

Sejanus, Pilate, and the Date of the Crucifixion of Christ

Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

Excerpt from Apples of Gold

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Proverbs 25:11

Abstract

Although well-known among Roman historians as the man who almost succeeded in overthrowing Caesar Tiberius, Lucius Aelius Sejanus' bearing on church history is not immediately evident. However, Sejanus' little-known relationship with Pontius Pilate bears greatly on the date of Christ's crucifixion.

An ambitious soldier, friend and confidant of Tiberius', Sejanus was the most influential and feared citizen of Rome. From AD 26 to 31, Sejanus turned the empire into a frightful tyranny. During this reign of terror, he moved to murder all who could possibly follow Tiberius on the Throne.

Sejanus' Early Years

Born into an equestrian (an order of Roman knights) family at Volsinii in Etruria around 4 BC (?), Sejanus was not part of Roman nobility.¹ Known as Aelius Sejanus, we have almost no knowledge about his youth.

Sejanus' Early Career

Shortly after Tiberius became sole emperor in AD 14, Sejanus' father (Lucius Seius Strabo) was made Prefect (commander) of the Praetorian Guard, the elite corps of Roman soldiers responsible for protecting the city of Rome and the emperor himself. One of Tiberius' most trusted administrators, Strabo was awarded this post (one of the two highest positions an equestrian could attain)² because of his life-long loyalty and service to Tiberius.³

The earliest reports of Sejanus' adult life place him in Rome with Strabo at this time. Thus, as a result of the service of his father, most of his life Sejanus had access to the imperial family. Without doubt, he grew up knowing Tiberius personally and had open access to him — an advantage to which he would later fully exploit.

In AD 16, Strabo was appointed the governorship of Egypt (the highest political position for an Equestrian of the time) and young Sejanus (c.20 years old?) was then appointed by Tiberius to succeed his father as Commander of the Praetorian Guard.⁴ Since by law the armies of the Roman Empire could not enter the city itself, Sejanus quickly distinguished himself by first persuading Tiberius that, the imperial safety required a closer presence of the Praetorians.⁵ Next, he significantly improved the organization of the previously scattered Guard. Having been randomly quartered among neighbors and friends throughout Italy, Sejanus had barracks built in Rome so that in time of need they could be more quickly mobilized.⁶ The 9,000 Praetorian's were no longer a force charged with keeping the peace within the towns of Italy. Sejanus made them truly the emperor's personal guard.

¹ Charles Edward Smith, *Tiberius and the Roman Empire* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1942), p. 116.

² Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981), p. 105.

³ J. C. Tarver, *Tiberius The Tyrant*, (London: 1902), p. 385.

⁴ Smith, *Tiberius and the Roman Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

⁵ Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization, Caesar and Christ*, vol. 3, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 263.

⁶ Robin Seager, *Tiberius*, 2nd ed., (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), p. 178.

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Apparently very early on, matters developed into a rivalry between Sejanus and Tiberius' son Drusus II. In AD 17, Sejanus was sent by Tiberius to accompany 30 year old Drusus⁷ in suppressing the mutiny of the Pannonian legion.⁸ It well may have miffed Drusus that the prefect had been sent to monitor his actions. This undoubtedly contributed to Drusus' hostility toward Sejanus. When Germanicus,⁹ heir to Tiberius, died in AD 19 and Drusus II became the heir-apparent, the rivalry with Sejanus took a noticeable turn for the worse.¹⁰

Over the next few years, Sejanus favorably impressed Tiberius through his many administrative abilities, and the young prefect continued to be endowed with more power. In AD 23, a fire broke out at a theater in Pompeii, ravaging the city. Sejanus was assigned to oversee and restore the city. So effective were his efforts that Tiberius ordered a statue of Sejanus be erected at the site of the new theater.¹¹ Always looking for someone capable of easing the burden of administration, Tiberius came to depend more and more on him, and Sejanus soon became his confidant.¹² The stage was now set for Sejanus' rise to power, and Drusus was the one man who stood in his way.

Sejanus' Rise to Power

By AD 23, it looked as if Drusus II would succeed Tiberius as emperor; however, Drusus died that same year after a short but violent illness. The way was now open for Sejanus to take an even more prominent role. Most Roman historians believe Drusus was actually poisoned.¹³ Shortly before Sejanus' wife was executed in 31 AD, she wrote that Sejanus and Drusus II's wife Livilla had become lovers.¹⁴ Further, that they had conspired to kill Drusus so that Sejanus could take his place as heir-apparent to Tiberius. Sejanus and Drusus' wife Livilla were accused of adultery and conspiracy in Drusus II's death (also known as “Drusus the Younger”). Indeed,

⁷ Drusus (13 BC–September 14, 23), was the only son of Tiberius and his first wife, Vipsania Agrippina. He was born with the name Nero Claudius Drusus, and is also known to historians as Drusus II, Drusus Minor, and Drusus the Younger.

⁸ Tacitus, *Annals*, i. 16, 24 & 52.

⁹ Augustus designated his step-son Germanicus to be his successor. Tiberius was seen as an emperor-regent for Germanicus until he came of age. This is why after Germanicus' premature death, his wife Agrippina began to clamor that her son Drusus was the rightful successor. See: Frank Burr Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 160.

¹⁰ Germanicus, the handsome, popular great nephew to Augustus Caesar, married Agrippina the Elder, granddaughter of Augustus Caesar. Augustus' wife, Livia Drusilla Augusta, was Tiberius' mother, he and Drusus I (the Elder) being sons from her first marriage.

But instead of naming Drusus I or Tiberius as heirs, Augustus acknowledged his grandchildren Gaius and Lucius, sons of his daughter Julia by his previous marriage to Scribonia. When, by 4 AD, his grandsons had both died, Augustus had to look elsewhere. He wanted to name Germanicus, son of Livia's son Drusus I, as his successor, but he was too young. Tiberius was Livia's favorite, and Augustus finally turned to him,

Upon the death of Drusus I, Augustus compelled Tiberius to adopt his nephew Germanicus as a son and name him his heir. (Tacitus, *Annals*, iv. 57.)

¹¹ Sager, *Tiberius, op. cit.*, p. 179.

¹² Tarver, *Tiberius The Tyrant, op. cit.*, p. 391.

¹³ Tacitus, *Annals*, iv. 8; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, lvii, 22, 1–4.; Suetonius, *Tiberius LXII*, 1.

¹⁴ Drusus II married his cousin Livilla c. AD 4. Their daughter Julia was born shortly thereafter. They had twin sons Tiberius Gemellus and Germanicus Gemellus in AD 19 – the same year Germanicus died.

Livilla may have already been in a relationship with Sejanus before the twins were born and Tiberius may have suspected as much. In AD 23, Drusus II (who was naturally irascible, cruel, ill-mannered, quick-tempered, and lecherous: see Durant, *op. cit.*, p. 263) struck Sejanus in the face during a casual argument (Tacitus, *Annals*, iv. 3). Dio Cassius relates that in the same year Sejanus also struck Drusus (*Roman History*, lvii, 22, 1).

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the ancient writings of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio Cassius concur that – with Livilla as his accomplice – Sejanus poisoned her husband.¹⁵

In AD 25, Sejanus asked Tiberius for permission to marry Livilla, the ex-wife of Tiberius’ son Drusus II. This would have gained greater legitimacy for him with the Roman nobility and improved his chances of actually becoming emperor. Tiberius refused to grant permission on the grounds of social conformity. After all, Sejanus was merely an equestrian and Livilla was a member of a noble family of the highest order. Instead, he promised Sejanus much greater honor and power in the near future:

“Of the result of my own reflections, and the further ties by which I propose to cement our union, I shall at present forbear to speak. One point only I shall make clear: no station, however exalted, would be unearned by your qualities and your devotion to myself; and when the occasion comes, either in the senate or before the public, I shall not be silent.”¹⁶

With Drusus II removed, Agrippina the Elder (the wife of Germanicus and granddaughter of Augustus), who was already a very important political figure, became even more so. Through various political schemes, Agrippina especially moved to advance her son Nero (as well as her other sons Drusus III and eventually Gaius Caligula) as Tiberius’ heir. At the same time, Sejanus’ was assuming a more prominent role in Roman politics.

Now 64, Tiberius had for years wanted to retire from public life and leave the leadership of the empire to a successor and the Senate. However, he was unable to do so. The oldest male family members were Agrippina’s children (Drusus III, Nero and Gaius Caligula), and they were too young to be appointed co-emperors.¹⁷

According to Tacitus, Tiberius even longed for a return to Republican rule, but this was simply unattainable.¹⁸ Tiberius knew that his desire for the Senate to take a more active role as they had done in the Republic was unrealistic. Unless he could find an administrator so competent and trustworthy that he could safely leave the government in his hands as his regent in Rome, Tiberius knew he would be unable to retire until one of these children grew to adulthood and demonstrated competence.

Livia Drusilla Augusta, Tiberius’ strong-willed mother, had now become a major problem of state.¹⁹ Accustomed to exercising authority over her son and feeling that her maneuvers had

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Annals*, iv. 3; Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lvii, 22, 1; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, LXII, 1.

¹⁶ Tacitus, *Annals*. iv. 40.

¹⁷ In AD 23, Nero was about seventeen. The twins, Drusus III and Gaius Caligula, were about fourteen. See Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

¹⁸ Tacitus., *Annals*. iv. 9.

¹⁹ Durant, *The Story of Civilization, Caesar and Christ*, vol. 3, *op. cit.*, p. 262. Livia Drusilla (58 BC - AD 29) was the wife of Caesar Augustus (also known as Octavian) and the most powerful woman in the early Roman Empire. She served as empress with her husband and several times acted as regent. Livia was Augustus’ faithful advisor. She took the name Julia Augusta following the death of her husband in AD 14. She was also mother to Emperor Tiberius and Drusus, grandmother to Germanicus and Claudius, great-grandmother to Caligula & Agrippina the younger and great-great-grandmother to Caesar Nero.

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cleared his way to the throne, she gave Tiberius to understand that he held it only as her representative.²⁰ During the early years of his reign when Tiberius was approaching 60, she added her signature to his official letters. However, equality did not satisfy Livia — “she wished to assert a superiority over him ... and undertook to manage everything like a sole ruler.”²¹ Finally, Tiberius built himself a separate palace and left his mother in undisputed possession of the one Augustus had raised.

Now a lonely, melancholy man of 67 and overcome with disappointment and bitterness, in AD 26 Tiberius left the hectic capital and withdrew to the completely inaccessible privacy of the island of Capri.²² While still retaining his full imperial authority, Tiberius now communicated his views to officials and the Senate through Sejanus. Placed in charge as regent, Sejanus would soon use this new power to advance his own personal agenda and nearly completely destroy the Julio-Claudian line.

The same year (AD 26) while dining in a villa that was built in a natural cavern, Sejanus made the most of a calamity and “proved” his total allegiance to Tiberius. Many servants were injured as rocks suddenly began to fall. Most guests fled, but Sejanus alone remained and, exposing himself to the falling stones, hung his body over the emperor.²³ Tiberius had found his confidant — the one man who had displayed unfailing loyalty to him.

From this point on, Sejanus’ power increased dramatically. He was not only Tiberius’ spokesman, which caused the senators to curry his favor, he also carefully controlled the communications to Tiberius on Capri.²⁴ In this way, Sejanus was able to prey on Tiberius’ fears of revolt. As Tiberius granted Sejanus more and more authority, he used his position to eliminate those who were obstacles to his goal of ultimate power.

Tiberius never returned to Rome after his withdrawal,²⁵ and Sejanus systematically took control of the government. During this period, Sejanus controlled the entire matter of Roman administration. From all military matters to political appointments, he truly wielded the ultimate power.

Immediately after Tiberius left Rome, Sejanus attempted to set Agrippina and her grandsons against one another. Through his own agents, Sejanus tried to convince Agrippina and Nero to leave Rome for their safety.²⁶ At the same time, he was sending reports to Tiberius of their activities in an attempt to convince him they were plotting revolt and should be executed. For

²⁰ *Ibid.*, and Tacitus, *Annals*, *op. cit.*, iv, 57.

²¹ Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, vol. VI, The Loeb Classical Library, trans. by Earnest Cary, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000), Book lvii, 12, 1–4.

²² Durant, *The Story of Civilization, Caesar and Christ*, vol. 3, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

²³ Tacitus, *Annals*, iv. 59.

²⁴ Tarver, *Tiberius The Tyrant*, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

²⁵ Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lviii, 1, 1. None of the extant histories give the exact date of Tiberius’ departure from Rome.

²⁶ Smith, *Tiberius and the Roman Empire*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135–136.

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the remainder of AD 26, neither strategy worked. Agrippina and Nero did not flee Rome, and Tiberius was not convinced that they were a threat.

Those in the Senate who in any way opposed Sejanus, found themselves in terrible danger of the charge of treason. Sejanus also controlled access to Tiberius. The location on Capri made the emperor virtually inaccessible. The Senate had little choice but to cower before the man who controlled 9,000 Praetorians within the very walls of Rome. However, Agrippina’s third son Gaius (Caligula), the eventual heir, remained safely under Tiberius’ direct care and protection being with him on Capri.

Sejanus at the Peak His Power

Sejanus reached the peak of his power in AD 29. Tiberius’ mother died that year at 86, yet he neither paid her any visits during her illness nor did he come to her funeral in Rome.²⁷ This may have been not only due to her overbearing treatment of him but also perhaps because he had begun to believe Sejanus’ charges that Agrippina was actively seeking to assassinate him.²⁸ The presence of Livia seems to have checked Sejanus’ overt power for a time. Her death changed all that. Sejanus began a series of purge trials against senators and wealthy equestrians in the city of Rome, thereby removing those capable of opposing his power.

Later that same year and as a result of the intrigues of Sejanus, in a letter read before the Senate, Tiberius accused Agrippina of adultery and her oldest son Nero of “vices”.²⁹ They were arrested and exiled (AD 29) to the Pontian islands off the coast of Naples. The people of Rome, who had always favored Germanicus, protested in the streets.

Declared a public enemy by the Senate, in AD 31 Nero was forced into suicide. After suffering ill-treatment at the hands of her guards, Agrippina starved herself to death.³⁰ In AD 30, Sejanus’ also persuaded Tiberius to condemn Agrippina’s second son, Drusus III. He was imprisoned and died of starvation.³¹

Only Gaius Caligula (now 17 but with no administrative experience) and Gamellus, a boy of ten, remained alive as heirs from the Julio-Claudian line.³² Still living with Tiberius on Capri, Gaius remained inaccessible to Sejanus.

From 29 to 30 AD, Tiberius made it clear that he regarded Sejanus as his exclusive representative in Rome. The Senate voted to publicly honor his birthday. Public prayers as well as

²⁷ Durant, *The Story of Civilization, Caesar and Christ*, vol. 3, *op. cit.*, p. 262; Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lviii, 2, 1. Tiberius saw Livia but once after leaving Rome (Durant, p. 264).

²⁸ Smith, *Tiberius and the Roman Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

²⁹ Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

³⁰ Seager, *Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 211. This was the first instance of Roman nobility being beaten while under imperial exile.

³¹ Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

³² Seager, *Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

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sacrifices were offered on behalf of “Tiberius and Sejanus” and oaths were sworn “by the Fortunes of Tiberius and Sejanus”.³³

At some point in AD 30, Tiberius became suspicious of Sejanus, but he realized that he was in a precarious position for Sejanus was in control in Rome, and he was on Capri.³⁴ When he learned that the senators as well as the Praetorians looked to Sejanus as though he were actually emperor and only lightly esteemed himself, Tiberius did nothing openly for fear they might outright declare his rival as Caesar. Instead, he began to undercut Sejanus in a manner designed to keep him from becoming apprehensive that the true emperor suspected him of insurrection until Tiberius could devise a way to safely do away with him.³⁵ Beguiling his opponent by first bestowing honors upon him, the crafty plan was set in motion.³⁶

Dio Cassius tells us that in AD 30, Sejanus obtained permission from Tiberius to marry his granddaughter Livia Julia, the daughter of Drusus II the younger and Livilla.³⁷ This would place him in an even more advantageous position. With a marital claim to nobility, he would be in a better position for the aristocracy to accept his person should he decide on an attempt to seize imperial power.³⁸

During AD 30, Sejanus began to consolidate his power over the Roman armies that were stationed in foreign lands. Realizing that many of these commanders were loyal to Drusus and his family and fearing the possibility of their overthrowing him, he replaced many with men loyal to him.³⁹

Previously during his reign, Tiberius had twice held the consulship of the Senate with his acknowledged successor: with Germanicus in AD 18, and in AD 21 with Drusus II. Now in AD 30, Tiberius declared his intentions to make himself and Sejanus consuls (an honorary compliment indicating that he was the official heir) in the following year.⁴⁰ All indications were that Tiberius would soon confer upon Sejanus the tribunician powers, thus making him a *de facto* joint-emperor and the unchallengeable successor to Tiberius.⁴¹

³³ Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lviii, 2,7-8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, lviii, 4, 1.

³⁵ Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lviii, 4, 1-2.

³⁶ Suetonius, *Tiberius*, LXV, 1.

³⁷ In 20 AD, Julia married her cousin Nero (the son of Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder; see: Tacitus, *Annals*, iii, 29). In 29 AD, Nero and Agrippina were accused of treason. Nero perished the following year (AD 30), and Dio Cassius records that Julia became engaged to Sejanus that same year (*Roman History*, lvii. 3. 9 = Loeb vii, p. 195). He was slain in AD 31, and Tacitus adds that in AD 33 Julia then married Rubellius Blandus (*Annals*, vi, 27).

³⁸ C.E. Smith calls this the attainment of Sejanus' long cherished goal – a marital alliance with the Julian House. If that route failed, he could try to persuade Tiberius to name him Gaius' protector upon Tiberius' death and thus still retain full control over the Emperor.

³⁹ Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190.

⁴⁰ Seager, *Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

⁴¹ P.L. Maier, “Sejanus, Pilate and the Date of the Crucifixion”, *Church History* 37 (1968), p. 11.

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The Downfall of Sejanus

Probably in early AD 31, a letter from Tiberius’ widowed sister-in-law Antonia somehow managed to get through Sejanus’ web of spies to the emperor.⁴² Perhaps because she had always remained above the intrigues of Roman politics, Antonia was completely within Tiberius’ trust. The letter detailed Sejanus’ seditious scheme. Whether or not Tiberius already suspected Sejanus,⁴³ from this time forward his actions make it clear (at least in retrospect) that he knew of Sejanus’ treason.

Mixed messages regarding Sejanus’ position were given in private, while in public Tiberius continued to lavishly praise the man he called “my Sejanus”.⁴⁴ Tiberius even had coins minted and statues erected in honor of Sejanus. On the other hand, he began to speak in a mildly critical way of Sejanus and his allies.⁴⁵ Later that same year, Tiberius resigned his consulship, thus forcing Sejanus to do the same.⁴⁶ Tiberius then made Gaius Caligula consul, thereby indicating that he had now chosen Gaius as his successor.⁴⁷ He also forbade all sacrifices to living humans, thus ending public homage to Sejanus.⁴⁸

As a result, Sejanus was kept off-balance. Meanwhile, Tiberius began feeling out the loyalty of the Senate as well as the Equestrians in positions of authority. He found that the senators strongly disliked Sejanus even though they carried his favor. Tiberius also learned, much to his relief, that the Praetorians were still loyal to him and only supported Sejanus because he was Tiberius’ regent.⁴⁹

Now satisfied in his own security and that of his remaining family, Tiberius formulated a brilliant and elaborate plot to depose Sejanus.⁵⁰ He secretly appointed Naevius Sertorius Macro as new commander of the Praetorian Guard. He then sent Macro to Rome with a letter to be read before the Senate. Entering Rome by night, Macro met with Graecinius Laco, commander of the night-watch, and secured his loyalty while informing him of Tiberius’ intentions. At dawn, Macro intercepted Sejanus as he was about to enter the assembly. Macro confirmed a rumor and deceived Sejanus by privately telling him that he was bringing him the *tribunician* power.⁵¹ This would place him as co-emperor and the obvious choice for succession as well as immediately giving him imperial authority over Roman civil affairs.⁵²

⁴² Tarver, *Tiberius The Tyrant*, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

⁴³ Marsh correctly says it is impossible to say at what point Tiberius began to suspect Sejanus (see: Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 192).

⁴⁴ Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lviii, 4, 3.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Tiberius and the Roman Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁴⁶ Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

⁴⁷ Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lviii, 8, 1; Seager, *Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 218

⁴⁸ Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lviii, 8, 4.

⁴⁹ Tarver, *Tiberius The Tyrant*, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

⁵⁰ This plot is detailed in Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, lviii, 8-12; Seutonius, *Tiberius*, *lxv*, 1; and Josephus, *Antiq.* XVIII. 6. 6.

⁵¹ Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lviii, 9, 1-4.

⁵² Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, *op. cit.*, p. 108

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Overjoyed, Sejanus rushed into the temple of Apollo where the senate was meeting to hear the reading of the dispatch. Meanwhile, Macro revealed the proof of his authority to the Praetorians that had been guarding Sejanus and the senate. After declaring that he also bore a letter from Tiberius which bestowed rewards upon them, he dismissed the Guard back to their barracks. After quickly stationing Laco’s night-watch in their place around the temple, Macro went in, delivered the letter to the consuls and left before a word was read. He instructed Laco to keep guard there, and he hurried away to the barracks to prevent any uprising.⁵³

The reading of Tiberius’ purposefully long, rambling letter contained no immediate wholesale denunciation of Sejanus. It would discuss some other matter, then a slight objection against him – then it would praise him and another minor objection would follow. Thinking each a slight matter, Sejanus paid little heed to the list of successive charges.⁵⁴ Then, as the reading was ending and it seemed Sejanus was about to receive the power he craved, the tone of the letter abruptly changed into a scathing denunciation of the prefect and an order for his arrest. A stunned Sejanus was led out.

When the senators saw that the common people and the Praetorian Guard rejoiced at his arrest, they had him strangled and cast down the Gemonian Stairs – October 18, 31 AD (15 November, OS?). Thus, the man who seemed next in line to become the third Roman emperor perished on the very day he expected his greatest triumph. A great celebration followed during which the people of Rome, aroused and angry, abused the body for three days. Afterwards, it was thrown in the river.⁵⁵

The Aftermath of Sejanus’ Fall

Tiberius then launched an investigation into the conspiracy. As was customary, all of Sejanus’ family, including his three children, were slain.⁵⁶ Many of his friends and allies were denounced, tried and executed or forced into suicide or exile.

Only a few days after Sejanus’ end, his divorced wife, Apicata, committed suicide (October 26) but not before addressing a letter to Tiberius claiming that his son Drusus II had been poisoned by Sejanus with the complicity of Livilla.⁵⁷ Livilla, Drusus’ wife at the time he was murdered, was executed for her role in this act. The revelations concerning Sejanus’ seduction of Livilla while she was still married to Drusus inevitably cast doubt on the paternity of Livilla’s son, Tiberius Gemellus.⁵⁸ The emperor attempted to convey that Sejanus was implicated for many reasons, including plots against various family members. Agrippina and Drusus III, who still remained in imperial custody, were allowed to rot away, experiencing unspeakable tortures for another two years after Sejanus’ fall.

⁵³ Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lviii, 9, 5–6 (Loeb VII, p. 211).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, lviii, 10, 1–5 (Loeb VII, pp. 211–213).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, lviii, 11, 4–5 (Loeb VII, p. 217).

⁵⁶ Seager, *Tiberius, op. cit.*, p. 222.

⁵⁷ Drusus’ cupbearer Lygdus and Livilla’s physician Eudemus were now tortured, and seemed to confirm Apicata’s accusation. By the end of the year Livilla too had perished, supposedly forcibly starved to death by her own mother, Antonia. *Wikipedia Internet Encyclopedia* (Drusus)

⁵⁸ Suetonius, *Tiberius*, LXII, 3; Dio Cassius, *op. cit.*, lvii, 4b.

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Though Tacitus describes this period as a reign of terror and a blood-bath, Seutonius and others disagree.⁵⁹ Tarver says that Tiberius moved in to check the indiscriminate persecution of Sejanus' friends.⁶⁰ Tiberius evidently made a real effort to be just in his investigation. Over the next three to four years, many people were tried. Some were convicted and executed; some were allowed to turn state's evidence; others were acquitted. All in all, several dozen people were executed.⁶¹ Satisfied that the conspiracy had been sufficiently rooted out, Tiberius dropped the matter around 34 AD. He died shortly thereafter in AD 37.

The Connection Between Sejanus and Pontius Pilate

The available evidence indicates that it may have been through the influence of Sejanus that Tiberius appointed Pilate as procurator of Judea about AD 26.⁶² The basis for this conclusion is twofold.

1. The Date Pilate Was Sent to Judea

The only chronological record of Pontius Pilate's appointment is found in Josephus, who says: “(Tiberius) ... sent Valerius Gratus to be procurator of Judea, and to succeed Annus Rufus ... When Gratus had done those things, he went back to Rome, after he had tarried in Judea eleven years, when Pontius Pilate became his successor ... So Pilate, when he had tarried ten years in Judea, made haste to Rome...but before he could get to Rome, Tiberius was dead.”⁶³

Josephus infers, and the subsequent chronology demands, that Tiberius sent Gratus very soon after he became emperor. Tiberius had been placed as co-ruler by Augustus in AD 12 and became sole emperor on September 17, 14 AD.⁶⁴

Later, a Samaritan deceiver promised his countrymen that if they would go to the top of Mt. Gerizim, he would show them where Moses had hidden certain golden vessels of the Tabernacle. Of course, Moses had never crossed the Jordan, much less been on Gerizim (Deu. 32:48–52, 34:1–5; Psa. 106:32–33); yet, a deluded multitude gathered at the foot of the mountain. Learning that they were bearing arms, Pilate had his soldiers slay, capture, and execute many. The Samaritans sent a complaint to Pilate's immediate supervisor, Vitellius the governor of Syria, who appointed a new procurator and ordered Pilate to Rome to answer for his conduct before the emperor. However, Tiberius died March 16, AD 37, while Pilate was en route.⁶⁵ Therefore, Pilate was removed no later than late AD 36.

⁵⁹ Seager believes Tacitus' report, though he says it was embellished by his rhetoric (*Tiberius, op. cit.*, pp. 229-233). Smith maintains that “the number of prosecutions was not large, however, in view of the fact that the emperor apparently was convinced of the actual existence of a conspiracy” (*Tiberius and the Roman Empire, op. cit.*, p. 150). Marsh agrees, saying, “The number of prosecutions is much smaller than might have been expected after what had passed, and the proceedings seem to show that a real attempt was made to secure justice; in short the whole of the Tiberian Terror is a product of imagination and rhetoric quite unsupported by evidence” (Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius, op. cit.*, p. 200).

⁶⁰ Tarver, *Tiberius The Tyrant, op. cit.*, p. 413.

⁶¹ In an effort to get the whole ordeal behind him, Tiberius in 33 AD had all those still imprisoned for conspiracy executed on the same day. Twenty people were killed (Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius, op. cit.*, p. 207).

⁶² Henry S. Gehman, (ed.), *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, (Phil., PA: The Westminster Press, 1970), p. 751 (Pilate).

⁶³ *Jos. Ant.*, XVIII, 2, 2; XVIII,4, 2.

⁶⁴ Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 261.

⁶⁵ Gehman, *Westminster Dictionary, op. cit.*, p. 753 (Pilate).

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Excerpt from Apples of Gold

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Consequently, at the latest, Gratus assumed his post in AD 15. If he governed for around 11 years, as stated above, then he was removed in AD 26. If Pilate administered approximately ten years, he must have been sent to Judea in AD 26.

The exact date that Tiberius retired to Capri in 26 AD is not known, but it is certainly possible that Pilate was sent after Tiberius left Rome.⁶⁶ In such case, he was appointed by Prefect Sejanus⁶⁷ – yet with Tiberius’ final approval.

2. Sejanus’ & Pilate’s Anti-Semitic Policies

Josephus details Pilate’s hatred and taunting of the Jewish people. Writing only a few years after the fact, Philo states that Sejanus was anti-Semitic and desired to completely “destroy our nation”.⁶⁸ After Sejanus was exposed, it became obvious to Tiberius⁶⁹ that many of the charges brought against the Jews had been fabricated by Sejanus. Thus in AD 32 he sent forth a decree throughout the Empire that the Jews were not to be harmed.⁷⁰ Further, Philo states that even when Sejanus was in power, his policy extended only throughout Italy.

“Therefore everyone everywhere, even if he was not naturally well disposed toward the Jews, was afraid to engage in destroying any of our institutions, and indeed it was the same under Tiberius though matters *in Italy* became troublesome *when Sejanus was organizing his onslaughts*. For Tiberius knew the truth, he knew at once after Sejanus’ death that the accusations made against the Jewish inhabitants of Rome were false slanders, invented by him because he wished to make away with the nation ... And he (Tiberius) charged his procurators in every place to which they were appointed to speak comfortably to the members of our nation in the different cities, assuring them that the penal measures did not extend to all but only to the guilty, who were few, and to disturb none of the established customs but even to regard them as a trust committed to their care, the people as naturally peaceable, and the institutions as an influence promoting orderly conduct.”⁷¹ (italics author’s)

Eusebius adds:

“...Sejanus, the most influential of the Emperor’s court at the time, took measures completely to destroy the whole race, and in Judea Pilate, under who the crime against the Savior was perpetrated, made an attempt on the temple, still standing in Jerusalem, contrary to the privileges granted to the Jews, and harassed them to the utmost.”⁷²

⁶⁶ Marsh, *The Reign of Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 181; Seager, *Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 200; Smith, *Tiberius*, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

⁶⁷ Maier’s language is very strong on this point. He says, “It seems more than probable that in 26 AD, Pontius Pilate was nominated to succeed Valerius Gratus as *praefectus Judaeae* by L. Aelius Sejanus ... Undoubtedly it was Pontius Pilate’s implementation of Sejanus’ policy in Palestine which caused the familiar imbroglios with the Jews...” (Maier, “*Sejanus, Pilate and the Date of the Crucifixion*”, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9). Hoehner is almost as strong. He says, “It is probable that when Pontius Pilate succeeded Valerius Gratus as prefect of Judea in AD 26 he was appointed by the equestrian Lucius Aelius Sejanus” (see Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, *op. cit.*, p. 105). As these authors are trying to establish a 33 AD death year for Jesus, their views on this issue may be somewhat biased.

⁶⁸ Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, 24, 159–161.

⁶⁹ Tiberius has been accused of being anti-Semitic because of his expulsion of the Jews from Rome, but this was not the reason for the action: see Josephus, *Antiq.*, xviii, 3, 5.

⁷⁰ Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, 159–161.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 24, 159-161.

⁷² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* ii, v. These quotes, together with the chronological data previously supplied, have led Hoehner and others to suppose that Pilate was appointed by Sejanus and that he actively pursued Sejanus’ policies with the Jews. Further, he maintains Pilate’s ruthlessness had softened at the trial of Christ, and this must have been due to the fact that Pilate’s sponsor, Sejanus, was now dead.

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Sejanus' Death Narrows the Date for our Lord's Death

Since Jesus was crucified while Pilate was procurator of Judea (26 to 37 AD), our Lord had to have died between those years. Furthermore, the New Testament states that he died on a Passover which fell before a “high” Sabbath and not the weekly Sabbath.⁷³ The Greek of Matthew 28:1 renders the word “Sabbath” as plural (i.e., Sabbaths). Thus “In the end of the Sabbath(s)” indicates a condition in which there are two Sabbaths, one after another: and one is a “high Sabbath” (namely, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread = 15 Nisan) followed by the regular weekly Sabbath.

Luke 3:1–2 and Astronomical calculations taken along with the well-known 483-year prophecy in Daniel 9:25 demand that this occurred between AD 30 and 33. The fact that Sejanus' downfall came in AD 31 has a very significant impact on dating the death of Christ Jesus.

Thus if, for example, we take 473 BC as the year in which Xerxes installed Artaxerxes I Longimanus as his pro-regent⁷⁴ (see the section on the next page taken from Chart 5 of *Chronology of the Old Testament* by Dr. Floyd Nolen Jones), the Jews would quite naturally begin to reference the dates associated with him from that year as it would have been the point from which they began to have dealings with him as their overlord and sovereign.

Numbering from that date would place his 20th year over the Jews as 454 BC (or AM 3550 inclusive, exactly as Ussher)⁷⁵ and the 483 years of the Daniel 9:25 prophecy brings us to AD 30 for its fulfillment (454 BC + AD 30 = 484 less one for going from BC to AD = 483). This date agrees with that already determined in the previously cited book by Jones.

Going to the other extreme and taking 470 BC as the commencement year of Artaxerxes' pro-regency would result in 451 BC as being his twentieth and AD 33 would be the 483rd year from that point. However, the well-known account that Tiberius received word from Pilate about the miracles done by Jesus, the events associated with His death and resurrection as well as the miracles done in His name afterward by His disciples disallows AD 33. Why?

Therefore, for Hoehner, our Lord must have died after AD 31 (*Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, op. cit.*, pp. 106–114). But the shield incident he cites seems to have occurred before the crucifixion (Jos. *Antiq.* lviii, 3. 3). This could have caused Pilate to tread softly, for whether Sejanus were alive or not, Tiberius still well knew that which transpired throughout the Empire.

Moreover, the Jews insulted Pilate from the very first by not coming into the judgment hall “lest they should be defiled” so that he was pressured to come out to them (John 18:28–29). Hence, it was this offense that disinclined him from granting their wish to dispose of Christ, not because he had softened toward the Jews. Later, Pilate's wife also warned him to “have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him” (Mat. 27:19) After having at least thrice declared Jesus innocent of all charges and seeking to release Christ (John 19:12-13), the Jewish leaders threatened Pilate with “Caesar”. When the chief priests protested the superscription above the cross with, “Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews” (John 19:21) – Pilate extracted his revenge for these outrages against his person: “what I have written I have written” (John 19:22).

Indeed, it was Passover and many thousands of Jews were in and about the city. The Roman garrison was outnumbered. To have a man, whom he had pronounced innocent, flogged and then put to death was not merely to appease the Jewish leaders. It was to avoid a massive riot – the news of which would certainly have reached the ear of Tiberius. The threat was real. Even though Pilate perceived from Christ's response to “art thou a king then” that the entire matter was one of “religion” and “envy”, the matter would not so sound in the emperor's ears. To allow another to be acknowledged as king would be treason to Tiberius. The crowd had him – it was not a matter of Pilate's having softened. As we shall see on the following page, Dr. Hoehner's well thought-out reasoning is forced to give way to actual historical data.

⁷³ Mk 14:12 makes it clear that Passover began the night of the Last Supper. John 19:31 makes it clear that the evening following Jesus' death was not the regular weekly Sabbath (Saturday) but the beginning day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 15. Therefore, Jesus died on Thursday 14 Nisan.

⁷⁴ Floyd Nolen Jones, *A Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to the Basics*, 3rd printing, A Major Revision, (Green Forest, AR: Master Books Pub., 2007), pp. 226–228, 234–240.

⁷⁵ Ussher, *Annals, op. cit.*, page 152 (1658 ed., page 137). Based on Thucydides and Charon, Dionysius Petavius (a French Jesuit historian and theologian) also dated the 20th of Artaxerxes as 454 BC (rather than 445 BC) in his *Opus de Doctrina Temporum* (2 Vols., 1627; see Martin Anstey, *The Romance of Bible Chronology*, (London: Marshall Bros., 1913), p. 280).

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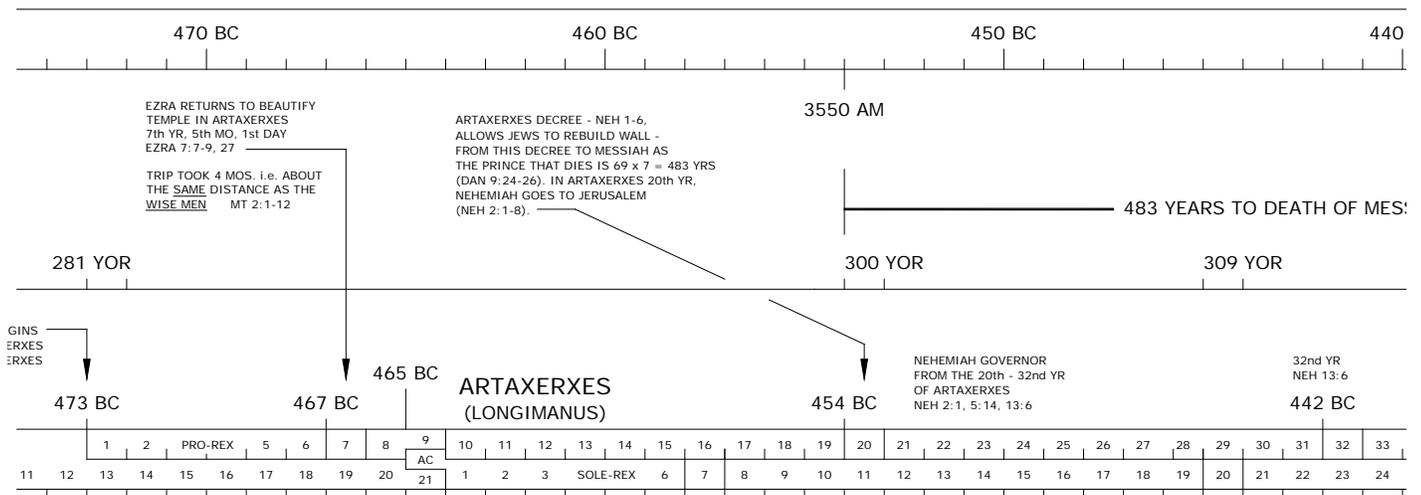
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Because upon reading the report from Pilate and hearing that many believed Christ to be a god, Tiberius proposed to the senate of Rome that Jesus be included among their gods. It was rejected⁷⁶ — due mainly to the obstinate opposition of Sejanus, the anti-Semitic prefect of Tiberius.⁷⁷ Now Tacitus and others fix Sejanus’ death at 18 Oct., AD 31.⁷⁸ This being two years *before* 33, the crucifixion could not possibly have taken place in 32 or 33! How could Sejanus die in AD 31 and yet address the Roman Senate after a 32 or 33 crucifixion? He could not, but he could if Christ died in AD 30!

Writing in AD 417, Orosius correctly adds that Augustus died in AUC 767 (AD 14) and that Christ died in the 17th year of Tiberius’ sole reign,⁷⁹ which was AD 30! (AUC 783)⁸⁰

The following section illustrates the Jones-modified Ussher-Thucydides solution to the Daniel 9:25 “483-year” prophecy. As explained in the preceding paragraphs, Artaxerxes Longimanus became associated on the throne as pro-rex with Xerxes I around 473 BC (also see Chart 5c and the display on p. xiv of Jones’ *Chronology*, 4th printing, 2009).



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⁷⁶ Tertullian, *Apology*, 5 & 21 (written c.207 AD).

⁷⁷ Orosius, Paulus, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, (NY: Columbia UP, 1936) pp. 325-26. Augustine’s protégé, Orosius wrote this history at his mentors request and under his watchful eye. (Neither 4 nor 5 in the above text refer to the well-known Catholic forgeries.)

⁷⁸ Tacitus, *Annals*, *op. cit.*, vi., 25 & 15 (written c.117 AD).

⁷⁹ Orosius, *Seven Books of History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 325–326.

⁸⁰ Jones, *Chronology of the Old Testament*, *op. cit.*, p. 256.