

EXTRA-BIBLICAL REFERENCES
TO THE
CRUCIFIXION DARKNESS

By Randy Roper

There was a discussion going on amongst secular historians and intellectuals in antiquity about a strange darkness that took place in 33 A.D. which lasted for 3 hours -- from the 6th hour until the 9th hour (i.e., from noon until 3 p.m.) at which time it became so dark that the stars came out. The only explanation they could come up with is that it must have been an eclipse of the sun. Note that the Greek historian Phlegon (below) says it took place in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad, which was 33 A.D. -- which can be verified by clicking on the link following Phlegon's quote in red below. (The Olympics began in 776 B.C., and by counting every fourth year you come to the 202nd Olympiad, and the fourth year of same is 33 A.D.) Most historical chronologies date Jesus' crucifixion in the Spring (at Passover) in 33 A.D.

The Gospels state that the sun was darkened from the 6th to the 9th hour while Jesus was being crucified. (Moreover, an earthquake took place which split rocks open and the veil of the temple was torn in two). This darkness was prophesied by the prophet Amos in approximately 700 B.C., who said it would occur just prior to God's judgment on Israel for all the sins they committed:

"And it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord GOD, "That I will make the sun go down at noon, And I will darken the earth in broad daylight;

I will turn your feasts into mourning, And all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, And baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son, And its end like a bitter day" (Amos 8: 9-10).

The supernatural darkness was also prophesied by the prophet Joel as we shall see in a moment.

Also, bear in mind, that an eclipse of the sun can only take place at the new moon, when the moon is traveling between the sun and the earth, and cannot take place at Passover when Jesus was crucified, because that event always takes place at the full moon (the Paschal moon), when the moon is on the other side of the earth -- (i.e., the earth is between the sun and the moon, and the moon is totally illuminated by the sun -- a full moon). See below where historian Julius Africanus correctly states this using his limited knowledge of the solar system in 220 A.D. Moreover, an eclipse of the sun only lasts a couple of minutes in its totality -- not 3 hours!

Extra-biblical, secular references to the crucifixion darkness:

Phlegon of Tralles was a Greek historian who wrote a history of the world from the first Olympic games in 776 B.C. to the 229th in approximately 137 A.D. His history is called The Olympiads:

"In the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad [AD 32-33], a failure of the Sun took place greater than any previously known, and night came on at the sixth hour of the day [noon], so that stars actually appeared in the sky; and a great earthquake took place in Bithynia and overthrew the greater part of Niceaea."

(Bithynia was a province in what is now northwestern Turkey and Niceaea was its major city). In a quote (in red below) from another historian, who cites more of Phlegon, it is shown that Phlegon stated that the darkness was for a period of three hours – from the sixth to the ninth hour.

For mathematical calculation of the Olympiads from the first in 776 B.C. to the 4th year of the 202nd in 33 A.D., click on this link <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/gary.h.turner/XmasSept/xmas11.htm> and scroll down to the sub-heading entitled “Historical Evidence.” (Remember, there is no year zero). This site also shows detailed evidence, including astronomical evidence, that Jesus died on Friday, Nisan 14, in 33 A.D. The following is a yearly breakdown chart of the 202nd Olympiad showing that the fourth year was 33 A.D.:

The 202nd Olympiad Calender

A.D.	-----29-----	-----30-----	-----31-----	-----32-----	-----33-----
	-----1st-----	-----2nd-----	-----3rd-----	-----4th-----	
	-----202nd Olympiad-----				

<http://www.freechristianteaching.org/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=185#axzz1kZuO6ovx>.

A first century secular historian, Thallus, a Samaritan, wrote his History of the ancient world from the Trojan War to approx. 52 A.D. <http://christianthinktank.com/jrthal.html>. Thallus' history is lost, but a portion of his work is cited by the 3rd century Christian historian Sextus Julius Africanus in his History of the World in five volumes completed in approximately 220 A.D. Africanus was a prominent historian of his day who was put in charge of building Emperor Alexander Severus' public library at the Pantheon in Rome -- <http://www.voskrese.info/spl/XjulesAfrican.html>. Below is the quote from Julius Africanus:

"On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun. For the Hebrews celebrate the passover on the 14th day according to the moon, and the passion of our Savior falls on the day before the passover; but an eclipse of the sun takes place only when the moon comes under the sun. And it cannot happen at any other time but in the interval between the first day of the new moon and the last of the old, that is, at their junction: how then should an eclipse be supposed to happen when the moon is almost diametrically opposite the sun? Let opinion pass however; let it carry the majority with it; and let this portent of the world be deemed an eclipse of the sun, like others a portent only to the eye. Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth--manifestly that one of which we speak. But what has an eclipse in common with an earthquake, the rending rocks, and the resurrection of the dead, and so great a perturbation throughout the universe? Surely no such event as this is recorded for a long period" (XVIII.1).

<http://christianthinktank.com/jrthal.html>. (This site also gives more information on Thallus and shows that he was a well-respected historian in the ancient world).

There is also a Jewish account of an earthquake in 33 A.D. which damaged the temple.

The remarks and chart (below) are from the following website:

<http://www.logosapologia.org/?s=israel+exploration+journal>

“The Israel Exploration Journal published by the institute of archeology at the Hebrew University published an article “Earthquakes in Israel and Adjacent Areas: Macrosismic Observations since 100 BCE.” On page 265 they list a slight earthquake in Jerusalem in AD 30 and one in AD 33 which affected Judea, Jerusalem including damage to the temple.”

Catalogue of Earthquakes in Israel and Adjacent Areas

DATE	TIME	DETAILS	REFERENCES
92 B.C.E., Feb. 28		Syria, Israel, Egypt. Tsunami on Levant coast.	BM:289
64 B.C.E.		Jerusalem: strong. Damage to Temple and city walls.	R; W; BM:277
31 B.C.E., Sept. 2		Intensity possibly MMS X (9:233). Severe in Galilee and Judaea. According to Josephus, '30,000 people and many animals' were killed in Judaea (10). 'Jason's Tomb' in Jerusalem was destroyed (11). Jericho area (12), structural damage at Kh. Qumran, the Dead Sea (13) and Masada (TA).	R; W; S
		★ ★ ★	
30 C.E.		Jerusalem: slight.	S
33		Judaea, Jerusalem: slight. Damage to Temple.	R; W

Tertullian references the darkness.

Tertullian, a prominent Christian lawyer, 160 – 225 A.D., in his Apologia XX1, states that accounts of the darkness were preserved in the national archives of his day – (an “Apology” was a defense of the Christian faith). He also states that Tiberius Caesar, the emperor during Christ’s lifetime, appears to have believed in Christ’s divinity and that Pilate became a Christian as well (see below).

In the first Tertullian quote below, which I have highlighted in red, the prophecy about Christ which Tertullian refers to is from the prophet Joel (800 B.C.):

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD (Joel 2:31).

The term “day of the Lord” is code used by the Old Testament prophets to signal the end of the age and the coming of the messiah which we now know is His second coming. On the night of the crucifixion, a blood-red moon arose which has been calculated by astronomical calculations as seen by residents of Jerusalem on the night of April 3, 33 A.D. – the night of the crucifixion. No wonder 3000 people accepted Christ during the first sermon by Peter on the day of Pentecost, since they all had seen two of the messianic signs he referred to – the darkness and the bloody moon prophesied by Joel.

For details on the blood-red moon and the astronomical calculations, click on this link: <http://www.bethlehemstar.net/day/day.htm> and scroll down to the caption entitled “The Celestial Dirge.” (You can enlarge the print by clicking on “View” on the menu, then go to “Text Size” and select “Largest”). The reddish color is produced on rare occasions when the light from the sun is refracted onto the moon through the earth’s atmosphere. This is known as a lunar eclipse (as opposed to a solar eclipse). Read what distinguished scientists and top NASA scientists and engineers say about this website on their home page: <http://www.bethlehemstar.net>.

Below are quotes from Tertullian and info about him from the following website:

<http://www.gods-kingdom-ministries.org/coldfusion/Chapter.cfm?CID=135>.

“In the same hour, too, the light of day was withdrawn, when the sun at the very time was in his meridian blaze. Those who were not aware that this had been predicted about Christ, no doubt thought it an eclipse. You yourselves have the account of the world-portent still in your archives.”

The Christian philosophers wrote to fellow philosophers, in order to convince them that Christianity was the true Philosophy. Tertullian, on the other hand, pleads for Christians as a lawyer. Philip Schaff tells us in his History of the Christian Church, Vol. II, p. 830,

“... Minucius Felix pleads for Christianity as a philosopher before philosophers, to convince the intellect; Tertullian as a lawyer and advocate before judges, to induce them to give fair play to the Christians, who were refused even a hearing in the courts.”

As a lawyer familiar with past decrees and other judicial records, Tertullian was able to refer his readers to the official records on file in the Roman courts. In his Apology, a “confession of faith” addressed to the Emperors of Rome, he reminds them that the Emperor Tiberius himself had looked with favor upon Jesus, saying in chapter V,

“Tiberius accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ's divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favour of Christ. The senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all accusers of the Christians. Consult your histories; you will find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making progress then especially at Rome.”

Nero, of course, was the first to persecute the Christians (64 A.D.) more than 30 years after its inception. Tertullian again reminds his Roman readers in Apology, XXI,

“All these things Pilate did to Christ; and now in fact a Christian in his own convictions, he sent word of Him to the reigning Caesar, who was at the time Tiberius. Yes, and the Caesars too would have believed on Christ, if either the Caesars had not been necessary for the world, or if Christians could have been Caesars.”

The reference to Pilate’s conversion may not be far-fetched. Tradition tells us that Pilate was very admiring and respectful of his wife. He was an uxorious husband. In Matthew 27:19 it states:

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, “Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.”

Although it may seem that Pilate ignored his wife’s advice, we learn in the Gospel of John that may not have been the case:

The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.”

Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid,⁹ and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

Notice that Pilate kept trying to release Jesus:

Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."

This last threat by the Jewish leaders – that freeing Jesus could get him in trouble with Caesar -- motivated Pilate to give in.

Since there is such strong extra-biblical evidence of the crucifixion darkness, and since it was such a supernatural event right at the time of Christ's Passion on the cross, does it not attest to the supernatural nature of His life? Does it not give powerful credence to the miracles attributed to Him as well as to the accuracy and credibility of the Gospels? Is it any wonder that the centurion, seeing all these fearful signs when Jesus died, exclaimed: "Truly this man was the Son of God!"?

Moreover, if so many libraries had not been destroyed by the barbarians when Rome fell in the fifth century, we would probably have many more accounts attesting to the darkness phenomenon.