

Extra-Biblical Documentation for Prophetic Fulfillment

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The following are quotes from 1st and 2nd century non-Christian writers, many of whom are hostile to Christians and Christianity. These help prove that the New Testament authors did not write the fulfillments of key events into the Scriptures after the fact so as to falsify history. These writers, taken along with the abundant evidence of the Old Testament prophecies being in place before the time of the New Testament, show us that the prophecies were indeed fulfilled as written. This should give us supreme confidence in the Scriptures as a whole from an intellectual standpoint to the end that we can have complete conviction that the Bible is the word of God and we can base our lives and eternity on it.

Cornelius Tacitus- (AD 55-120) One of the greatest Roman historians. Wrote two works: *Annal* and *Histories*. He documented the reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, Nero and those that briefly reigned during the Roman civil war of AD 69 (The Year of Four Emperors: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian).

Here is a quote from *Annals* detailing Nero's attempt to place the blame for the burning of Rome on the Christians:

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.

Tacitus was no friend to the Christian, however, by writing this down, he proved a very valuable ally in the documenting of several key points:

- 1- That a man named Christus (Latin for Christ) was the founder of a group called Christians.
- 2- This man was crucified (“suffered the extreme penalty”) by Pontius Pilate in Judea during the reign of Tiberius.
- 3- Christians were hated by the populace for their beliefs and practices.
- 4- His death ended the “superstition” for a time, but it arose again from Judea and spread to Rome and took root. Could be an allusion to the resurrection “myth”.
- 5- The Christians were arrested, tortured, and executed for their faith. Many were crucified, possibly Peter.

This helps to document what would happen to the Messiah in several passages like 2 Sam 7:12-16; Psalm 22; Is 53; Dan 2:44-45; Micah 5:1-5; Zech. 12:10, 13:7.

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus- (AD 69-130/140) Known for his work on the 12 Caesars, Julius Caesar-Domitian (*De vita Caesarum*). He was the chief secretary for the emperor Hadrian and had access to the imperial records. He made two references to Christ and Christians:

1- *Lives of the Caesars, Claudius 25*: “Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.”

Majority of commentators and translators view “Chrestus” as a variant spelling of Christus. This helps to authenticate the passage as a Christian interpolator would have used the correct spelling and not stated that Christ was a troublemaker. This also lends credence to the comment in Acts 18:2 that Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome. This quote also lets us know that the man who started the Christian movement was a real man and that his followers had spread to Rome.

2- *Lives of the Caesars, Nero 16*: “Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.”

The concept of superstition appears again here. For the Greek and Roman mindset, the resurrection is probably what is referred to here (see Acts 17:31-33). This also corroborates what Tacitus wrote as this is referencing the persecution of the Christians by Nero after the fire.

Flavius Josephus- (AD 37-97) One of the most well know in Christian circles. He was of priestly lineage and was also a Pharisee. He led the Jewish forces in Galilee against Vespasian but surrendered in AD 67. He became a servant of Vespasian but was granted his freedom by the Emperor in AD 69 at which time he took on the family name of the emperor, Flavius. Josephus accompanied Vespasian’s son and future emperor, Titus to the final siege against Jerusalem where he witnessed its destruction. He is best known for *The Jewish Wars* and *Antiquities of the Jews*. He makes 2 references to Christ:

- 1- *Antiquities 20:9*- Festus was now dead, and Albinus was brought upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name is James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the Law, he delivered them to be stoned.

The historicity of Jesus and his brother James are confirmed here. Also, that Jesus was called the Christ, or Messiah. This helps relate all the Messianic prophecies made in the Old Testament to Jesus.

The second quote from Josephus is the most controversial as there could be some “Christian” editing that took place to the passage. However, there has been another manuscript found that preserves what is possibly the original reading. Both are provided below with 2a being the questionable version and 2b, which is what some view as a better candidate for the original (*Antiquities 18:3*):

2a - About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.

2b- At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon their loyalty to him. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive. Accordingly they believed that he was the Messiah, concerning whom the Prophets have recounted wonders

There is no universal consensus on which is the original. However, if there was any “Christian” redaction that took place, 2a would be a good example of what it would look like. I prefer to use 2b as it has all the facts we need to verify the historicity of the Scriptures, without any of the controversy:

- 1- Jesus was a real man, and He was known to be good and virtuous.
- 2- There were many disciples made from all the nations.
- 3- He was condemned by Pilate to death by crucifixion.
- 4- The disciples continued to follow Him even after His death.
- 5- The disciples reported that He had risen from the dead 3 days after His crucifixion.
- 6- They believed that He was the Messiah,
- 7- The Prophets spoke of miraculous things that the Messiah would do which lets us know that the writings of the Prophets were compiled during the time of Josephus and that they predate Christ.

This helps confirm not only the Scriptures that we referenced in the section on Tacitus, but also all the prophecies that speak to the resurrection and the Gentiles coming into the Kingdom. The concept of Gentiles coming into the Kingdom of Israel would have been a very foreign and offensive teaching for the Jews. They were taught the need to be separate from the nations, both in fellowship and marriage. Yet many prophets speak to this reality in the Messianic Kingdom.

Thallus- (AD 52)- Wrote a history of the eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War to his own time. His work has been lost but there are quotes in the writings of others. Julius Africanus, an early church writer from circa AD 221, wrote about what Thallus records concerning the darkness that the Gospels describe at Jesus' crucifixion (*Chronographiai*):

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness: and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.

Here, Julius Africanus argues with Thallus' assumption that this was merely a total solar eclipse, and with good reason. Passover always happens during a full moon and a total solar eclipse is impossible during a full moon (a solar eclipse can only happen during a new moon phase).

Pliny the Younger- (AD 61-113) A Roman author and magistrate during the reign of Trajan. There are ten books of his that are still in existence today. The tenth book which was written circa AD 112 has quotes about Christ and Christianity.

Pliny was the administrator of the region of Bithynia in Asia Minor (southern coast of the Black sea in modern day Turkey). He wrote to Trajan to get his advice on what to do with the troublesome Christians in his area. Due to the influence of the Christians, the pagan temples were empty and the participation in the pagan festivals were extremely low, thereby impacting the local economy. The Christians were known for being very rigid in their refusal to participate in the local pagan culture. Therefore, he interrogated and punished those who were accused of being Christians and who would not honor Caesar as god by offering incense to him and cursing Christ.

Here is the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan (emphasis added):

Pliny, Letters 10.96-97

Pliny to the Emperor Trajan

It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offenses it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offenses, or only the offenses associated with the name are to be punished.

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be

punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ. ***They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food.*** Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.

Trajan to Pliny

You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it--that is, by worshiping our gods--even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

From the text in bold above we can see:

- 1- Christ was worshipped as God.
- 2- They assembled together on a fixed day.
- 3- They bound themselves to live righteous lives.
- 4- There is an allusion to the Lord's Supper.
- 5- Earlier in the letter, he refers to "excessive superstitions" possibly the resurrection.

Emperor Hadrian- (AD 117-138) Hadrian was emperor of Rome after Trajan. He also was asked by the proconsul of Asia about what to do with those accused of being Christians. Here is his reply as recorded by Eusebius:

I have received an epistle, written to me by Serennius Granianus, a most illustrious man, whom you have succeeded. It does not seem right to me that the matter should be passed by without examination, lest the men be harassed, and opportunity be given to the informers for practicing villainy. If, therefore, the inhabitants of the province can clearly sustain this petition against the Christians so as to give answer in a court of law, let them pursue this course alone, but let them not have resort to men's petitions and outcries. For it is far more proper, if anyone wishes to make an accusation, that you should examine into it. If anyone therefore accuses them and shows that they are doing anything contrary to the laws, do you pass judgment according to the heinousness of the crime. But, by Hercules! if anyone bring an accusation through mere calumny, decide in regard to his criminality, and see to it that you inflict punishment.

The Talmud- (AD 135-200) The Jews handed down many oral traditions through the ages. The collection of these traditions was started by Rabbi Akiba and completed by Rabbi Judah. This part is called the Mishnah and along with the Gemaras (the commentary on the Mishnah), it comprises the Talmud. This quote is found in *Sanhedrin 43a* which dates back to AD 70-200:

On the eve of the Passover, Yeshua was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, "He is going to be stoned because he practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf." But since nothing was brought forward in his favor, he was hanged on the eve of the Passover.

This is an incredible quotation. It states that they intended to stone Jesus, which we see in John 8:59 and 10:31. However, he was hanged (on a cross- Gal 3:13 and Luke 23:39). This can only be explained by the last-minute Roman involvement. According to the Talmud, the Jews lost their right to capital punishment in AD 28, the 18th year of Tiberius. This assured that Jesus could only legally be crucified if He were to be put to death by the government. It is also clear that during the trial of Jesus they were searching for witnesses against Him. He was accused of sorcery and apostasy, surely in relation to His miracles and teaching that challenged the leaders of His day.

Lucian of Samosata- (AD c. 125-180) He is a Greek satirist who mocked Christ and Christians. Here is his quote from *The Death of Perigrine*:

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day- the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account...You see the poor fools have persuaded themselves above all that they are immortal and will live forever, which explains the contempt of death and many of them willingly undergo imprisonment. Moreover, their first lawgiver taught them that they are all brothers of one another, when once they have sinned by denying the Greek gods, and by worshipping that crucified sage himself and living according to his laws. So, they despise all worldly goods and regard them as common property, accepting such teaching, taking it all on faith. Accordingly, if any quack or trickster, who can press his advantage, comes among them he can acquire great wealth in a very short time by imposing on simple-minded people.

This brings out some interesting points. Again, it is clearly stated that the founder of Christianity was crucified. The teaching of eternal life is explicit, as well as a denial of the Greek gods. Interestingly, the concept found in Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-5:11 is seen here. The regarding of all things as common property and the selling of assets to fund the work and people of the church is still being seen over 100 years later. This was not an isolated thing, but was common practice in the church. This explains why the Philippians in Ph 4:15-19 sent money to Paul for work being done **outside** of Philippi. Work that they were receiving no personal benefit for. All they cared about was the message going out and they supported those who performed the work.

Mara Bar-Serapion- (AD c. late 1st century) He was a Stoic philosopher from Syria. This quote is taken from a letter written to his son:

What else can we say, when the wise are forcibly dragged off by tyrants, their wisdom is captured by insults, and their minds are oppressed and without defense? What advantage did the Athenians gain from murdering Socrates? Famine and plague came upon them as a punishment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea and the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates is not dead, because of Plato; neither is Pythagoras, because of the statue of Juno; nor did the wise King die for good: he lived on in the teaching which he had given.

More direct evidence of the execution of Christ, this time at the hands of the Jews. There is also a direct correlation made that the execution of Jesus was the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem.

Conclusion-

With all of this extra-biblical evidence, the following facts can be clearly seen:

- 1- Jesus was a real person and was reported to have performed miracles, and was prophesied about in the Old Testament.
- 2- He was executed by the Romans and the Jewish leaders by crucifixion.
- 3- This was authorized by Pontius Pilate and took place during the reign of Tiberius.
- 4- This silenced the movement for a short time, but then it came back and spread to Rome.
- 5- There were superstitious rumors about Jesus- more than likely a reference to the resurrection.
- 6- There were direct reports of His resurrection- Josephus.
- 7- Disciples were being made of all nations.
- 8- The Christians were known as virtuous people who shunned the pagan culture and practices
- 9- They continued in the practices that were laid out in Acts 2.
- 10- The Christians were persecuted and killed for their faith.

These points above help to show several things:

- The writers of the New Testament did not write the New Testament so as to falsify prophetic fulfillment.
- There were identifiable prophecies that were known to the people- Josephus
- We know through the Dead Sea Scrolls that many of these prophecies can be proven to have existed hundreds of years before Jesus was born- specifically the whole book of Isaiah which is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Isaiah 53 which is virtually identical in the DSS, LXX and the Masoretic text.
- We can have absolute confidence that the Bible is the word of God as it can be proven to be supernatural in origin, even through non-biblical sources.
- We can stake all of our lives and our eternity on what is written in the Scriptures.