assyria was formerly the world superpower, but in 612BC the combined forces of Nabopolassar (father of Nebuchadnezzar II) and Cyaxares the Mede overcame Nineveh, and Babylon would soon become the leading world empire.

In Herodotus, Necho II is described as succeeding Psammethicus (Psamtik I) and beginning the construction work of the canal to the Arabian Gulf that would be completed by Darius the Persian. The construction work is said to have cost the lives of 120,000 Egyptians, though Necho II ceased from completing the project when an oracle warned him that it would be to the advantage of the Barbarians. A fragment of a stela commemorating the opening of that canal which is known as the 'Stela of Shaluf' can be seen in the Louvre Museum. Necho II then shifted his attention to war, built triremes, attacked Syria by land at Magdolus and then went on to take Gaza and was succeeded by Psammis.[4]

The Scriptures provide eight references concerning Necho II. 2 Kings 23:28-30 provides a succinct account of Pharaoh Necho going to the aid of the king of Assyria, to the River Euphrates and killing King Josiah in battle. Jehoahaz succeeded Josiah and did evil in the sight of the Lord. Pharaoh Necho then put him in prison and imposed tribute of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold. Necho appointed Eliakim, the son of Josiah king of Judah in place of his father Josiah and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Pharaoh Necho took Jehoahaz to Egypt where he died (2 Kings 23:31-34). 2 Chronicles 35:20-27 provides a fuller account of the battle where Josiah died and also mentions that Jeremiah lamented him. The reign and captivity of Jehoahaz in 2 Chronicles 36:1-4 parallels the account in 2 Kings 23:31-34.

Jeremiah 46 declares judgement on Egypt and verses 1-2 provide the geographic and historical background to these events: "The word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the nations. Against Egypt. Concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt, which was by the River Euphrates in Carchemish, and which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah".

Pharoah Apries (Hophra) succeeded Psammis (Psamtik II). There is just a single reference to Hophra in the Bible though it is an important one and is consistent with Herodotus' account: "Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies and into the hand of those who seek his life, as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy who sought his life.'" (Jeremiah 44:30) There are however passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel that refer to him only by his title of Pharaoh, such as Ezekiel 29:2.[5]

Herodotus provides several references to Apries, but in connection with the above states that Amasis defeated Apries and Amasis was persuaded by the Egyptians to surrender his prisoner. The Egyptians then strangled him and buried his body in the family tomb in the temple of Athene and subsequently Amasis came on the throne.[6] One can view a lion sphinx with the head of Apries in the Louvre.

Assyria

There are no less than nineteen references to Sennacherib, king of Assyria, in the Scriptures (in the narrative sections of 2 Kings 18-19, 2 Chronicles 32 and Isaiah 36-37). Sennacherib was successful in taking all the fortified cities of Judah and conquering them all with the exception of Jerusalem. Isaiah reassured Hezekiah that the Lord would turn Sennacherib back by the way which he came and that he would not come into the city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with a shield, nor build a siege mound against it. It came to pass that the Angel of the Lord in one night killed 185,000 Assyrians and that they went back the way they came.

This is a most astonishing prophecy. The siege of Lachish is the background setting of 2 Kings 18 and it is graphically preserved on the stone relief walls in the Assyrian galleries of the British Museum; a glass case even houses some weapons used from that battle. The Taylor Prism is viewable in an upstairs gallery and recalls that Sennacherib had trapped Hezekiah like a bird in a cage in Jerusalem, though it is clear that the campaign was brought to an abrupt halt.

Herodotus states that when Egypt was invaded by Sennacherib, the king of Arabia and Assyria, not one of the Egyptian warriors was willing to fight. However, following a dream the Egyptian priest-king believed that if he marched out boldly, he would come to no harm.[7] Note the reference in 2 Kings 19:9 about Tirharqa king of Ethiopia (who was also Pharoah of Egypt) coming to make war with them! Herodotus oddly writes that thousands of field mice swarmed over the Assyrians at night and ate their quivers, bowstrings and the leather handles of their shields so that the following day, having no arms to fight with they abandoned their position and retreated. In the next sentence regarding those incredulous closing details, Herodotus adds, “Up to this point I have relied on the accounts given me by the Egyptians and their priests.”[8]

Persia

Four Persian kings mentioned in the Bible, Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes, are referenced in Herodotus. At times, several of the names of the respective kings are mentioned in one paragraph thus providing further historical attestation. Out of many examples, one should suffice: "The Delians declared that after his departure the Island was shaken by an earthquake – the first and the last shock ever recorded to my time. It may well be that the shock was an act of God to warn men of the troubles that were on the way; for indeed, during the three generations comprising the reigns of Darius the son of Hystaspes, and of his son Xerxes and his grandson Artaxerxes, Greece suffered more evils than in the twenty generations before Darius was born – partly from the Persian wars, partly from her own internal struggles for supremacy."[9]

There are nineteen references to King Cyrus in the Scriptures. Isaiah 44:28-45:6 shows how the Lord foretold through Isaiah how Cyrus would be His instrument to enable Jerusalem to be rebuilt and the foundations of the temple laid. 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-4 shows the fulfilment of that. The Cyrus cylinder confirms that it was his policy to allow those from Babylon to return to their homelands. Book one of Herodotus speaks of Cyrus' military campaigns but also of his clemency, in particular sparing the life of King Croesus.[10]

In the book of Ezra, the rebuilding of Jerusalem was opposed though Darius issued a decree enabling the work to continue, the cost to be paid at the king's expenses and provision to be made with whatever they needed for offerings and sacrifices (Ezra 6:1-12). The temple was completed and dedicated. In addition, the books of Haggai and Zechariah are dated to the second year of the reign of Darius (Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 1:1). It is possible to view a majestic display of the Palace of Darius I from Susa in the Louvre. Herodotus lists his conquests following those of Cyrus and Cambyses and extending across the whole of Asia other than Arabia.[11] Herodotus adds that Babylon was captured for a second time and unlike Cyrus, Darius destroyed its defences, pulled down all the city gates and impaled three thousand leading citizens.[12]

Xerxes (Ahasuerus) is a central figure throughout the book of Esther and there are also references to the beginning of his reign in Ezra 4:6 and that Darius was his son (Daniel 9:1). In the British Museum overlooking the stairs, there is a relief of him on his throne at Persepolis. One can also view the Apadana columns commenced by Darius and completed by Xerxes in room 52 at the British Museum. In Herodotus, there are long accounts of his battles with the Greeks and his enormous army especially with reference to the battle of Thermopylae.[13]

In Nehemiah 2, Artaxerxes famously gave permission for Nehemiah to go to Judah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was the cup bearer and some of Artaxerxes drinking vessels are on display in room 52 at the British Museum. An inscription in the bowl confirms that Artaxerxes was the son of Xerxes the King (who was) son of Darius the King.[14] At one point in the book of Ezra, Artaxerxes actually gave the order to prevent the Jewish people from completing the work (Ezra 4:17-24). However, the temple was eventually completed and dedicated: "So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." (Ezra 6:14) There are fewer references to Artaxerxes in Herodotus,[15] possibly because his reign would have been in the latter stages of Herodotus' life.

Summary

There is much common ground between Herodotus and the Bible with regard to historical setting, location and biblical characters, relating especially to Egypt and Persia, but also to some extent Assyria and Babylon. Although Herodotus simultaneously reports on historical facts and a spectrum of cultural narratives, the historical information he provides supports the historicity of the Bible as a reliable source. Herodotus is quick to point out the incredulity of some of those alternative tales, and Cicero's appraisal of him as 'the Father of History' was certainly not stated on a whim. Far more importantly, everyone's greatest need is to trust in the God of history revealed in the Bible. He foretells and fulfils history and you must trust in Him and not in yourself!

1. Herodotus, The Histories (Penguin, 2003; London), p306-307
2. Ibid, p132
3. Ibid, p145
4. Ibid, p161
5. Titus Kennedy, Archaeology and the People of the Bible (Harvest House, 2026; Eugene), p200
6. Herodotus, p164-165
7. Ibid, p153
8. Ibid, p153
9. Ibid, p395
10. Ibid, p40-41
11. Ibid, p211
12. Ibid, p239
13. Ibid, p489-497
14. The British Museum https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1994-0127-1
15. Herodotus, p395, 450, 467

The Classical Writers, Ancient History & the Bible

Arrian–Alexander the Great and the Bible

The book of Daniel foretells Alexander's meteoric world conquest and that even when he would be strong, his empire would split into four (Daniel 8:5-8; cf. 21-22). Alexander died in his early thirties. 1 Maccabees 1:1-8 recollects these details and that in the zenith of his power he fell sick and that his officers began to rule in their respective locations. There are also a number of ancient biographies written about Alexander's life. The most notable one is probably Arrian, but there is also Curtius and Plutarch's biography of Alexander in 'Greek Lives', and importantly Josephus chronicled Alexander's fascinating visit to Jerusalem.

Writing over four hundred years after Alexander's death, Arrian himself was a successful military commander of two Roman legions. He was also a governor of a border province in Cappadocia and thereby capable to report accurately on military and administrative matters. Throughout his narrative he strives to be objective and is not hesitant to question details from other sources that he found questionable or unlikely.



Alexander the Great

The 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia states, "By introducing Hellenistic culture into Syria and Egypt, Alexander had probably more influence on the development of Judaism than any one individual not a Jew by race".[1] Western civilization has been profoundly shaped by Alexander's victories over the Persians and subsequent Hellenization. Alexander also encouraged cultural interchange and intermarriage in his army between east and west. Alexander became a pharaoh and Egypt was incorporated into his empire.

The Septuagint was written in Greek by the seventy Jewish scholars. Concerning the gospel Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16)

In Daniel 2, Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the coming successive empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Greece was the bronze section of the statue that would rule over the whole earth (Daniel 2:39). In Daniel 7:6 with the vision of the four beasts, the leopard (depicting the speed at which Greece would conquer under Alexander) had four heads (denoting the generals who would rule after him. Daniel 8:5-8 speaks of the male goat coming from the west, without touching the ground, across the surface of the whole earth with a notable horn (Alexander).

The male goat defeated the ram with two horns (Medes and Persians) with furious power. No one could withstand the male goat, though when he was very great and strong the horn was broken and four notable ones came up. Daniel 8:20-21 clarifies the exact meaning, "And the male goat is the kingdom of Greece. The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power." The generals succeeding Alexander were Cassander, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy.[2] Since these details are so precise and have overwhelming historical support, liberal commentators contend that the Book of Daniel was written much later than during the Babylonian exile in essence because they refuse to consider inspiration of the Scriptures and the remarkable fulfilment of prophecy.

Arrian makes an intriguing comment about the rule of successive empires, attributing it to 'destiny' rather than foretold and fulfilled according to the Scriptures. "Destiny had decreed that Macedon should wrest the sovereignty of Asia from Persia, as Persia once had wrested it from the Medes, and the Medes, in their turn, from the Assyrians."[3]

In agreement with the Bible, Arrian commented frequently on the breathtaking speed at which Alexander's army advanced in their relentless quest to rule Asia and the world. A few examples should suffice to demonstrate that: "The news made it plain to Alexander that he must continue to press his pursuit without a moment's delay. His men and horses were both pretty well exhausted already by their unremitting exertions, but Alexander drove them forward none the less, and after covering a great deal of ground during the night and the following morning reached about noon a village where Darius and his captors had stopped the previous day."[4]

Then, "Alexander himself then started off again at dusk with all the speed he could make, and covering some fifty miles in the course of the night, came up with the Persians as dawn was breaking."[5] And finally, "He covered many miles in the course of the night, and at daybreak reached the Hydraotes, where he learned that most of the Mallians had already crossed to the other side; some were still on their way over, and many of these he caught and destroyed – indeed, without a moment's hesitation he went over the river among them and then continued to press his pursuit of those who had got way ahead of him."[6]

Although Arrian provided an account concerning the campaigns of Alexander, as is often the case with ancient biography, he also mentions biblical characters in passing reference. In this case he mentions each of Cyrus, Darius and Xerxes on a few occasions; for example, when Alexander ventured into the territory of the Ariaspians: "These people Alexander treated with every courtesy; he honoured them for the service rendered to Cyrus in the old days and also for the fact, which he observed for himself, that their political institutions were different from those of other tribes in that part of the world: like the best of the Greeks, they claimed to know the distinction between right and wrong."[7] Arrian also cites Aristobulus concerning Cyrus' tomb that Alexander was greatly concerned that it had been broken into and robbed,[8] and that Aristobulus received orders from Alexander to thoroughly repair the monument.[9]

Arrian draws from a range of sources and again in doing so refers to biblical characters: "There is no mention in the accounts either of Aristobulus or Ptolemy (my two principal authorities) of the method employed by Alexander in bridging the Indus, and I should myself hesitate to express an opinion as to whether a permanent bridge was constructed or a bridge of boats such as Xerxes made for crossing the Hellespont or Darius for crossing the Bosphorus and the Danube."[10]

On one occasion, quoting Herodotus, Arrian references Cyrus, Darius and Xerxes all together in one long paragraph concerning the practise of prostration. "It is said that Cyrus, son of Cambyses, was the first to receive the homage of prostration, and that this humiliating custom thereafter became an accepted thing in Persia. So be it; none the less you must remember that the great Cyrus was cured of his pride by a tribe of Scythians – poor men but free; that Darius was humbled by Scythians too, as Xerxes was by Athens and Sparta, and Artaxerxes by the Ten Thousand of Clearchus and Xenophon. And now Alexander has robbed Darius of his pride – though no man has yet bowed to the earth before him."[11]

Arrian narrated Alexander's siege of Tyre and the huge determination required to construct a mole between the shore and the offshore island together with war-engines and siege towers. Ezekiel 26 pronounced a proclamation against Tyre for being derisory towards Jerusalem, rejoicing in her temporary demise and for their awful treatment towards them. The Lord would bring many nations against them and Tyre would be destroyed. As foretold in that chapter, Nebuchadnezzar and other nations attacked Tyre, though the prophecy from Ezekiel 26 was not fulfilled in entirety until Alexander.

Gabelein observes that, "Centuries passed and it seemed as if Ezekiel's prophecy concerning Tyre's complete overthrow would remain unfulfilled. It was about 240 years after when the literal fulfilment of this prophecy was accomplished. Alexander the Great came against the city built on the island. After seven months the city was taken by means of a mole, by which the forces of Alexander could enter the city. In constructing this mole, Alexander made use of the ruins of the old city. The stones, timber and the very dust of the destroyed city was laid into the sea to erect the causeway which accomplished the utter ruin of the wealthy city. And thus Ezekiel's prophecy was fulfilled."[12]

Summary

Alexander the Great's rapid overthrow of the Persian empire was foretold in the Bible and fulfilled and recorded in ancient history. Those events have had a profound and lasting effect on world history and of course Jewish history. But Daniel speaks of One far greater, the stone cut without hands that would break the empires into pieces including the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold (Daniel 2:45). His reign is an everlasting reign and His dominion forever. Are you trusting in the Rock of Ages and the Stone of Israel? "Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." (Psalm 146:5)

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8. Ibid, p344
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The Classical Writers, Ancient History & the Bible

Suetonius–The Twelve Caesars, Jewish History and the Bible

In addition to the famous extra-biblical reference to Jesus (concerning the Jews at Rome who caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus),[1] Suetonius gives useful background on the Caesars mentioned in the Bible and historically corroborates other Bible characters including Felix, Berenice and Quirinius (Acts 23-25; Luke 2:2). Suetonius was a private secretary to the Emperor Hadrian and wrote concerning the lives of the Caesars from Julius Caesar (not technically an emperor) until Domitian. Throughout the course of the narratives, there are insightful comments that relate to the biblical account as well as historical affirmation of some other biblical characters. It is worth reading Suetonius alongside Tacitus, Josephus and the Bible.

Julius Caesar

When Julius Caesar visited Gades (Cadiz, Spain), he was overheard to sigh impatiently whilst viewing a statue of Alexander the Great, comparing his lesser achievements with Alexander's.[2] That reference in itself reminds us of Alexander the Great, whose rise to power and fourfold division of his empire was foretold so precisely in Daniel 8:8, 21-22. Also, Julius Caesar displayed wild-beast hunts and stage plays with Marcus Bibulus whilst claiming most of the credit for himself, causing the latter to comment on the Temple of the Heavenly Twins, in that Bibulus played Pollux to Caesar's Castor.[3] In Acts 28:11 Saul was sailing towards Rome in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers (Zeus' sons Castor and Pollux).

Like other Caesars, Julius Caesar renamed a month after himself, 'July'.[4] After he was assassinated by 23 stab wounds, "Public grief was enhanced by crowds of foreigners lamenting in their own fashion, especially Jews, who came flocking to the Forum for several nights in succession."[5] Julius Caesar issued several decrees to the favour of Jewish people enabling them to possess Jerusalem and encompass that city with walls and that all the country of the Jews pay tribute to the city of Jerusalem except for the Sabbatical year and that the original ordinances of the high priests of the Jews would remain in force.[6]

Augustus Caesar

Three Caesars are named in the Scriptures: Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius (Luke 2:1; 3:1; Acts 11:28). The unnamed one referred to in Acts 25-26, who Paul appeals to, was the infamous Nero.

Augustus' attitude towards Jewish people in his empire was generally favourable. However, he wrote to Tiberius concerning his eating habits, "Not even a Jew fasts so scrupulously on his sabbaths as I have done today."[7] Concerning religious observances, Augustus praised his grandson Gaius for not offering prayers when he visited Jerusalem.[8]



Fascinatingly, when Augustus Caesar was born, Publius Nigidius Figulus the astrologer stated, "the ruler of the world is now born."[9] August may still be the month named after his honour, though Yeshua (Jesus) has the whole of the western calendar marked by His birthdate. When Jesus was born, He fulfilled Micah's prophecy that the Ruler of Israel, whose origins are from of old and everlasting, would come from Judah and be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2/Micah 5:1(Tanakh); cf. Matthew 2:6).

Tiberius Caesar

Tiberius Caesar is mentioned in Luke 3:1, and in Luke 3:1-2 there are no less than seven biblical characters that have been confirmed archaeologically and through extra-biblical sources. They are Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, Philip the Tetrarch, Annas and Caiaphas the high priests and John the Baptist.[10]

Suetonius writes of Tiberius' initial modesty, and that proposals that all citizens should affirm his former and future actions by renaming September and October 'Tiberius' and 'Livius' (after his mother) were met with his veto.[11] He was antagonistic towards Jewish people in his empire, abolishing foreign cults in Rome (Egyptian and Jewish) and forcing them to burn their religious vestments and other accessories.[12] An exception to his attitude towards the Egyptian gods seems to be represented by the Tiberius Stela located in the British Museum, where like other Roman emperors, he makes offerings to the Egyptian gods.[13]

Jews of military age were posted to unhealthy regions on the pretext of joining the army and threatened with slavery if they defied the order.[14] Understandably, there was resentment towards paying taxes towards the emperors. Consider this in the light of the Pharisees' and Herodians' question to Jesus about whether it was lawful to pay taxes unto Caesar or not? Jesus showed them a denarius and drew their attention to the inscription and counselled to render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's and to God the things that are His (Matthew 22:15-22).

Tiberius Caesar was known for being stingy and willing to acquire possessions by force. Suetonius states, "It is notorious that he forced the wealthy Gnaeus Lentulus Augur to name him as his sole heir and then to commit suicide, by playing on his nervous apprehensions; and that he gratified Quirinius, a rich and childless ex-Consul, by executing the highly aristocratic Aemelia Lepida – she was Quirinius' divorced wife and he accused her of an attempt to poison him twenty years previously!"[15] There is an endnote in Robert Graves' Suetonius translation pointing out that this is the 'Cyrenius' (Quirinius) of Luke 2.[16]

Gaius (Caligula)

Gaius' reign was for just three years and ten months, though he honoured his father's memory by renaming the month of September 'Germanicus'.[17] He completed projects that Tiberius had undertaken, extended the Palace as far as the Forum and converted the shrine of Castor and Pollux into its vestibule (cf. Acts 28:11 – the Figurehead of the Twin Brothers).[18]

Gaius was notorious for smashing statues and inscriptions or the busts of living individuals unless he gave permission for their erection and he came near to having the works of Virgil and Livy removed from their libraries, claiming Virgil had no talent and Livy was an inaccurate historian.[19] He even stole the breastplate from Alexander the Great's Tomb at Alexandria![20] Today, some people jump on the above and other instances of the same and argue that history is written by the victors. In some cases that is the case, but the Bible is unusual in that it consistently records military defeats as well as losses and includes the embarrassing and less favourable aspects of generally popular characters in addition to their successes and their positive qualities.

Claudius Caesar

In Acts 11:28, Agabus prophesied that there would be a great famine throughout the whole world and this took place in the days of Claudius Caesar. Suetonius writes that following a series of droughts that caused a scarcity of grain, Claudius took all possible measures to import grain, offering a large bounty for newly built ships transporting grain.[21] Josephus mentioned a great famine in Judea in which Queen Helena bought grain in Egypt at great expense[22] and Tacitus notes during Claudius' reign there was a shortage of corn, resulting in famine in Rome, that there was no more than fifteen days' supply of food in the city and that only heaven's favour and a mild winter prevented catastrophe.[23] During the time of a famine across the Roman Empire, Claudius invaded Britain in AD43 and considered that in Britain a real triumph could be most readily earned.[24]

The famous quote from Suetonius concerning Jesus is during the reign of Claudius Caesar: "Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city."[25] This also ties in with Acts 18:2, where Aquila and Priscilla came from Italy to Corinth, since Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome. This is consistent with some of the other emperors in their treatment of Jews and Christians and most of the earliest believers in Yeshua were Jewish believers. Suetonius is one of several extra-biblical sources relating to Jesus in addition to other writers that were Roman, Greek, Jewish and Syrian.

Another important reference is in regard to Felix the governor (Acts 23-25): "For Felix he had an equally high regard, giving him command of infantry cohorts and cavalry squadrons, and the Governorship of Judea; this Felix married three queens."[26]

Nero

Nero was egotistical, highly unpredictable and a monster and he savagely murdered members of his own family. Punishments were inflicted on the Christians, described by Suetonius as "a sect professing a new and mischievous belief."[27] Tacitus mentions Nero blaming the fire in Rome on the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were called) with every refinement.[28] Unlike Claudius he felt no compulsion to advance or extend the empire and even considered withdrawing his forces from Britain, though he maintained his forces for the sake of Claudius' former glory.[29] Two important garrison towns, Camulodunum (Colchester) and Verulamium (St Albans) were taken suddenly.[30]

He was fiercely competitive in acting and sporting competitions, had to take centre stage and even destroyed evidence of previous winners by removing statues and smashing them in public latrines.[31] At the Isthmian Games in Corinth he conferred Roman citizenship to the province and gave large cash rewards to the judges and whilst chariot racing in Olympia the judges had little choice but to award him his prize even when he failed to stay the course.[32] In Rome, he wore the Olympic wreath on his head and the Pythian wreath in his right hand.[33] In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul writes about running to win the imperishable crown. He would have been familiar with the Isthmian Games held in that locality, as well as the Pythian Games and Olympic Games.

Nero's men destroyed many apartments, mansions and valuable monuments of historic importance.[34] He was so vainglorious that he changed names of items and locations in his own honour; in Rome, the month of April became known as 'Neroneus' and Rome was close to being renamed 'Neropolis'.[35] Some astrologers predicted that if Nero were forced to leave Rome, he would find an alternative throne in the East; one or two of those stated that would be Jerusalem.[36] Jerusalem was besieged by Vespasian and later overthrown by his son Titus in AD70, but Israel was re-established on May 14th 1948 and one day still future, all nations will come up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16-21). Yeshua the Messiah departed to heaven from the Mount of Olives and will return there (Acts 1:9-12; cf. Zechariah 14:1-4).

Galba, Otho and Vitellius all had short reigns as respective emperors, spanning the gap from the end of Nero's reign in AD68 to the commencement of Vespasian's rule in AD69.

Vespasian

On Claudius' rise to power as emperor, Vespasian was given command of a legion in Germany and then he went to Britain, subjugated two warlike tribes, fought thirty battles and captured in excess of twenty towns, as well as the Isle of Vectis (Isle of Wight).[37] The Legion II Augusta quickly advanced through Dorset. Roman roads and the Roman settlement, Badbury Rings, can be visited today.

Suetonius wrote of an ancient superstition from the East predicting that the rulers of the world would come from Judea.[38] Suetonius explains this as pertaining to the Romans but adds that the rebellious Jews attributed it to themselves, murdered their Governor, routed the Governor of Syria and captured an eagle.[39] Vespasian with his elder son Titus carried out an assault on the enemy fortress to crush the uprising,[40] which Titus would complete. This is one of the saddest occasions in Jewish history and the destruction of the Temple was foretold by Jesus the Messiah in Matthew 24:1-2, Mark 13:1-2 and Luke 21:5-6.

Josephus is famous for surviving in Masada and for his writings which are an incredibly important extra-biblical source, constantly intertwining with biblical history. Suetonius wrote of a distinguished prisoner of Vespasian: Josephus, who himself was adamant he would soon be released by the same man who imprisoned him and successfully predicted he would become the Emperor.[41] As they say, the rest is history.

Titus

Titus was renowned for his military service in Germany and Britain. He then became a barrister in the Roman Forum to advance his reputation, before commanding one of Vespasian's legions in Judea and capturing the substantially fortified cities Tarichaeae and Gamala (in the Galilee region).[42] Following this, he completed the conquest of Judea and laid siege to Jerusalem at the end of a bitterly fought four-year campaign. The arch of Titus was commissioned by Domitian and depicts soldiers carrying away looted treasure from the temple, including the noticeably prominent menorahs.[43]

Jesus foretold the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in Matthew 24:1-2, Mark 13:1-2 and Luke 21:5-6 and that there would not be left there one stone upon another. John MacArthur notes that, "The only stones left undisturbed were huge foundation stones that were not actually a part of the temple edifice but formed footings for the retaining wall under the entire temple mount. These can be viewed today in the "Rabbi's Tunnel" which runs north-south along the western wall. It is a portion of the western side of the retaining wall that today is called the Wailing Wall. More of that retaining wall, including the steps used to ascend and descend from the temple mount, has also been uncovered on the southern side."[44]

Suetonius also mentions that Titus nursed a notorious passion for Queen Bernice to whom he had apparently promised marriage[45] and that he sent Queen Bernice away from Rome which was painful for both of them.[46] Bernice is mentioned alongside her brother Agrippa the King in Acts 25:13, 23 and 26:30 and MacArthur adds, "Bernice for a while became the mistress of Emperor Vespasian, then of his son Titus, but always returned to her brother.[47]

Domitian

Suetonius explains how Domitian tried to make a name for himself to compare favourably with his brother Titus, and in so doing he planned an unnecessary expedition to Gaul and Germany, but his father's friends managed to dissuade him from doing that.[48] Whilst Vespasian and Titus were seated in their official chairs and taking part in the Judean triumph, he had to be content riding on a white horse.[49]

Suetonius wrote that Domitian's agents collected taxes from the Jews in an especially unmerciful manner and additionally took proceedings against those who hid their Jewish origins to avoid tax and even those who lived as Jews yet without professing Judaism.[50] Suetonius recollects a personal note: "As a boy, I remember once attending a crowded Court where the imperial agent had a ninety-year-old man inspected to establish whether or not he had been circumcised."[51]

Domitian's blasphemous self-importance matched or even surpassed that of other emperors. He commenced his letters with, "Our Lord and God instructs you to do this!" and that also became his regular title in written form and oral form.[52] On his death nevertheless, senators decreed that all inscriptions of him must be effaced and records of his reign destroyed.[53] What a contrast to the Lord and God of the Bible whose reign is an everlasting reign and whose dominion is forever (Daniel 7:27; Micah 4:7; Psalm 145:13; Luke 1:33; Revelation 19:6).

Conclusion

In the writings of Suetonius there is significant supplementary detail about the emperors explicitly mentioned in the Bible: Augustus Caesar, Tiberius Caesar, Claudius Caesar, and the unnamed one which referred to Nero. There is a massive amount of important historical information that sheds light on the biblical narrative, including the reference to Jesus during Claudius' reign, plus relevant mention of the biblical characters, Felix, Berenice and Quirinius. When Suetonius is read alongside Josephus, Tacitus and the Bible, it becomes increasingly evident that the Bible is a remarkably reliable historical document and that the God of the Bible knows and even foretells the end from the beginning.

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5. Ibid, p42
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11. Suetonius, p124
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13. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA617
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15. Ibid, p134
16. Ibid, p345
17. Ibid, p157
18. Ibid, pp160-161
19. Ibid, p169
20. Ibid, p178
21. Ibid, p195
22. Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, 20:5.2
23. Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, Translated by Michael Grant (Penguin, 1962; Middlesex), p262
24. Suetonius, p194
25. Ibid, p200-201
26. Ibid, p202-203
27. Ibid, p221
28. Tacitus, p354
29. Suetonius, p222
30. Ibid, p237, 437
31. Ibid, p226
32. Ibid, p226
33. Ibid, p226
34. Ibid, p236-237
35. Ibid, p247
36. Ibid, p238-239
37. Ibid, p283
38. Ibid, p283
39. Ibid, p284
40. Ibid, p284
41. Ibid, p285
42. Ibid, p297
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44. John MacArthur, The MacArthur Bible Commentary (Thomas Nelson, 2005 Nashville), p1244
45. Suetonius, p298-299
46. Ibid, p299
47. MacArthur, p1490
48. Suetonius, p304
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50. Ibid, p312
51. Ibid, p312
52. Ibid, p313
53. Ibid, p318

The Classical Writers, Ancient History & the Bible

Tacitus–The Annals of Imperial Rome, Jewish History and the Bible

Tacitus provides the important and well-known reference to Jesus being executed during Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. What is not so well known are the other references to the biblical characters Quirinius, Gallio and Felix (Luke 2:2; Acts 18:12-17; Acts 23-24). Furthermore, Tacitus illuminates our understanding on Jewish-Roman relations and even refers to yet more biblical characters in his account. Bringing both the Bible and ancient history to life, he details some events in Britain that were directed by Caesars referred to in the Bible and took place simultaneously with New Testament events.

Although Tacitus wrote some vital historical and notable works, not that much is known concerning his life. He was born when Claudius was emperor and probably died after Trajan's death. He was a senator during Domitian's reign, took on the consulship in AD97 and governed western Anatolia (a large province of modern-day Turkey).[1] Tacitus had a good education and studied rhetoric and is widely regarded as one of the most significant Roman historians. He worked alongside and corresponded regularly with Pliny the Younger, who in a letter to Cornelius Tacitus commented, "I believe that your histories will be immortal: a prophecy which will surely prove correct."[2] The annals of Tacitus detail the period from the death of Augustus' to the end of Nero's reign.

The Caesars, Deification and Our Calendar

Augustus Caesar, Tiberius Caesar and Claudius Caesar are mentioned in the New Testament (Luke 2:1; 3:1; Acts 11:28; 18:2) and Nero is referred to as 'Caesar' in Acts 25-26 and 28:19. Concerning Augustus, Tacitus observed that Augustus seemed to have exceeded the worship of the gods and desired to have himself venerated in temples with god-like images, by priests and ministers and that following his funeral, Augustus was pronounced a god and decreed a temple.[3] It is worth noting that Claudius was also deified after his death.

Near the end of Tacitus Annals, the names of the months are recorded as being changed so that April became 'Neroneus', May became 'Claudius' and June 'Germanicus'.[4] Similarly, Suetonius records that respectively, Julius Caesar had the month 'July' named after him[5] and Augustus also had August named after him.[6] We still retain the months July and August in the respective Caesars' honour, though consider that Yeshua (Jesus) is the most worshipped Jewish person ever who lived. He never authored a book, travelled far, or had an impressive political career, yet the western dating system of B.C. and A.D. marks his birthdate dividing the whole of our time. Consider that every time you check the time or the date on your calendar!

Quirinius, Tax, the Bible and Jewish history

Tacitus mentions Quirinius (cf. Luke 2:1-2, governor of Syria during the census) on three occasions. He is also attested historically as a Bible character with his full name 'Publius Sulpicius Quirinius'.[7] The first mention by Tacitus, relates to the trial of a defendant by the name of Libo who entrusted his relative Publius Sulpicius Quirinius with a final appeal to Tiberius;[8] in the second reference, Aemilia Lepida II was accused of falsely claiming she bore a son to the rich and childless Publius Sulpicius Quirinius;[9] and thirdly, Tiberius requested that the senate award a public funeral to Publius Sulpicius Quirinus.[10]

Luke 2:1-3 informs us that Caesar Augustus issued a decree that all the world should be registered (taxed) and this census first took place when Quirinius was governing Syria. Tacitus notes problems had occurred in Syria and Judea where provincials found their financial burdens oppressive and petitioned for a reduction of direct taxation.[11] There was great enmity between the Romans and Jewish people with particular regard to collecting taxes. In Luke 19:1-10, Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector who had evidently formerly taken more than his fair share for himself as well as the Romans, but after meeting Yeshua came to change his ways and trust in Messiah. Likewise, Matthew, formerly known as Levi, was a tax collector but became one of the Lord's disciples (Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32).

Tacitus also writes concerning the expulsion of Egyptian and Jewish religious customs during Tiberius' reign. Four thousand ex-slaves associated with those superstitions were sent to Sardinia to oppose criminal activities there, and it was supposed that if the unhealthy climate killed them the loss would be considered small. If the remaining refused to recant their 'unholy practices by a given date' they would have to leave Italy.[12]

During Claudius' reign, he carried out a census confirming there were 5,984,072 persons in Rome.[13] Ituraea and Judea were integrated into the province of Syria following the deaths of their monarchs.[14] There is a footnote in Tacitus' Annals identifying those monarchs, as Sohaemus and Herod Agrippa I,[15] and the latter is listed in Acts 12:1-6, 18-23.

There is another footnote in Tacitus' Annals with reference to an additional member of the Herodian family. In Nero's reign, "Two dependant kings were instructed to prepare an army to invade Parthia, and orders were given that the Euphrates should be bridged."[16] The footnote references those two kings as Herod Agrippa II and Antiochus Epiphanes IV (of Commangene).[17] Herod Agrippa II is mentioned in Acts 25:13-26:32.

Claudius Caesar, The Famine and Britain

There are only two references to Claudius Caesar in the Scriptures, but they are important ones. The first is in Acts 11:27-28: "And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened during the days of Claudius Caesar." Tacitus refers to the deaths of two men and one of whom had a dream in which Claudius was wearing a wheaten wreath with inverted ears, which was interpreted as a corn shortage. Furthermore whitening vine leaves were understood as a prediction of the death of Claudius that autumn.[18]

Tacitus thought the real reason for their deaths was the accusation that they had lent their house as a meeting place for the ballet-dancer Mnester I and Poppaea Sabina (who later became Nero's wife).[19] More significantly however, Tacitus described the actual famine which did relate to a shortage of corn and it was established that there was only fifteen days supply of corn in Rome and apparently only heaven's special favour and a mild winter prevented catastrophe![20]

Suetonius also attested the famine. "Once after a series of droughts had caused a scarcity of grain, a mob stopped Claudius in the Forum and pelted him so hard with curses and stale crusts that he had difficulty in regaining the Palace by a side-door; and as a result he took all possible steps to import grain, even during the winter months – insuring merchants against the loss of their ships in stormy weather (which guaranteed them a good return on their ventures), and offering a large bounty for every new grain-transport built, proportionate to its tonnage."[21]

Additionally, Josephus noted that "Under these procurators that great famine happened in Judea, in which Queen Helena bought grain in Egypt at great expense, and distributed it to those that were in want, as I have related already."[22]

Sometimes the span of two millennia of history can seem too far to bridge or even fathom. Yet Tacitus wrote of Roman involvement closer to home, including wars in Britain. There are still the visible reminders of Roman roads and places of historical interest that relate to the Caesars mentioned in the Bible. Tacitus states that Boudicca was flogged and her daughters raped, the Icenian chiefs had their hereditary estates taken from them as if the Romans possessed the whole country and the king's relatives were treated like slaves.[23]

The Iceni subsequently rebelled and they hated the soldiers who had recently become established at a settlement at Camulodunum (Colchester).[24] "Moreover, the temple erected to the divine Claudius was a blatant stronghold of alien rule, and its observances were a pretext to make the natives appointed as its priests drain the whole country dry."[25]

One can visit Colchester Castle today and Claudius' temple foundations are underneath the castle. The guidebook 'Colchester Castle 2000 Years of History' states:

"The Romans who sought protection in the great Temple of Claudius, and who looked for comfort in the strength and status of the building, waited for help to arrive.

The help never came for them. The full horror of being trapped inside the burning temple whilst listening to the cries of the enemy closing in, before being overcome by fear and smoke, sword and fire, would have been a horrifying ordeal..."[26]



The second reference to Claudius is in Acts 18; Paul was ministering at Corinth and he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, since Claudius had ordered that all the Jews were to depart from Rome (Acts 18:2). Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue believed in the Lord with all his household (Acts 18:8). Paul continued teaching there for six months, whilst Gallio was a proconsul of Achaia and Paul was taken to the bema (judgement seat) being accused of worshipping God contrary to the law.

Tacitus, Gallio and the Bible

Gallio responded to his Jewish audience that if it were a matter of wicked crimes or wrongdoing, he would bear with them, but he considered it a matter of words and names and their own law, and he counselled for them to look to it themselves since he did not want to be a judge in such matters. He drove them from the judgement seat and then the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue and beat him before the judgement seat but Gallio took no notice.

Tacitus writes that Junius Gallio determined that ex-Guardsmen should be permitted to sit in the fourteen rows at the theatre reserved for the gentry outside the senate. Tiberius sternly reprimanded him by letter advising that they were to receive orders from the emperor only and he was ejected from the senate and later from Italy. Since he chose to stay in Lesbos and that was considered too agreeable for him, he was taken back to Rome remaining in private custody by officials.[27] Later, in Nero's reign, and following his brother Seneca's death which frightened him, and whilst appealing for his life, "Gallio was denounced as a public enemy and parricide".[28]

Felix, Jewish History, Tacitus and the Bible

In Acts 23, there was a plot by a group of Jewish men to kill Paul and on learning that he was a Roman citizen, he was sent by the Roman commander to Felix the governor. Felix himself was married to a Jewish wife Drusilla (Acts 24:24). Ananias the high priest came down with the elders to give evidence to the governor against Paul. Paul gave in his defence that he believed all things written in the Law and the Prophets and that he had found hope in God and the resurrection of the dead both for the just and unjust.

Felix procrastinated and after two years, Porcius Festus succeeded Felix and wanting to do the Jews a favour, left Paul bound. Note, Felix was interested about what Paul had to say about righteousness, self-control and the judgement to come, but never repented and turned to the Lord. Felix was afraid when Paul preached, but he failed to recognise the urgency of Paul's gospel message and procrastinated. He sent Paul away until a more convenient time – which never came! Apathy and procrastination are as dangerous as a refusal to accept the way of salvation.

Tacitus wrote that Antonius Felix governed Judea and, backed with major influence, believed himself free to commit any crime.[29] The Jews had rioted when Gaius ordered his own statue to be set up in their temple, and by poor judgement and ill-placed discipline Felix stimulated further outbreaks.[30]

Judea was divided since the Samaritans were governed by Felix and the Galileans under Ventidius resulting in unrestrained long-standing feuds which would have only worsened if the imperial governor of Syria had not intervened.[31] Jewish people who had dared to kill Roman soldiers were swiftly executed. Claudius opted to empower Quadratus to deal with Cumanus and Felix though he displayed Felix as one of the judges to silence his accusers and Cumanus was condemned for the faults of both and then Judea was again restored to peace.[32]

Tacitus on Jesus

Tacitus provides us with one of the most important extra-biblical accounts concerning Jesus. A fire with devastating consequences had burnt much of Rome, and Nero blamed the fire on the Christians and brutally punished them by crucifixion, burning, or being torn to pieces by dogs. Tacitus confirmed that Jesus was executed during Tiberius' reign (some time prior to Nero's reign) by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, and that His followers who originated from Judea were also to be found in Rome.[33]

There are Roman, Jewish and Greek sources, and even a Syrian source, Mara Bar Serapion, which confirm many historical details about Jesus, the Man from Galilee. Despite the awful and prolonged persecution of His disciples, instead of diminishing, the number of followers of Jesus the Messiah rapidly increased and spread like wildfire across the Roman empire.

Felix procrastinated and he never turned to trust in Jesus as Messiah. Too many people are sitting on the fence and will regret that for the rest of eternity. Paul was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and stood before the Council and uttered timeless counsel, which we would all do well to heed. If what the disciples preached were of men, it would come to nothing, just like Theudas, or Judas of Galilee. But if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it, lest you even be found to fight against God (Acts 5:33-42).

The Psalmist explained how to respond to Messiah and tells us what we must all do:

"Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him." (Psalm 2:12)

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5. Suetonius, p36
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12. Ibid, p116
13. Ibid, p238
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15. Ibid, p253
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17. Ibid, p277
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19. Ibid, p226
20. Ibid, p262
21. Suetonius, p195
22. The new complete works of Josephus, Translated by William Whiston, Commentary by Paul L. Maier (Kregel, 1999; Grand Rapids), Jewish Antiquities 20:5:2, p648
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27. Tacitus, p196
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The Classical Writers, Ancient History & the Bible

Josephus-Jewish History and the Bible

Josephus' writings are the most important extra-biblical account and are of immense value in relation to Jewish history and the Bible. They are hugely significant concerning biblical context and the intertestamental period. They corroborate a vast number of biblical characters, places and events and also often provide useful sermon insights. In Paul Maier's commentary on Josephus he states, "It is safe to say that if Josephus had not written, or if his writings had not survived, every biblical reference book, dictionary, encyclopaedia, or commentary in our libraries today would occupy far less space on the stacks, and our knowledge of the biblical world would be impoverished.[1] This is in addition to Josephus' famous quotations concerning Jesus, John the Baptist and James (Jesus' half-brother).

Josephus wrote 'Jewish Antiquities', which is an extensive and detailed narrative running from creation until the end of the first century. 'The Jewish War' runs from the taking of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes until the taking of Jerusalem by Titus. In 'Life,' Josephus provides an autobiography defending his dishonourable conduct in Galilee at the beginning of the revolt, which gives useful background information to what follows later in his life.[2]

Lesser known are the substantially shorter works, 'Against Apion Book 1' and 'Against Apion Book 2'. The former is actually an apologetic for the antiquity of the Jewish Nation and engages with several critiques including that of the Egyptian Priest Manetho, who is well known for supplying valuable details concerning Egyptian King Lists; the latter specifically opposes Apion, the Graeco-Egyptian scholar's writings.

Intriguingly, Josephus commences those shorter books in a style remarkably similar to that of Luke in the openings of the books of Luke and Acts. Josephus writes, "I suppose that by my books of the Antiquities, most excellent Epaphroditus, I have made it evident to those who peruse them, that our Jewish tradition is of very great antiquity, and had a distinct subsistence of its own originally, as also, I have therein declared how we came to inhabit this country wherein we now live."[3]

Luke writes, "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed." (Luke 1:1-4)

The Life of Flavius Josephus

Josephus was born in AD37, proudly affirmed Hasmonean descent on his mother's side, had an exceptional memory and was distinguished in learning as a boy.[4] From the age of sixteen to nineteen he trialled the sects of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes before conducting himself to the rules of the Pharisees.

In AD64, when Josephus was twenty-six, he sailed to Rome in an effort to secure the release of some Jewish priests whom the Roman governor Felix had sent to Nero for trial. Josephus was successful through the help of a Jewish actor Aliturus and Poppaea Sabina (Nero's wife). Soon after the return of Josephus to Jerusalem in AD66, the great Jewish war broke out and Josephus was appointed by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem to defend Galilee.[5] Josephus played a controversial role since he was initially a commander of the Judean forces in Galilee, then surrendered during their siege at Yodfat and became an advisor to the Romans whilst trying to persuade Jerusalem's defenders that to resist the Romans was impractical.[6]



At Jotapata, whilst the Romans laid siege, Josephus and forty others hid in a large cave as they were the remaining survivors. When the Romans discovered them, they swiftly made a suicide plan to draw straws and kill each other rather than fall into the hands of their enemies. When only Josephus and one other man remained, they surrendered to Vespasian. Josephus duly predicted that Vespasian and his son, Titus would become emperors, which they did following the death of Nero.

Josephus was released from prison after the prophecy came to fruition and was granted a privileged status thereafter. Josephus became both an intermediary and interpreter between the Roman and Jewish forces and was well recompensed by the Romans, but bitterly cursed by the Jewish people as a traitor.[7]

The life of Josephus was undoubtedly controversial, although he was an eyewitness to many first century events and his writings are invaluable. He was able to report as an observer concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 and he provides important extra-biblical information concerning biblical political characters such as Herod the Great, Felix and Pilate, as well as Herod's extensive building projects.[8] The most important aspects of his work are that concerning Jewish history from 100BC to 100AD from which he utilised a variety of authentic sources woven together skilfully.[9]

Josephus' Writings

Josephus' writings are extensive and whilst some have made attempts to condense his works and write them in a more accessible manner, it is worth reading the much more concise work 'The Life of Josephus' to gain an appreciation of the man and his setting. When studying the Tanakh (Old Testament) there is often valuable insight concerning the background of those accounts, so one can read a small portion alongside Scripture.

Alexander Enters Jerusalem

The intertestamental period is again of immense importance regarding Hanukkah, the Hasmonean dynasty and also Alexander the Great, when he spared Jerusalem and had a favourable encounter with Jaddua the High Priest. It is worth reading specific parts of Jewish Antiquities in relation to the events surrounding the Maccabees, alongside 1 and 2 Maccabees from the Apocrypha.

Josephus recalls Alexander's extraordinary visit to Jerusalem. Alexander came into Syria and took Damascus, obtained Sidon, besieged Tyre and sent a letter to the Jewish high priest to send reinforcements and supply his army with provisions.[10] The high priest responded that he had given his oath to Darius not to bear arms against him.[11] Alexander was greatly annoyed and intended to make an expedition against the high priest and instruct all men how they should keep their oaths.[12]

Alexander typically hurried to reach Jerusalem and Jaddua the high priest was terrified. Nonetheless Josephus tells us that Jaddua had a dream, greatly rejoiced and declared that he received a warning from God. Then Alexander approached Jerusalem and saw a multitude at a distance including priests ready to receive him. Alexander saluted the high priest and the people saluted Alexander. Parmenio his general enquired concerning his actions and Alexander explained that he did not honour the high priest but his God who honoured him with the priesthood.[13]

Alexander offered a sacrifice to God at the temple and when the book of Daniel was showed to him, indicating that one of the Greeks should destroy the empire of the Persians, he gladly believed that it was speaking of himself. He also granted their wishes that they might enjoy the laws of their forefathers and pay no tribute on the seventh year.[14]

Josephus and New Testament Characters

The writings of Josephus are also vital concerning the historicity of the Brit Hadasha (New Testament). Lawrence Mykytiuk wrote for the Biblical Archaeological Review regarding fifty-three people from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) confirmed by archaeology; he then later wrote concerning thirty people in the New Testament also archaeologically confirmed.[15] These characters were confirmed through either historical writings or evidence in inscriptions.

The historical writings concerning New Testament characters included Jewish writings such as the Talmud and Mishnah, Greek writers such as Lucian of Samosata and Celsus, and Roman authors such as Tacitus, Pliny the Younger and Josephus. Having said this, it is immediately apparent upon perusal of Mykytiuk's list that Josephus provides by far the most references to the New Testament characters. Moreover, because of when he lived and his particular occupations, he was able to report on some matters incredibly close to the time that they occurred and, in some cases, he could provide a first-hand account having been an eyewitness.

Josephus mentions a vast array of biblical characters including Jesus, Gamaliel the Elder, John the Baptist, James (Jesus' brother), Ananus/Annus, Caiaphas, Ananias, Herod I the Great, Herod Archelaus, Herod Antipas, Herod Philip, Herodias, Salome, Philip the Tetrarch, Herod Agrippa I, Herod Agrippa II, Berenice/Bernice, Drusilla, Quirinius, Pontius Pilate, Lucius Junius Gallio, Marcus Antonius Felix, Porcius Festus, Aretas IV, the unnamed Egyptian leader of Acts 21:8 and Judas of Galilee.[16]

Josephus' Writings Concerning Jesus

This is the more well-known quote from Josephus concerning Jesus:

"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 among 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."[17]

This quote is disputed as having been rewritten in favour of Jesus, so some would say that it was too favourable to have been written by a Jewish source from that era.[18] Nonetheless, there is no proof that insertions into the text have ever been made and they may well be authentic since they are included in every copy of Josephus in existence.[19] Notwithstanding, the first believers in Jesus were Jewish and the New Testament setting is distinctly Jewish, whilst under Roman occupation. Furthermore Josephus wrote concerning many New Testament characters and favourably about John the Baptist. There are also other independent historical accounts concerning Jesus from Jewish, Greek and Roman sources including the Talmud, Lucian of Samosata, Tacitus and Pliny the Younger and the Syrian Stoic philosopher, Mara Bar Serapion.

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9. Ibid
10. The New Complete Works of Josephus, Translated by William Whiston, Commentary by Paul Maier (Kregel, 1999; Grand Rapids), Jewish Antiquities Book 11, Chapter 8, para 3, p384
11. Ibid, p384
12. Ibid, p384
13. Ibid, p384-386
14. Ibid, p386
15. Lawrence Mykytiuk, 30 People in the New Testament Confirmed, 9th February 2025 https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/new-testament-political-figures-the-evidence/
16. Ibid
17. The New Complete Works of Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, Book 18, 3:3, p590
18. Matt Slick, 8th December 2008, Regarding the Quotes from the historian Josephus about Jesus https://carm.org/evidence-and-answers/regarding-the-quotes-from-the-historian-josephus-about-jesus/
19. Ibid

The Classical Writers, Ancient History & the Bible

Philo-Jewish History and the Bible

Philo was a slightly earlier contemporary of Josephus although he is not so well known or quoted. His writings are of value concerning Jewish history, biblical background and reference to biblical characters. Not much is known concerning his life, though essentially he was a chief representative for the Jewish people in Alexandria, Egypt, in the embassy to the Emperor Gaius (Caligula).[1] He lived around the time of Jesus and was an early Jewish interpreter renowned for his use of allegory.[2] Due to his inclination for Platonic philosophy, he is considered the Hebrew Plato[3] and his allegorical method influenced many Early Church Fathers including Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Origen, Ambrose, Augustine et al.[4]

Philo's family also have important connections regarding Jewish history and attestation for biblical history and in addition, concur with Josephus. Philo's brother, Alexander was employed in various offices for Rome in Egypt and used his considerable wealth to plate the gates of the temple in Jerusalem with silver and gold and to make a loan to Herod Agrippa I (cf. Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 18:159-160; Jewish War 5.205).[5] This is Herod the King from Acts 12:1-6, who killed James, the brother of John and imprisoned Peter.

Philo's nephew, Tiberius Alexander, would become procurator of Judea and prefect of Egypt having departed from the Jewish faith.[6] One of Philo's nephews, Marcus, married Bernice, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, (cf. Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, 19.276-277 – this was the Bernice mentioned in Acts 25:13, 23; 26:30).[7]

Philo and Josephus

Josephus writes concerning the disturbance in Alexandria between the Jewish inhabitants and the Greeks and that three ambassadors were selected out of each party who were at variance who went to Gaius.[8] Also, that Philo the principal of the Jewish delegation who was highly respected and skilful in philosophy, was prepared to make his defence against the things said by Apion, who was an ambassador from Alexandria and who intended to provoke Gaius to anger against the Jews.[9]

Interestingly the works of Josephus include Book I and Book II of 'Against Apion'.

I am using Yonge's new and updated complete and unabridged works of Philo, though I will focus on just two small sections of his corpus, namely, 'Flaccus' and 'On the Embassy to Gaius' rather than his voluminous works on the writings of Moses. In the foreword of Yonge's translation, the text agrees with Josephus' account, that Philo was selected to lead the Jewish delegation to Rome to see Gaius Caligula, since there was an emergency in the Jewish community related to the pogrom that commenced in AD38 by the prefect Flaccus.[10]

Alexandria



Since Alexandria is the setting of both 'Flaccus' and 'On the Embassy to Gaius', a little background to this city is imperative. Alexandria was founded by Alexander the Great with the purpose of being an outstanding Hellenistic cultural and academic centre.[11] Philo's municipal residence was Alexandria, which was second only to Athens as the most celebrated seat of philosophy in the world and was a long-established favoured dwelling of the erudite Jewish population; Philo also mentions visiting Jerusalem.[12]

The city was divided into sections. There was a well-established Jewish community under their own ethnarch, though they were restricted to their own quarter in AD38.[13] Alexandria possessed the greatest library in the ancient world containing in excess of 500,000 volumes and it became the most vital centre of Judaism outside Jerusalem.[14]

Alexandria is mentioned in a few places in the book of Acts. In Acts 6:9, the synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputed with Stephen. In Acts 18:24, a certain eloquent Jewish man, Apollos, who was born at Alexandria was mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus and later spoke boldly in the Scriptures and showed from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 18:24-28).

In Acts 27:6, Paul was on a voyage to Rome and the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy and put them on board. Also in Acts 28:11, "After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin brothers, which had wintered at the Island."

The Twin Brothers refer to Castor and Pollux and in 'The Embassy to Gaius', Philo writes that "Again, it is said that the twin sons of Jupiter Castor and Pollux, are partakers of immortality."[15] Emperor Gaius compared himself with Jupiter and many other Roman gods in an attempt to be recognised as a living god and even dressed in imitation of Castor and Pollux, Hercules or Bacchus.[16] Philo's writing is heavily rhetoric and exposes the vanity of Caligula's delusions. Sadly Gaius had a vehement hatred and antagonism towards Jewish people and encouraged others to do the same. His reign was just under four years.

Flaccus

Tiberius Caesar selected Flaccus to be viceroy of Alexandria and the near country.[17] This is the Tiberius Caesar referred to in Luke 3:1, whilst Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip was tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene. Philo later refers to Pontius Pilate and Philip the tetrarch in his writings.

Philo states, "Gaius Caesar gave Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the King, the third part of his paternal inheritance as a sovereignty, which Philip the tetrarch, who was his uncle on his father's side, had previously enjoyed."[18] Herod the King is also known as Herod the Great and in addition to undertaking extensive work on the temple in Jerusalem, he put to death all the male children in Bethlehem and all its districts in Matthew 2:16, sadly fulfilling what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah (Matthew 2:17-18; cf. Jeremiah 31:15).

Matthew 2 also records the visit of the Magi who followed the star in the East and had come to worship the King of the Jews. In a different book, 'Every good man is free', Philo makes a comment concerning them: "Among the Persians there is the body of the Magi, who, investigating the works of nature for the purpose of becoming acquainted with the truth, do at their leisure become initiated themselves and initiate others in the divine virtues by very clear explanations."[19]

When Tiberius died and Gaius succeeded him as emperor, Flaccus proceeded to persecute the Jewish population in Alexandria and incited others to do the same. Flaccus permitted the mob to set up statues in the synagogues and it was apparent that what took its rise

in Alexandria would instantly spread throughout Egypt and to other nations.[20] Flaccus then attempted to destroy Jewish constitution, national customs, lawful political rights and social privileges.[21]

Philo explains that Flaccus was effectively accuser, enemy, witness, judge and executioner and permitted those who sought to exterminate the Jews as prisoners of war.[22] There were five districts in the city and the Jewish population were confined into a very small portion of one.[23] This immediately brings to mind the Ghettos in Europe during WWII. In Alexandria, since no one hindered them, Jewish shops were broken into, those who had lent money lost money, and usual means of employment were prohibited. Again this echoes Nazi Germany and also similar despicable treatment of Jewish people in Europe during the Middle Ages. History repeats itself. Recently a surge of antisemitic attacks has arisen in London. Philo writes of savage madness including stoning, beating and burning whole families.[24]

When Agrippa the King came to the country, they explained all that Flaccus had done and he promised to take a decree to the emperor. Ironically, Flaccus was arrested during the Feast of Tabernacles though the Jewish people could not observe the festival because of the oppression.[25] On hearing of the arrest they sang a hymn and gave thanks to God for their deliverance and being relieved from continual and incessant oppressions.[26]

Philo recalls Flaccus' own words: "O King of gods and men! You are not, then indifferent to the Jewish nation, nor are the assertions which they relate with respect to your providence false; but those men who say that that people has not you for their champion and defender, are far from a correct opinion. And I am evident proof of this; for all the frantic designs which I conceived against the Jews, I now suffer myself."[27]

Philo's final paragraph in this book summarises divine justice: "Such was the end of Flaccus, who suffered thus, being made the most manifest evidence that the nation of the Jews is not left destitute of the providential assistance of God."[28] When one considers biblical history and Jewish history throughout the ages, the same pattern emerges.

On the Embassy to Gaius

Gaius sought to be revered as a god and went to excessive theatrical means to portray that. He was especially suspicious with regard to Jewish people as if they were the only people who possessed desires opposed to his own.[29] He regarded Jewish people not simply as slaves but as the lowest and most dishonoured of them.[30] Synagogues were

razed to their foundations and burnt whilst conspicuous images of Gaius were erected.[31] Gaius planned to have an enormous statue of himself in the Jerusalem Temple with his own name inscribed with the title of Jupiter[32] although he was assassinated in AD41 before his order could be enforced.

Gaius ordered Petronius to install the statue though Philo and others managed to convince Petronius to delay its installation so that they could send an embassy to him.[33] Petronius subsequently wrote to Gaius providing little information other than stating that since the time of year was the height of the wheat harvest and other cereal crops, the men might conceive such a contempt for life that they burn all their crops.[34]

This communication made Gaius furious since Petronius appeared indifferent to his commands.[35] Soon afterwards King Agrippa arrived in Rome having no knowledge of Gaius and Petronius' communications and could perceive that Gaius was livid and was fearful that Gaius' anger was directed towards him.[36] Gaius stated to King Agrippa that the only nation on earth by whom he was not esteemed to be a god, refused to install the statue of Jupiter and was plotting his death.[37]

King Agrippa was so affected that he lay in a state of profound stupor, completely unconscious but on waking and having taken tablets he wrote to Gaius pleading on behalf of his country[38] and explained the reverence for God esteemed by his ancestors in the temple regarding pictures and images as representations of the invisible God.[39]

He also drew attention to Tiberius who preserved the form of worship in the temple as it had been known from earliest of times.[40] King Agrippa added that Pontius Pilate was one of the emperor's lieutenants and appointed governor of Judea and in an effort to honour Tiberius dedicated some gilt shields in the palace of Herod in the holy city. The people were greatly angered and sought to appeal to Tiberius, so Tiberius ordered the shields to be taken from Judea to Caesarea Augustus that they might be set up in the temple of Augustus.[41]

King Agrippa then spoke well of Augustus since on hearing that the first fruits were neglected, he enabled them to assemble in the synagogues and convey the holy things to Jerusalem and that no one should hinder the Jews either on their way to the synagogues, or when bringing their contributions, or in obedience to their national laws in Jerusalem and even commanded that perfect sacrifices of whole burnt offerings be offered to the most high God every day.[42]

Gaius response was ambivalent. He stated to Agrippa that the erection of the statue would not take place and letters were written to Petronius not to allow any innovations or alterations to be made to the Jewish temple.[43] However if any people, in bordering countries, with the exception of the metropolis itself, were hindered from erecting statues of him they would either be punished or brought before a tribunal.[44] Almost predictably in Alexandria and other cities he filled them with images and statues of himself.[45]

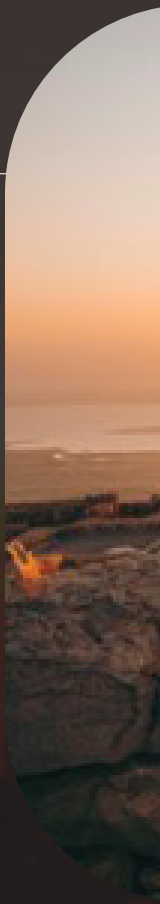
The embassy was a strange affair, more akin to a theatre or prison than a court of justice.[46] Gaius enquired why they abstained from pig's flesh and then jested, trifled and ridiculed them.[47] Philo describes the pleadings as broken up, cut short and interrupted and then Gaius strangely took compassion on them and turned his mind to pity concluding, "These men do not appear to me so wicked so much as unfortunate and foolish, in not believing that I have been endowed with the nature of God," so he dismissed us, and commanded us to depart."[48]

Closing Thoughts

Philo brings valuable insight regarding Jewish history and survival. It is useful to read Philo alongside Josephus, but most importantly in connection with the Bible. In addition to Augustus Caesar and Tiberius Caesar, Philo provides important historical attestation for other biblical characters including Herod the Great, Herod Agrippa I, Philip the tetrarch and Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea. Philo could recognise the providential assistance of God when Flaccus was finally removed from Alexandria. The Lord is sovereign over all history, but do you know Him personally? Can you see Him shaping events in your life through His providential assistance? Are you trusting and following the God who knows the end from the beginning?

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12. Philo, pxviv
13. Douglas, p25
14. Holman, p46-47
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17. Ibid, p725
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33. Ibid, p779
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37. Ibid, p781
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41. Ibid, p784
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43. Ibid, p787
44. Ibid, p787
45. Ibid, p788
46. Ibid, p790
47. Ibid, p789
48. Ibid, p790

The Classical Writers, Ancient History & the Bible



How does the study of ancient history relate to the Bible? Which Bible characters are referenced by the classical writers such as Herodotus, Arrian, Suetonius and Tacitus and how do those narratives relate to the biblical accounts? Why is the Bible unique amongst ancient historical writings and not simply a narrative of history written by the victors? How frequently is Jewish history interwoven into the works of the classical authors? How do the writings of Suetonius, Tacitus and Philo support the reliability of the New Testament? Why is Josephus such a crucial historical source for the serious Bible student? What did Josephus say concerning the Messiah?

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