



Flavius Josephus is a crucial name for understanding the historical and cultural context in which early Christianity developed. His work offers a unique source of knowledge about first-century Judaism and the political and social tensions that led to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Within his writings, one of the most famous passages is the *Testimonium Flavianum*, a brief reference to Jesus of Nazareth in his work *Jewish Antiquities*, which has been widely studied, debated, and analyzed in theological and historical circles.

In this article, we will delve into the figure of Flavius Josephus, the history behind the *Testimonium Flavianum*, the theological relevance of this passage for Christianity, and finally, the spiritual lessons we can draw from its content to strengthen our faith and apply it in daily life.

Who Was Flavius Josephus?

Flavius Josephus, born Yosef ben Matityahu in 37 A.D., was a Jewish priest, general, and above all, a historian. Raised in a priestly family in Jerusalem, he was educated in the different religious currents of the time and initially joined the rebel cause in the First Jewish-Roman War (66-70 A.D.). However, after being captured by the Romans, he changed sides and became a chronicler under the patronage of Emperor Vespasian and his successors. He wrote several works, including *The Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*, his most extensive work.

Josephus's work is crucial because it provides a comprehensive view of Second Temple Judaism, describes the different religious and political groups of the time, and provides details about life in first-century Palestine. This information is essential to situate the events of the Gospels in a historical context. Among his extensive writings, we find a direct reference to Jesus in the *Testimonium Flavianum*, which makes Josephus one of the few non-Christian authors of the first century to mention him.

The Testimonium Flavianum: What Does It Say and Why Is It Important?

The *Testimonium Flavianum* is a brief passage found in Book XVIII of *Jewish Antiquities*. This text has garnered considerable attention since Josephus appears to refer explicitly to Jesus. Here is a traditional version of the passage:

“About this time appeared Jesus, a wise man, if indeed it is proper to call him a man, for he was a doer of startling deeds, a teacher of



people who receive the truth with gladness. He won over many Jews and many Greeks. He was the Christ. When Pilate, upon the denunciation of the principal men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him from the beginning did not cease to do so. He appeared to them on the third day, alive again, as the prophets of God had foretold, along with many other marvelous things concerning him. And to this day, the group of Christians named after him has not disappeared.”

This passage is significant because, in just a few lines, it provides a reference to Jesus in a secular historical context. Although Josephus was not a Christian, the *Testimonium Flavianum* mentions Jesus as “Christ” and alludes to his crucifixion and resurrection. This has made the text especially valuable for Christian scholars as it serves as external evidence of Jesus’s existence and his impact on history.

Debate over the Authenticity of the Testimonium Flavianum

One of the issues surrounding the *Testimonium Flavianum* is its authenticity. There are two main schools of thought:

1. **Christian Interpolation:** Some scholars believe the original text by Josephus was modified by Christian scribes to make a more favorable reference to Jesus. They argue that expressions like “he was the Christ” and “he appeared to them on the third day, alive again” are unlikely from a non-Christian Jewish author like Josephus, who does not show any inclination elsewhere in his work to accept Jesus as the Messiah.
2. **Partially Authentic Reference:** Others maintain that while certain phrases may have been added by Christians in later centuries, the core of the passage is authentic. In this view, it is believed Josephus could have written something like “Jesus, a wise man” and “a doer of startling deeds” without necessarily recognizing him as the Messiah.

Over the years, the *Testimonium Flavianum* has been compared with ancient manuscripts, and some studies suggest it likely contains a mixture of authentic and added elements. This interpretation holds that Josephus might have made a brief, objective reference to Jesus, but that additional phrases about his resurrection and divine nature were incorporated later.



Theological Relevance of the Testimonium Flavianum

The *Testimonium Flavianum*, though brief and contested, has profound theological relevance for Christians. Here we explore some key aspects of its importance:

1. **Historical Confirmation of Jesus's Existence:** For many, the *Testimonium Flavianum* is invaluable proof that Jesus truly existed and that his impact was significant enough to be recorded by a secular historian of the time. This allows us to see Jesus not only as a figure of faith but also as a historical figure whose legacy influenced the course of history.
2. **Recognition of Jesus as a Teacher and Miracle Worker:** Josephus describes Jesus as “a wise man” and presents him as someone who performed “startling deeds.” This reference to Jesus’s extraordinary qualities is important because, even from a neutral perspective, it highlights his wisdom and power, indirectly reflecting how people of the time perceived him.
3. **A Connection to Jewish Faith:** Josephus was Jewish and wrote to explain Jewish faith and culture to the Romans. His brief mention of Jesus, a Jew, and the influence of his followers underscores an intrinsic connection between early Christianity and its Jewish roots. For Christian theology, this acknowledgment is essential, as it reminds us that Jesus was sent to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24) and that Christianity originated within Jewish tradition.

Spiritual Applications for Daily Life

Although the *Testimonium Flavianum* may seem like a purely historical subject, it contains spiritual lessons that we can apply to our daily Christian lives:

1. The Search for Truth Beyond Personal Opinions

The example of Josephus shows us the value of documenting and sharing truth, even when our personal beliefs may differ from the facts we record. Josephus was Jewish and did not embrace the Christian faith, yet in his role as a historian, he dared to mention Jesus and his influence on society. In our Christian journey, we too are called to seek the truth with humility, without distorting the Gospel or imposing it, but proclaiming it with simplicity and authenticity.

2. The Historical Relevance of Faith

The fact that a Jewish historian of the time mentions Jesus invites us to reflect on the impact



our faith can and should have in the world. Josephus wrote about Jesus because his life and works left an undeniable mark on history. As followers of Christ, we are called to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16), to live in such a way that our faith does not go unnoticed, but instead inspires and transforms our surroundings.

3. Learning to Dialogue with the World Around Us

Just as Josephus sought to explain Judaism to the Romans, we too must learn to communicate our faith in an accessible and respectful way. In a plural world, it is essential to find ways to express our faith in terms others can understand, avoiding prejudice and sharing the message of Christ with patience and charity.

Final Reflections

The *Testimonium Flavianum* is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and debated passages in ancient history, as it connects us with the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth through a source external to the Gospels. For Christians, these lines remind us that Jesus is not only the Savior of our faith but also a historical figure who left an indelible mark on the world.

Through Josephus, we can remember the importance of living our faith with truth and humility, being witnesses in the world, and communicating the light of Christ with clarity and respect. May this brief testimony inspire us to follow Jesus's example, to be living testimonies of his love, and to let our lives also speak, in a powerful and authentic way, about the transformative message of the Gospel.