

## JESUS AND HISTORY

### I. EVIDENCE FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS:

#### From Pagan Sources.

• **Thallus** - A Samaritan born historian lived and worked in Rome about the middle of the first century (52 A.D.).

1. Though his works are lost to us, Julius Africanus, a writer of the early 3rd century, was familiar with Thallus, history of Greece.
2. Africanus in commenting on the darkness which fell over the land during the crucifixion of Jesus (Mk.15:33) said that, "Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun."
3. The chief point pointed out by Will Durant lies in the fact that a knowledge of the circumstances surrounding Jesus' death were well known in the imperial city of Rome as early as the middle of the first century.
4. Christ's crucifixion was already common knowledge at that time, though the tried to explain away the darkness, they couldn't deny it.

• **Mar-Bar-Serapion** - A manuscript in the British Museum preserves the text of a letter written some time after 73 AD.

1. The letter was sent by Mara-Bar-Serapion a Syrian to his son. In prison at the time of the writing the father pleads for his son to be wise by illustrating the folly of persecuting such wise men as Socrates, Pythagoras, and Christ:
2. It is obvious that by the time of this writing, Jesus was already placed on an equal footing with the accepted wise men of the ancient world.

• **Cornelius Tacitus** - Usually rated as the greatest historian of Rome, Tacitus (born c. 52-54 AD) at about the age of 60, while writing of the reign of Nero (54-68 AD), told how the Christians were made scapegoats for the Great fire of 64 AD.

1. Tacitus says, "*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..."*

2. Tacitus was governor of Asia in 112 AD.

• **C. Plinius Secundus** (Pliny the Younger)

1. Pliny, governor of Bithynia, often wrote to the emperor Trajan asking his Imperial advise on how best to deal with the sect of the Christians which according to him were troubling his province.
2. One letter (c. 112 AD) reveals information he extracted from some Christians by torture: "They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not commit any wicked deed...after which it was their custom to separate, and then to meet to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind."

### II. JOSEPHUS

A The most important references to Jesus from a Jewish source are from a former Jewish general turned historian by the name of Flavius Josephus. He writes about many New Testament characters: (Pilate, the Caesars, the Herods, the Pharisees and sadducees, of Annas, Caiaphas, Felix, and Festus.) He also writes of Jesus' brother James, and the death of John the Baptist.

B. Most importantly is his reference to Jesus: "And there arose about this time Jesus a wise man, if indeed we should call him a man; for he was a doer of marvelous deeds, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure. He won over many Jews and also many Greeks. This man was the Messiah. And when Pilate had condemned him to the cross at the instigation of our own leaders, those who had loved him from the first did not cease. For he appeared to them on the third day alive again, as the holy prophets had predicted and said many other wonderful things about him. And even now the race of Christians so named after him, has not yet died out."

