

Preacher's Pen points

It's Reliable History!



Next month I hope to spend a couple of days in Rome. To make the most of the opportunity I've been trying to read as much as time allows on the city and its history. This week I was intrigued by this paragraph in a book by Rosen on Julius Caesar:

"All of the events described in this book took place over 2000 years ago. How is it possible that they are still known? The answer is that written records based on eyewitness accounts were made at the time, and these, amazingly, have survived the centuries. The original documents, of course, perished long ago, but before they did, copies were made, and these copies were in turn copied".

This history writer appeals to one of the fundamental principles of historiography. The only way one can know the past is through the reliable testimony of eye-witnesses who have recorded their observations. Such testimony can be preserved through the ages by careful copying. Thus, in this way may know about the life of Julius Caesar.

How Can We Know About Jesus?

A similar statement could be made about Jesus Christ. He lived over 2000 years ago. How is it possible that we may know about Him? The answer is that those who lived with Jesus, His apostles, made eye-witness accounts of His deeds. Though Jesus, unlike Julius, left no personal "commentaries" of His activities, His disciples, like the apostle John, personally witnessed His life and solemnly recorded the truthfulness of His testimony. John writes in

connection with Jesus' crucifixion these words, "*And he who has seen has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. (Jn. 19:35).*

Comparing Jesus and Julius

As in the case of the writings about Caesar, the writings about Jesus have amazingly survived the centuries through the same process of careful copying that has preserved other manuscripts of the ancient world. However there is a vast difference in the manuscript evidence.

1. The earliest copy of Caesar's "Gallic Wars" dates from only the 9th century AD, nearly a thousand years after he lived. In contrast, the John Rylands Fragment of the "Gospel according to John" dates to 125 AD, within a generation of the events it describes.
2. The manuscript evidence for Caesar's "Gallic Wars" includes only nine or ten good manuscripts. However the Gospels have been preserved in tens of thousands of manuscript copies.

The point I hope is clear. The same process that enables us to know about the activities of Julius Caesar also enable us to know about the activities of Jesus Christ. However in the case of Jesus, the bibliographical evidence is overwhelmingly greater. If one can affirm that he knows the truth about Julius Caesar, how much more can we say we know the truth about Jesus Christ! —Johnny Felker (www.truthchasers.com)