

The Testament about Jesus in Josephus, is any of it real?

Flavius Josephus, born in 37 AD, was the most important Jewish historian of the times. This dedicated writer created a monumental history of the Jews called Jewish Antiquities. It was written sometime in the early nineties. That Josephus was no Christian can be gleaned from his book. Yet it contains a piece popularly known as the Testament of Flavius that professes faith in Jesus. It runs, "Now about the same time, a wise man called Jesus, if it be right to call him a man for he was a worker of wonderful works and a teacher of men who like to receive the truth. He won over to him many of the Jews and also many of the Gentiles. He was the Messiah or Christ. Pilate at the request of the chief men among us condemned him to crucifixion. When that happened those who loved at from the first did not abandon him because he appeared to them alive on the third day as the prophets of God had forecasted and not only that but ten thousand other things about him. The tribe of Christians called after him are not extinct even today."

This is obviously an insertion made by a forger. But how much of an insertion is it? There is every reason to think the whole thing is an insertion but some desperate Christian apologists deny this. They say some of it might be authentic and that the forger simply changed what Josephus had in about Jesus.

Some scholars and fantasists cross out the supernatural bits from the longer text of the Testament of Josephus and think that the result is the restoration of what was there originally and even the Christian fundamentalist tome He Walked Among Us admits that there was somebody interfering with the text (page 43, 44). But when all is said and done they are only guessing. We might as well believe that the whole thing is inauthentic. Their assumption is that somebody saw the entry on Jesus and added on supernatural bits.

As Jesus and John the Baptist were sort of similar you would expect Josephus to write about them the same way. The John material is matter of fact and does not read anything like the Testament which is more like a creed than history.

The silence of Church Fathers in relation to the Testament shows that if it existed then there was nothing in it that they could use to defend the faith. Irenaeus and Tertullian ignored it completely despite being determined defenders of the faith. Interestingly, the John the Baptist discussion appears after the Testament not before it. It would be before if it were true that John came first and then Jesus. Josephus does nothing to link the two men at all which is odd and what is even more interesting, as we have seen, is how he writes about John in a historian type of way and writes more about him than the Testament claims he wrote about Jesus. Oddly enough he does the same thing with figures who are Jesus-like albeit more obscure such as Honi the Circle-Drawer. Why does Honi get attention that Jesus never gets? Considering that the Christians had to battle against Christian heretics and pagans who worshipped non-existent gods and had no regard for evidence for their deities, it is remarkable that nobody said, "Our God man at least was a person of history. Josephus wrote about him."

The shortness of the passage proves that Josephus did not write it and that is final. We know we should not make anything more complicated than it need be. So if there are interpolations then perhaps this is the original for it is all we need, "About this time there was a man named Jesus who founded the tribe of Christians who still have not disappeared to this day." It talks as if there are not many Christians about and that it is a wonder they haven't disappeared. This does not fit a man who thought Jesus had miracle powers or who was impressive or who managed to seem to have come back from the dead but implies it is a wonder the Christians were still around so it indicates that the bits that sound grand about Jesus are insertions by a falsifier. The writer of the passage never hinted that he expected their number to be small because of their persecution. If the author of the Testament were a heretical Christian then that would explain this surprise that Christians were still around for the heretics would believe that the true Church was tiny and the real Christians were few and far between the only trouble is the text does not further any particular group so that is unlikely. The author perhaps did not notice the contradiction or maybe Josephus did write something about Christians here and that is what is left. If it is a wonder the Christians were not extinct by Josephus' day then it follows that they should have been even in those gullible times meaning it was the silliest religion in existence then and was capable of following a Jesus who never existed.

It is a problem that the Testament states that the Church got its name, the Christians, from Jesus. The real Josephus would have stated that they called Jesus the Christ and themselves Christians. To say the name came from Jesus the Christ implies that Jesus is the Christ.

Or the only Christ who had followers!

Would Christians refer only to followers of Jesus? There were other Christ claimants. Their followers would have said they were followers of the Christ. Christians is a description not a label. Jesus' Christians could not have been the only ones. Christian was used by Gnostics as well who did not use the word in the Jewish sense of followers of the Messiah

king. David was a Messiah in the Old Testament and he had to have had followers who described themselves as Christian.

Edwin M Yamauchi in his *Jesus Under Fire* from the Paternoster Press believes that we can know which references in the Testament are insertions and which really belong there. He thought the reference to a wise man was from Josephus for a Christian would have said more - but you can't place much emphasis on that when the Christian might have said all he could think of.

Yamauchi said that unbelievers like Josephus could say that Jesus did amazing miracles meaning tricks. That's a lie for Josephus would not praise a man who was doing conjuring tricks as if they were miracles.

Yamauchi said that Josephus would have written that Jesus won over many Jews and Greeks for that was an observation. And finally Josephus said that the disciples came to love Jesus and called the church the tribes of Christians both of which fit his writing style. I do not like Yamauchi for he is too much for Christianity and does not care what harm this faith and his defending it does.

The Testament says that Jesus was called more than a man after being called a wise man and Yamauchi rejects the more than a man bit as fake. Some even say this more than a man bit was pure sarcasm and therefore authentic (eg *Runaway World*, page 19). But Josephus would not be sarcastic like that and it need not be sarcasm and the sarcasm interpretation is out of place in that context. Christians would have taught unbelievers to believe that Jesus was a wise man first in order to prepare them for being told that he was sinless and then the Son of God. Shocking doctrines have to be handled diplomatically. And why should we take the text to mean tricks by miracles when the whole passage was revised to make it support Jesus? And the Testament is chronological so Jesus winning the Greeks happened before his death which contradicts the gospels that he focused on Jews only and was not an observation for it was not true.

There is no evidence at all that any part of the Testament is genuine. There is no need for it to be genuine to explain Josephus saying that James was the brother of the so-called Christ, Jesus, later on so briefly. Maybe it was all he wanted to say.

Many think that since Josephus only said that the resurrection was reported by Jesus' friends that he does not sound too sure that the resurrection happened. But when the passage is so determined to be brief that would explain why whoever wrote it never said that Jesus rose and this was reported. Anyway, saying something is reported does not imply disbelief or mistrust for what they say. You can talk that way about something you know is true. The reference to the reporting could be a scam to get people to turn to the gospels to read the reports. That would be a further indication that Josephus did not write it. The fact however is, the Testament does say Jesus appeared alive after his death and does not say it was just somebody else who said that.

Those who say that the style is like that of Josephus never prove that Josephus would have been hard to imitate. Few well-known writers are and it is only a short insertion. It is too short to make an accurate assessment of who the author was or wasn't.

Arguments from Josephan expressions for authenticity are dubious for whoever inserted the Testament would have been familiar with his expressions. For example he called Solomon and Daniel wise men. The Testament called Jesus' miracles *paradoxa erga*. Josephus used this term for the miracles of Elisha. The Testament called the Church a tribe, *phylon*. We are told the Christians never used these expressions so they must have come from Josephus and not a forger. But we don't have much Christian literature and especially literature from the Christians Josephus might have known and when the expressions were already in Josephus a forger might have known them.

When Christianity did regard Jesus as a wise man why wouldn't it call him that? Why wouldn't it use *paradoxa erga* when speaking of Jesus' miracles? *Paradoxa* conveys the idea of deeds contradicting or being in a paradoxical relationship with nature rather than just astonishing but this word was loosely applied to seeming miracles (fakes) too. But from the positive context of the Testament, we can be sure that it was using the word to describe real wonders.

So the Testament says the followers of Jesus founded a tribe, *phylon*. They founded a tribe in the sense that the Church claimed to be the new Israel and Israel was a tribe subdivided into further tribes then why wouldn't they use these words? Josephus called the Jews and other racial groups tribes. It looks very much as if the Christians were a race and they do call themselves a chosen race. It is like they are a new Jewish race and they have the sectarian format of being a tribe.

Perhaps the author thought that you had to be a Jew to become a Christian and once you did that you became a new species or race and Gentile Christians are fakes for they didn't become Jews first. The apostle of Jesus, Peter, called the Church a chosen race just like Yahweh called the Semitic race a chosen race. This would suggest that Jesus never envisioned a Church like Paul's made up of Jews and Gentiles but of converted Jews alone and this would have been a serious refutation of the authenticity of the New Testament which says the Church is for all and is not limited to any race.

The reference to Pilate having killed Jesus to please the Jews is sometimes taken to be part of what Josephus really wrote because Josephus wanted to please the Romans and wrote this for it was undeniable anyway. And it is thought to be real for in the second and third centuries the Christians blamed the Jews for killing Jesus (He Walked Among Us, page 41). This kind of argumentation is very weak. How could the Christians see what the writer's motive was?

The passage does not morally blame Pilate or the Jews for it only says what they did but not that they were acting in bad faith or in good faith either though still Josephus could not have written this for it is still unflattering. If it blames anybody it blames the Jews for accusing him to Pilate which led him to sentence him to death. It certainly blames the Jews for wrongly or misguidedly killing Jesus, its position in the moral scale being a different issue, so that may be a sign of a third century editor for earlier the Church tried to slander the Jews whenever it could even more so than it did in later centuries. If you are going to accept the unlikely position that the Romans all knew what Pilate was like and did not mind anybody saying then Josephus would not have needed to blame the Jews and probably would not have liked to blame the Jews before the Roman readership. Josephus would have tried to defend what the Jews did or have said that though they did wrong they did not mean to.

Tiberias Caesar hated Pilate but that does not mean he would have wanted him slandered for that makes the empire look bad. Tiberias Caesar hated Pilate so much and wiped the evidence for his existence from the world so completely - though Tiberias' rule ended in 37 AD indicating that Rome agreed that Pilate should be forgotten long after Tiberias was gone for Pilate fell from power about that time too - that until an inscription was found there was no evidence of Pilate's existence (page 66, In Defence of the Faith). This tells us that the records about Jesus would have been destroyed for Pilate and the Jews needed Jesus to be forgotten and that Rome kept none for they would be remembrances of Pilate. This tells us that Josephus and later Tacitus (another who alleged referred to Christ but very briefly) could not have depended on imperial records. Josephus could not have mentioned Jesus without records for he liked to reference all his sources for us (Biblical Discrepancies). It would not have been his purpose or desire to have anybody turning to the gospels if they existed.