

THE
CREDIBILITY
OF THE
GOSPEL HISTORY,
PART I.

OR, THE
FACTS

S. S. C.

Occasionally mentioned in the

NEW TESTAMENT

Confirmed by PASSAGES of

ANCIENT AUTHORS,

Who were contemporary with our
SAVIOUR, or his APOSTLES,
or lived near their Time.

With an APPENDIX concerning the Time of
HEROD'S Death.

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us's first assessment, because he intended to write afterward another book of the history of the *Jews*, and go over their affairs once more, as he expressly assures us at the conclusion of his *Antiquities*.

Josephus informs us in his *Life*, writ after *the War*, and *the Antiquities*, that the *Jews* had a battle with *Gessius Florus*, their last Procurator, and killed him, and a good many of his men, and that this victory was fatal to them: Forasmuch as this determined them to the war with the (z) *Romans*. Is it not strange that *Josephus* should say nothing of this in the history of *the War*, where he has made so frequent mention of *Florus*, and ascribed the *Jewish* uneasiness under the Roman government to the cruelties and other irregularities of this man? For this instance I am indebted to (a) *Mr. Le Clerc*.

There is another omission appears to me very remarkable. *Pheroras*, *Herod's* youngest brother, is often mentioned by *Josephus*.

(z) Ὁ δ' ἐπειθὲν κ' συμβαλὼν μάχῃ ἐνικήθη, πολλὰν τῶν μετ' αὐτὸν ποικίλων κ' γίνεται τὸ Γερουσιαστικὸν πταίσμα, συμφορὰ τῷ παντὶ Ἰσραὴλ. ὅθεν ἐπεβλήσαν γὰρ ἐπὶ τούτῳ μάλλον οἱ τὴν πλεονεξία καὶ ἀκαταστάσια, κ' ἐκείσαντες τὰς Ῥωμαίους εἰς τέλος ἠλπίσασαν. *Ant. 1. 6.*

(a) *Hist. Eccl. A. D. 66. n. 12.*

He has particularly informed us, that when *Augustus* was in *Syria*, he gave this *Pheroras* a Tetrarchy (*b*) at the request of *Herod*. And we are informed by *Josephus*, of *Pheroras*'s retirement into his Tetrarchy, of *Herod*'s visiting him there, and of *Pheroras*'s dying (*c*) at home, and of his being brought afterwards from thence to be buried. But yet, if I mistake not, he has never once said, what this Tetrarchy was, whose it had been before, nor where it lay. It is true, that whereas in the *Antiquities* (*d*) *Josephus* says, *Pheroras* went to his Tetrarchy; in his *War* (*e*) he says, he went to *Peraea*; or, as in some copies, *Petraea*: but *Peraea*, properly so called, could not be this Tetrarchy, because *Peraea* belonged all along to *Herod*. But this Tetrarchy of *Pheroras* was given him by *Augustus*, and was distinct from that estate or revenue which had (*f*) been settled upon him by *Herod*.

(*b*) *Antiq.* 15. c. 10. §. 3.

(*c*) *Ibid.* l. xvii. c. 3. de B. J. l. i. c. 29.

(*d*) Φερωσαν δ' ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς τετραρχίας ρ. 756. σ. 37.

(*e*) Φερώρας δὲ ὑποχωρήσειεν εἰς τὴν Περαίαν ρ. 1031. σ. 41. *vid.* Ἔ ρ. 1032. σ. 26.

(*f*) Τῷ μὲν ἀδελφῷ Φερώρα παρὰ Καίσαρος ἠτήσατο τετραρχίαν, αὐτὸς ἀπονέμειναι ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας πρὸς ὅσον ἑκάστῳ τῶν τῶν κ. λ. *Antiq.* 15. c. 10. §. 3.

These particulars may convince us, that though *Cyrenius* was in *Judea* in the time of *Herod*, *Josephus* was capable of omitting to take notice of it.

4. Again, it will be said: It may be fairly concluded from another place in *Josephus*, that *Cyrenius* was but once in *Judea*. For he says, that “*Massada* was then held by *Eleazar*, the chief man of the *sicarii*, a descendent of *Judas*, who persuaded not a few of the *Jews* not to enrolle themselves, as I have said (g) above, when *Cyrenius* the Censor (h) was sent into *Judea*.”

I own, this is a difficulty, but the argument is not conclusive. It is true, that *Judas* made this disturbance, when *Cyrenius* was sent into *Judea*, or in the time of *Cyrenius*: but it does not follow, that *Cyrenius* was sent but once into *Judea*. The New Testament will afford us an instance upon this very subject, which will be of use to us. *Gamaliel* says: *After this man rose* ^{Acts v. 37.}

(g) *Vid. de Bell. l. 2. c. 17. §. 8.*

(h) Καλεῖται δὲ τὸ μὲν φρέγιον Μασαδα, περιεστέκει δὲ τῶν Ἰουδαίων αὐτὸ σικαριῶν ὀνομαίος ἀνὴρ Ἐλεάζαρος, ἀπόγονος τοῦ περσῆος Ἰουδαίου ἐκ ὀλίγου, ὡς πρότερον ἐδήλωκαμεν, ἀποπέμψας τὰς ἀπογεγραμὰς, ὅτε Κυρήνιος τιμητὴς εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν παρῆεν. *de B. l. 7. c. 8. §. 1.*

up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him. If we had in our hands this book only of St. Luke, namely, *the Acts of the Apostles*; it is not unlikely, that many would have supposed, that St. Luke knew of no other taxing made in *Judea*, but that, in the time of which Judas rose up. But we are assured from his *Gospel*, that this conclusion would have been false: for there he has spoke very particularly of another, which he calls *the first*, or at least distinguishes very plainly from some other.

I must be allowed to repeat here once more, that arguments formed upon the silence of writers, are very seldom of much moment. *Josephus* is the only *Jewish* writer of those times, in whom we have the history of that countrey: And it cannot be justly concluded, that any particular thing was not done, or that such or such a circumstance did not attend it, because he has not mentioned it. All writers have their particular views, and some things we are very desirous to know might, for some reason or other, which we are ignorant of, lie without the compasse of their designs. Besides, the most accurate and careful historians

rians have omitted many facts or incidents, that might be very properly mentioned, through forgetfulness or oversight. I take the omission of the description of the Tetrarchy that belonged to *Pheroras* to be a remarkable instance of this sort.

5. But it will be said, that *Tertullian* is positive, the census in *Judea* at the time of our Saviour's birth was made by *Sentius Saturninus* (*i*).

I answer to this: (1.) It ought to be considered, that the heretic *Marcion*, with whom *Tertullian* disputes in this place, did not admit the authority of the first chapter (*k*) of *St. Luke's Gospel*. And it was the custom of *Tertullian*, to argue from those parts of scripture, which the heretics he was dealing with (*l*) acknowledged. Possibly therefore *Tertullian* having, or suppos-

(*i*) Sed & census constat actos sub Augusto nunc in Judæa per Sentium Saturninum. Apud quos genus ejus inquirere possent. *Cont. Marc. lib. iv. c. 19.*

(*k*) Accedit his Cerdon quidam.—Solum evangelium Lucae, nec tamen totum recipit. Post hunc discipulus ipsius emerfit Marcion.—Haeresin Cerdonis approbare conatus est. *De praescrip. Haeret. c. 51.*

(*l*) Quam & argumentationibus earum, & scripturis quibus utuntur, provocavimus ex abundantia. *De carne Christi. .17. 25.*

ing he had reason to think, that this census was made, when *Saturninus* was president of *Syria*, he might choose to mention the ordinary officer, as a thing certain : but yet might not intend to affirm, that the census was made by him, but only that it happened in his time. *Isaac Casaubon* judged it not unreasonable so to understand *Tertullian*, who often uses words (*m*) improperly. I thought it not fit to deprive the reader of this answer of that learned man. But I do not adopt his interpretation of *Tertullian*.

(2.) *Tertullian's* authority ought not to outweigh the testimony of more ancient writers, who were nearer the event. *Justin Martyr*, in his first apology, presented to the Roman Emperour sixty years before *Tertullian* wrote his books against *Marcion*, says, this Census was performed in *Judea* by *Cyrenius* ; and all other writers agree with *Justin*, as has been shewn already.

(3.) *Tertullian's* authority is of the less weight in this point, because he has made

(*m*) *Tertullianus* cum adversus *Marcio*. scribit, *Sed & cetera*, — ad majorem fidem magistratum ordinarium potius nominat, quam extraordinarium. Ait autem per *Sentiam Saturninum* dure & *Tertullianice*, hoc est, improprie pro *Σατῶν Σατῶνος*, vel *ἡγεμονίᾳ τῆς Σ. Κ.* *Casaub. Eccl. Hist. l. 6. 31.*

very gross blunders in history, of which I shall say somewhat more in the third chapter.

(4.) I imagine some account may be given of this mistake of *Tertullian*. It has been observed, that *Marcion*, whom *Tertullian* was now arguing with, did not own the first chapters of St. *Luke's* Gospel. *Tertullian* therefore not having his eye particularly on St. *Luke*, and supposing that this census was made in *Judea*, when *Saturninus* was president of *Syria*, says, it was made by him.

Judea having been afterwards a branch of the province of *Syria*, he concluded it was so at this time, and that therefore the census must have been made by the President of *Syria*. But this was arguing from later to more early times, as men not thoroughly versed in history are apt to do.

After the banishment of *Archelaus* *Judea* was annexed to *Syria*. But whilst *Herod* was living, the President of *Syria* had not any proper authority in *Judea*. The President of *Syria* was always the most considerable officer in the Eastern part of the Empire. When the *Romans* had any war (*m*) in
that

Tam intellecto Barbarorum irrisu, qui peterent quod
eripu

that part of the world, the neighbouring Kings were obliged to follow his directions; to furnish those sums of money, or those troops, which he required, and to send these to the places he appointed. When any differences happened between these Kings and Tetrarchs, they were bound to refer them to him, nor could they march any forces out of their territories without his consent. But he seems not, especially in a time of peace, to have had any proper authority within their dominions.

Nor do I think, I here impute to *Tertullian* any very gross mistake. The state of dependent kingdoms and provinces in the Roman Empire underwent frequent changes. And a person had need to have made history his peculiar study, and to have aimed at some uncommon accuracy, in order to understand the state of the Roman provinces for a couple of centuries.

I have now gone through all the difficulties, which are of any moment in this point.

eripuerant, consuluit inter primores civitatis Nero, bellum anceps an pax inhonesta placeret, nec dubitatum de BELLO.— scribitur tetrarchis ac regibus praefectisque ac procuratoribus.—jussis Corbalonis obsequi. Tacit. Ann. 15. cap. 25.

I have

I have nothing farther to add to those evidences which I have already produced, except these two observations: 1st, That it seems to me highly probable, from the manner in which *Eusebius* speaks of this matter in his chronicle, that it was originally the common opinion of Christians, that *Cyrenius* was sent into *Judea* on purpose to make this census: “In the thirty third year of
 “*Herod*, *Cyrenius* being sent by the Roman
 “Senate, made a census (or *enrolments*) of
 “goods and persons (o).” This does very much confirm the opinion of those learned men, who think, that *Cyrenius* was sent with extraordinary power: though why *Eusebius* mentions the *Senate* instead of the *Emperour*, I know not.

Possibly some may be disposed to set aside *Eusebius*'s authority, because in his *Ecclesiastical History* he has confounded the two surveys. But I must confesse, I ascribe that, not to ignorance, but to somewhat a great deal worse. It is impossible, that a man of *Eusebius*'s acutenesse, who had the New Testament and *Josephus* before him, should think a census made after *Archelaus*'s banishment was the same with that made be-

(o) *Chron. pag. 76.*

fore *Herod* died. But *Eusebius* was resolved to have St. *Luke's* history confirmed by the express testimony of the *Jewish* historian, right or wrong. Here *Eusebius* was under a biasse. In his Chronicle we have a simple unbiaffed account of what was the opinion of Christians, and others, at that time.

Secondly, It seems to me in the nature of the thing most probable, that some person was sent with extraordinary power to make this enrolment. There is no evidence in *Josephus*, that *Augustus* had any intention to take away the kingdome from *Herod*, and make *Judea* a province. A census in his dominions was a very great disgrace. But to have ordered it to be performed by the Prefident of *Syria*, would have been an additional affront. It would have looked like making *Herod* subject to *Syria*. Since *Judea* was to continue a distinct kingdom, as hitherto, and only to be reduced to a more strict dependence; the only method of making this census could be that of sending some person of honour and dignity, like *Cyrenius*, to enrolle the subjects of *Herod*, and value their estates; that for the future, tribute might be paid according to this census. And
 this

this does admirably suit the nature of the oath mentioned in *Josephus*, the substance of which was, to be faithful to *Cesar* and *Herod*.

I conclude therefore, that it is, upon the whole, most probable, that the first assessment, of which *St. Luke* here writes, was performed by *Cyrenius*, as well as the second. This appears to me a very natural meaning of *St. Luke's* words, and the external evidences for this supposition seem to me to outweigh the objections.

We have now got through the affair of the census. If I have not been so happy, as to remove every difficulty attending this text of *St. Luke*; yet I hope the reader will allow at least, that I have not concealed, or dissembled any.

