

Josephus

Sources

Josephus' Works

Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (2003)

Edwin Yamauchi, "Josephus and the Scriptures," *Fides et Historia* 13 (Fall 1980): 42-63

I. Life and Works of Josephus

A. Early Life

1. Born in Jerusalem c. AD 37
2. Character: An *aristocratic Jew*
- 3.

B. Later Career

1. Participated in Jewish revolt (AD 66-73)
2. Surrendered to Vespasian and became part of his circle
3. Went to Rome under imperial patronage
4. Died c. 100 in Rome

C. Major Works

1. *The Jewish War*
 - a. Covers from Antiochus Epiphanes to AD 73—mostly the war
 - b. Finest of Josephus's histories
2. *Antiquities of the Jews*
 - a. Comprehensive history of the Jews
 - b. Early sections retell OT narrative w/ some Jewish traditions
 - c. Most accurate from the time of Herod

II. Josephus and the Bible

A. The Old Testament: The *Antiquities*

1. Dependable on the OT only when duplicating the OT
2. Preserves some Jewish traditions
3. Sometimes inserts own viewpoint

B. New Testament Era

1. John the Baptist
 - a. *Antiquities* 18.5.2 describes John in positive terms but says Herod Antipas executed him out of fear of rebellion
 - b. Some suggest John's denunciation of Herod's marriage might have raised fears of (or made excuse for) rebellion
2. Gamaliel's Speech (Acts 5:36-37)
 - a. Judas the Galilean is described several places as founder of the Zealots
 - b. Mentioned "Theudas" (*Antiquities* 20.6.1) but a different person
3. Death of Herod Agrippa I
 - a. Described in *Antiquities* 19.8.2, very close to Acts 12:20-23
 - b. Main difference → Herod lingers five days in Josephus's version
4. "That Egyptian" (Acts 21:38)
 - a. On rescuing Paul, the Roman commander thought he had captured "that Egyptian which before these days made an uproar."
 - b. Josephus also describes him, giving fuller details, but differing on the number of followers (4,000 in Acts, 30,000 in Josephus)

5. Death of James the Just, Brother of Christ
 - a. Described (*Antiquities* 20.9.1) how James was stoned by the high priest Ananus (“Annas,” son of the Annas of the Gospels and Acts) during the interregnum between Festus and Albinus
 - b. Viewed event as attempt to build up authority of Sadducees
6. Description of the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70)
7. Testimony to Christ (*Testimonium Flavianum*)
 - a. In *Antiquities* 18.3.3, Josephus briefly describes the ministry of Christ, ascribing miracles & Messiahship
 - b. Views on the authenticity of the passage
 - 1) A completely spurious Christian forgery
 - 2) Completely genuine as it now stands
 - 3) Written by Josephus but having Christian interpolations (majority view)

III. Josephus as a Historian

A. Josephus and Luke

1. Critics tend to see Luke as reliant on (though mishandling) Josephus
2. Conservative date of Luke (AD 60s) makes borrowing impossible—nor any reason to see Josephus borrowing from Luke
3. Luke & Josephus could have drawn on same sources
4. No valid reason to privilege Josephus above Luke, as most writers do

B. As a Jew

1. Saw a linear, teleological view of history (esp. *Antiquities*) under God’s providence
2. “Prophetic” and providential history (like OT pattern)
 - a. Apologetic: To vindicate Judaism to the Roman world
 - b. To explain God’s reasons for judgment
3. Though despised by later Jews, he was one of their foremost apologists in the ancient world.