

at Jotapata (Josephus, *JW* 3.340–92). Josephus was kept alive only because he prophesied Vespasian's accession to the Roman throne (*JW* 3.400–408). For two years (ca. AD 68–69) he was kept in Roman custody, but he won favor by acting as a translator, adviser, and negotiator in the siege of Jerusalem. For his cooperation, Josephus was rewarded with Roman citizenship and patronage in the Flavian house, which had acceded to power, with Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian each taking the throne in turn.

While living in Rome, Josephus published *Jewish War*—initially in Aramaic (ca. AD 73), later in Greek (ca. AD 75–81). Its principal purposes were, first, to be an apology for the Romans to the Jews that God had in effect gone over to the side of the Romans because of Judean impiety and, second, to defend Judean character from vitriolic criticism following the disaster of AD 70. Later, around AD 93–94, Josephus composed *Jewish Antiquities*, with his *Life* attached as an appendix. The *Antiquities* fits the genre of “rewritten Bible”; that is, it summarizes and redacts sacred accounts of Israel's history, combined with extensive information about the events leading up to the Jewish war. The *Life* was written to exonerate Josephus from charges of falsehood raised by Justus of Tiberias concerning Josephus's account of the Jewish war and to extol Josephus's character and credentials. Soon afterward, Josephus composed *Against Apion*, a defense of Judaism and the Jewish people against objections posed by the Alexandrian scholar and politician Apion. Josephus probably died sometime around AD 100.

The relevance of Josephus's writings for understanding the NT is manifold. First, he provides a great deal of background information about Judaism and Jewish history. Indeed, we may regret that he never got around to writing his work *Customs and Reasons* about the Jewish people (Josephus, *Ant.* 4.198; 20.268). Second, he writes about events, institutions, groups, customs, places, and people known in the NT, such as Pilate, Herod Agrippa, the census of Quirinius, the Jerusalem temple, and more. Third, independent of the NT accounts, he provides attestation to the careers of John the Baptist, Jesus, and James the brother of Jesus.

Josephus on the Jewish Background to Christianity

The significance of Josephus as a background source and contemporary of the first Christians can be demonstrated with several examples.

First, Josephus provides information about the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, which he describes as the “three forms of philosophy” (*JW* 2.119; *Ant.* 13.171; 18.11; *Life* 10). Josephus's account is somewhat jaundiced. He is favorably disposed to the Pharisees (and even claims to be one), probably because they were the Jewish sect that emerged as leaders of the Palestinian Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem. So Josephus disparages the Sadducees as “barbarous”

Josephus and the New Testament

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Who Was Josephus?

Flavius Titus Josephus was appointed as the Judean general charged with the defense of Galilee during the First Jewish Revolt against Rome (AD 66–70). He subsequently was captured, changed sides in the conflict, and later wrote significant historical, autobiographical, and apologetic works under imperial patronage in Rome. His significance lies in the fact that he is arguably the single most important witness to the history and religion of the Jewish people in the Greco-Roman world of the first century. The works for which he is known are *Jewish War* (*Bel-lum judaicum*), *Antiquities of the Jews* (*Antiquitates judaicae*), *Life of Josephus* (*Vita*), and *Against Apion* (*Contra Apionem*).

Josephus was born Yoseph ben Mattiyahu in Jerusalem to a wealthy priestly family in AD 37. His elevated social status is implied by his Greek education, his dispatch to Rome on a diplomatic mission at age twenty-six, his landholdings in Jerusalem, and his appointment as regional commander of Galilee during the war against Rome. In his teenage years Josephus allegedly tried all three major Jewish sects (Essenes, Sadducees, Pharisees) and for a time followed a Judean ascetic named Bannus, who lived in the wilderness. Josephus then purportedly returned to Jerusalem and joined the Pharisees. He was selected by a revolutionary council to prepare Galilee for the Roman invasion, during which time he was opposed by John of Gischala. He eventually surrendered to Vespasian's forces

and presents the Pharisees as "friendly" (*J.W.* 2.166). Josephus also describes the sects in largely Hellenistic terms, likening them to a "philosophy," with the Essenes believing in the immortality of the soul and Pharisees in reincarnation (*J.W.* 2.154–57, 163). Nonetheless, Josephus remains our best source outside the NT for information about these Jewish sects, including their practices, politics, and beliefs.

Second, Josephus refers to the body of "traditions" that the Pharisees preserved and transmitted to others (*Ant.* 13.297–98, 408; 18.15). Evidence for a Pharisaic oral tradition of halakah (i.e., legal interpretation) is attested in the Gospels (*Matt.* 15:2–6; *Mark* 7:3–13) and Paul's Letters (*Gal.* 1:14). The traditions of the elders may not have been a technical "oral Torah" distinct from the "written Torah" (see *m. 'Abot* 1.1), but Josephus and the NT confirm the existence of such a body of Pharisaic traditions before the codification of the Mishnah (ca. AD 200).

Third, Josephus is also an excellent source of information about banditry, royal pretenders, prophetic movements, and revolutionary leaders in Judea. He writes about how Judea was filled with "imposters and demagogues, [who] under the guise of divine inspiration, provoked revolutionary actions and compelled the masses to act like madmen. They led them out into the wilderness in order that there God would reveal to them signs of imminent liberation" (*J.W.* 2.259 LCL [amended]; cf. *Ant.* 20.160). This is an important factor for considering popular and Roman responses to Jesus' messianism.

Fourth, Josephus shows that the dilemma of whether converts to Judaism should be circumcised was not limited to the early Christian movement (e.g., *Galatians*; *Acts* 15). Josephus recounts how King Izates and Queen Mother Helena of Adiabene (modern-day Armenia) converted to Judaism (*Ant.* 20.17–96). Yet Izates received conflicting advice as to whether he should be circumcised. A Jewish merchant named Ananias told him that he could worship God without circumcision, whereas a Pharisee named Eleazar chastised him for spurning the commandment to be circumcised (*Ant.* 20.41, 44–45).

Fifth, Josephus's works have a particular parity with Luke-Acts. The prologues to Luke (1:1–4) and Acts (1:1–2) parallel the prologues to both books of *Against Apion* (1.1–5; 2.1–3), and both have patrons in, respectively, "Theophilus" and "Ephroditrus." Luke and Josephus refer to similar people, places, and events, including the watershed census under Quirinius and political leaders like Pontius Pilate and Herod Antipas, as well as such revolutionary leaders as Judas the Galilean, Theudas, and the Egyptian. Both also have written broadly historical works with the purpose of defending a group against calumnious accusations and to demonstrate the inherent virtue of the group's way of life. Josephus writes about Jews and Romans from the top down in his position as a Flavian client representing Judean interests; Luke writes about Christians and Romans from the bottom up as a gentile Christian in a group regarded as a foreign sect by Roman elites.

Josephus on John the Baptist

In the canonical Gospels, John the Baptist is regarded as the forerunner of Jesus. According to the synoptic evangelists (*Mark* 6:17–28; *Matt.* 14:3–11; *Luke* 3:19–20) the reason for the Baptist's arrest and execution was that he criticized Herod Antipas for marrying Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, contrary to Levitical law (*Lev.* 18:16; 20:21). Josephus mentions John the Baptist in a parenthetical remark in *Ant.* 18 concerning the defeat of Herod Antipas's army by the Nabatean King Aretas IV. There Josephus recounts:

But to some of the Jews the destruction of Herod's army seemed to be divine vengeance, and certainly a just vengeance, for his treatment of John, surnamed the Baptist. For Herod had put him to death, though he was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice toward their fellows and piety toward God, and so doing to join in baptism. In his view this was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God. They must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they had committed, but as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already cleansed by right behavior. When others too joined the crowds about him, because they were aroused to the highest degree by his sermons, Herod became alarmed. Eloquent that had so great an effect on mankind might lead to some form of sedition, for it looked as if they would be guided by John in everything that they did. Herod decided therefore that it would be much better to strike first and be rid of him before his work led to an uprising, than to wait for an upheaval, get involved in a difficult situation and see his mistake. Though John, because of Herod's suspicions, was brought in chains to Machaerus, the stronghold that we have previously mentioned, and there put to death, yet the verdict of the Jews was that the destruction visited upon Herod's army was a vindication of John, since God saw fit to inflict such a blow on Herod. (*Ant.* 18.116–19 LCL)

From Josephus we can deduce the following: (1) John was regarded as a Judean holy man, popular with the masses, who attracted large crowds; (2) he was known for and named after his activity as a "baptizer" (*baptistés*); (3) John exhorted his audience to return to appropriate covenantal behavior, marked by righteous conduct, justice, and reverence for God; (4) a commitment to a righteous life was a prerequisite for baptism and not a license for lawlessness, implying that baptism was for the remission of sins; (5) Josephus links baptism to purification, though he adds a gloss couching this activity in Hellenistic philosophical terms by regarding it as a symbol of the soul that has been cleansed by noble conduct; (6) Herod Antipas imprisoned John because he feared the influence of John over the masses, who might be led to revolt; and (7) it was a commonly held view that the defeat of Antipas's army by King Aretas of Arabia was a sign of God's anger with Antipas for executing John the Baptist.¹

1. Michael F. Bird, "John the Baptist," in *Jesus among Friends and Enemies* (ed. C. Keith and L. Hurtado; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 63.

Josephus on Jesus

The most famous passage from Josephus is the *Testimonium Flavianum*, which contains the first of two mentions of Jesus in *Antiquities of the Jews*. The received form of the text reads:

...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 Messiah*. 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. (*Ant.* 18.63–64 LCL, italics added)

The authenticity of the passage is disputed because it sounds far too positively disposed toward Jesus to have been penned by someone who was not a follower of Christ. (See the italicized portions of the quotation, above.) Origen, writing in the third century, states that Josephus “did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah” (*Comm. Matt.* 1.15; *Cels.* 1.47), perhaps indicating that no “Jesus passage” was in the version of Josephus available to Origen. Others argue that the *Testimonium* interrupts the context that deals with upheavals and the folly of Roman governors, while no such upheaval occurs here. We could say regarding context, however, that Josephus is prone to rather obtrusive digressions in his works. In any case, the *Testimonium* is not really a digression, since it continues to recount the events occurring under Pilate’s procuratorship. Origen’s remark about Jesus only indicates that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah, not that Josephus did not mention Jesus at all. Finally, the glowing account of Jesus is explainable by the fact that the text has been touched up by a Christian scribe (i.e., the italicized portions above).²

In summary, the evidence favors the authenticity of the *Testimonium*, though not in its present form. (1) The language in the *Testimonium* is consistent with

2. For example, on the phrase “He was the Messiah,” Alice Whealey (“The Testimonium Flavianum in Syriac and Arabic,” *NTS* 54 [2008]: 573–90) draws attention to the *Testimonia* preserved by Michael the Syrian (twelfth century) and Jerome (fourth century), which independently attest to the reading “he was thought to be the Messiah.” This corresponds to Origen’s claim that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah. A variant is also found in the Arabic chronicles of Agapius of Hierapolis (tenth century): “he was perhaps the Messiah.” In light of this, there probably was a reference to Jesus as Messiah in the *Testimonium* but probably in a way that held that the messianic status of Jesus was dubious. Christian scribes who transmitted the text of Josephus removed this dubiety from the *Testimonium* and instead inserted “He was the Messiah.” Alternatively, Jerome’s version may be an assimilation from *Ant.* 20.200. Overall, I think there was a reference to the Messiah in *Ant.* 20.200 and probably in *Ant.* 18.63, but it was expanded (rather than interpolated) by a Christian scribe.

Josephus’s style elsewhere.³ (2) There is no emphasis on the role of the Judean leadership in Jesus’ death. (3) The brief mention of Jesus again in *Ant.* 20.200 presupposes the mention of Jesus in *Ant.* 18.63–64. If a Christian scribe interpolated the Jesus passages in Josephus, it is likely that he would have put them into one location rather than spread them over books 18 and 20. (4) Arabic and Syriac versions of the *Testimonium* differ slightly from the received Greek textual form and either omit or alter the seemingly positive descriptions of Jesus.⁴

Stripped of the obviously Christian glosses and embellishments, the original form of the text probably was something like this:

At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man. For he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of people who receive the truth with pleasure. And he gained a following both among many Jews and among many of Greek origin. And when Pilate, because of an accusation made by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him previously did not cease to do so. And up until this very day the tribe of Christians (named after him) has not died out.⁵

Josephus on the Martyrdom of James

Josephus narrates how, during an interregnum between Roman governors in Judea, the high priest Ananus had a man “named James the brother of Jesus called the Messiah” and his companions summarily executed about AD 62.

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was set upon the road. He [Ananus] convened the council of judges and brought before it the brother of Jesus—who was called “Christ”—whose name was James, and certain others. Accusing them of transgressing the law he delivered them up for stoning. But those of the city considered to be fair-minded and strict concerning the laws were offended at this and sent to the king secretly urging him to order Ananus to take such actions no longer. (*Ant.* 20.200 LCL)

James was venerated as a martyr in Christian tradition and was even called “James the Just” (see *Gos. Thom.* 12). The precise reason for James’s death is not given in any of the sources, including Josephus. The charge of being “breakers of the law” is a form of sociological deviant labeling where the beliefs and praxis of someone are regarded as a threat to a shared identity and common way of life. Most likely, James was a victim of intra-Jewish sectarianism, where Christians

3. H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus, the Man and the Historian* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1929), 137; see, however, Ken Olson, “Eusebius and the *Testimonium Flavianum*,” *CBJQ* 61 (1999): 305–22.

4. For discussion, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (4 vols.; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1:56–69; Alice Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus: The Testimonium Flavianum Controversy from Late Antiquity to Modern Times* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

5. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 1:61.

in general and James in particular were regarded as a dangerous threat to the integrity of the Judean laws on account of their messianic faith and so warranted violent censure.

Conclusion

Josephus is the single most important source for understanding first-century Judaism. He provides crucial background information about the politics, sects, culture, laws, and religion of Judea. Josephus also provides independent historical attestation for many events recounted in the NT, not the least of which is the existence of the man Jesus of Nazareth in the *Testimonium Flavianum*.

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Philo and the New Testament

TORREY SELAND

Life and Accomplishments

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BC–AD 50) was a Jewish scholar, philosopher, author, and politician who lived in Alexandria all his life and who has had significant influence through his many books. He wrote about seventy treatises, of which about fifty are still extant in whole or in part. His works are of tremendous value for students of the Judaism of his time, of the NT, and of the early churches in the Diaspora.

Until the seventeenth century, many scholars believed that Philo had had some relation to Christianity; some thought he referred to early Egyptian Christian groups in his writings, or that he had met Christians during a stay in Rome. Some ancient sources even consider him to have been a Christian. As far as we know, however, Philo never met any Christians, nor does he tell anything about any Christians, nor did any of the NT writers know him. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that during the many centuries after his death, Jews did not preserve his works, but Christians did, and they came to cherish them and to adopt many of the ideas inherent in his works. Today we can see that his literary remains contain evidence of various relevant traditions about Jewish life and theology and various ways of interpreting the Jewish Scriptures, as well as information about the life of the Jews as a minority group in the Greco-Roman world of the first century AD.