

Apollonius of Tyana

by: Mark Dunagan

A couple of weeks ago someone wrote in the Oregonian that the claims of Jesus are not that impressive because the same type of claims were made by others including someone named Apollonius of Tyana. Apollonius was a philosopher who lived in the first century, died around 98 A.D., and it is claimed that he healed people, exorcised demons, raised someone from the dead, and appeared to some of his followers after he died. The argument from skeptics is that since such claims are obviously false, then the claims of Jesus are equally false. But there is much more to story. The apostles wrote about the life of Christ within 30 or so years after His death, in contrast, Philostratus, who wrote about Apollonius, wrote a century and a half after Apollonius lived. The life of Christ is found in four gospels, written within Jesus' generation and written by eyewitnesses. With Philostratus we are dealing with only one source. But the story continues. Philostratus was commissioned by an empress to write a biography in order to dedicate a temple to Apollonius. She was actually a follower of Apollonius, so Philostratus did have a financial motive to embellish the story and give the empress what she wanted. In contrast, the Apostles did not receive any compensation for writing the gospels, rather they only received persecution. But there is still more. The way that Philostratus writes is far different from what we find in the gospels. While the Bible simply says that Jesus did this or that, the life of story about Apollonius includes many

tentative statements, such as, "It is reported that", or "Some say this young girl had died; others say she was just ill". Finally, Philostratus was writing in the early third century in Cappadocia, where Christianity had already been present for quite some time, therefore the story of Apollonius is simply a pagan attempt to copy Christianity and is actually proof that the message about Jesus was being widely circulated in the Roman world long before the third century A.D. "You can imagine the followers of Apollonius seeing Christianity as competition and saying, 'Oh, yeah? Well, Apollonius did the same things Jesus did!' Sort of like, 'My dad can beat up your dad!'" (The Case for Christ, Lee Strobel, p. 120). One writer makes a good observation when he notes that the story of Apollonius is simply the gospels revisited and made more palatable for non-Christians, and what they thought Christ should have been. In contrast to Jesus, it is claimed that Apollonius was brought to trial, but unlike Jesus, he was miraculously delivered. For unbelievers it is far easier to follow someone who was delivered than someone who actually died for our sins.