

Another Response to David, Part 3: The Usual Pagan Suspects

David attributed the following two quotes to G.A. Wells:

Before 90 AD, Jesus remained an undated, mysterious figure about whom virtually nothing was known or reported (Did Jesus Exist? pgs. 47, 65; HEJ, 217-220).

I did not find this quote on p. 47 of Wells' *Did Jesus exist?* (I saw a full-page chart instead), nevertheless it reads like something he would write and describes his position. It may be that you have a different edition from mine? Or, you're paraphrasing Wells?

You quoted Wells again:

Jesus is not linked with a recognizable historical situation in any document (Christian, Jewish or pagan) that can be proved to have originated before about AD 100" (Did Jesus Exist?, pg. 215)

Yes, Wells writes this, and does so at the point where you cite him. You then registered your thoughts in response to these quotes:

Now those are some big statements, and you would immediately wonder what he does about all the external attestation (Josephus, Tacitus, and later Papias, Thallus, Lucian, Pliny, etc...) Easy, he rejects them.

Wells' assessments of these sources are completely tenable. He does not simply "reject" them, as if he didn't have any interaction with opposing arguments. Wells' treatment of Tacitus, for instance, is worth quoting at length since he has been accused of rushing to judgment before:

The one pagan reference to which appeal is still commonly made is the statement of Tacitus that Christians ' derived their name and origin from Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, had suffered death by the sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate'. Tacitus wrote this about AD 120, and by then Christians had themselves come to believe that Jesus had died in this way. I tried to show ([*The Historical Evidence For Jesus*], p 17) that there are good reasons for supposing that Tacitus was simply repeating what was then the Christian view, and that he is therefore not an independent witness. I did not (as I have been accused of doing) *assume* that Tacitus was repeating what contemporary Christians believed. I gave reasons for thinking this to be probable, which is quite a different thing. Trilling, even though an orthodox apologist, goes so far as to state that 'what Tacitus actually says could have reached him from any educated contemporary' and is 'no more than what could be learned anywhere in Rome' ([*Fragen zur Geschichtlichkeit Jesu*], pp 58-9). But in thus conceding the main point at issue Trilling has obscured the fact that Tacitus obviously considered it necessary to explain to his educated readers what manner of persons Christians are. He evidently did not expect the educated public of his own day to know, even though, in the same context, he implies that as early as Nero's reign (fifty years earlier) the common people of Rome knew and hated them. This is valuable evidence that Christianity had made little headway among the educated Romans of Tacitus' day. How came it, then, that he himself knew something of them? As governor of Asia about AD 112 he may well have had the same kind of trouble with them that Pliny experienced as governor of Bithynia at the very time... The cities of Asia included some of the earliest Christian congregations (Rev. 1:4) and may well have been the foci for active disturbance between pagan and Christian: for some of these cities were 'centres of a strong national Roman feeling... The emperor-cult was especially vigorous in that region, and the older deities also had not lost their hold on the enthusiastic devotion of the populace' (Merrill, [*Essays in Early Christian History*], p 97). Merrill adds wryly that 'it is altogether likely that Tacitus returned to Rome from his province with no favourable opinion indeed of Christianity, but with some knowledge of it that he might not have acquired without his period of official service in the particular province, and that his fellow-citizens of his own class at Rome would hardly be expected to possess'. (*Did Jesus exist?*, pp. 13-14)

While Wells puts Tacitus' writing of his *Annals* at "about AD 120," other sources put it to AD 115-117, while several which I have looked at put Tacitus' death at AD 117. Nevertheless, all sources seem to agree that Tacitus was writing after AD 110, which is sufficiently later than the time when the Christian story of Jesus as we have it in the gospels would have gelled in the minds of adherents. Needless to say, this is after AD 90, and here Wells is not simply dismissing Tacitus as a source of *independent* testimony, but is in fact giving reasons why Tacitus need not be taken seriously as an independent source confirming the gospel depiction of Jesus.

In regard to Josephus, Wells devotes an entire section of his *The Jesus Myth* (pp. 200-221) to dealing with both the *Testimonium* as well as with the so-called 'shorter passage', both of which hard-line literalists insist that we accept as authentically Josephan testimonies verifying the existence of the Jesus of the gospels. Wells cannot be accused of merely "rejecting" Josephus as an independent source confirming the portrait of Jesus found in the gospels,

With regard to Josephus, Wells devotes an entire section of his *The Jesus Myth* (pp. 200-221) to his defense of the position that the two passages in Josephus' *The Antiquities of the Jews* are Christian interpolations. Wells is not alone in this view; he cites numerous authorities on the matter who are inclined towards this same conclusion. That Wells is not simply parroting what others have written is clear with the fact that he also interacts with several sources which argue for their authenticity. It should be no surprise that I am persuaded that Wells (along with numerous other scholars) is right.

Wells addresses the issue of Thallus in his book *The Jesus Legend* (pp. 43-46), where he points to disagreements among scholars on when Thallus supposedly wrote, something that is quite difficult to determine since his writings do not survive (what we know of him comes to us from Sextus Julius Africanus, who wrote in the third century and quotes Thallus briefly).

Also, see Richard Carrier's [Thallus: An Analysis](#), which is a good overview of the matter.

In regard to Pliny, again Wells does not simply dismiss him as if he did not exist, but gives good reasons why his testimony does nothing to vouchsafe Christianity's claims for the historicity of the gospel Jesus. Wells writes of Pliny:

It is clear from what he says that his only knowledge of these people [i.e., Christians in his province Bythnia-Pontus] was what he had extracted from them under interrogation, namely that their convictions amounted to "a perverse and extravagant superstition", involving (among other things) reciting "a form of words to Christ as a god". Whether this 'Christ' they worshipped had been on earth as a man will have been of no interest either to him or to [Emperor] Trajan. What worried them was that Christians were holding meetings which, because of Christian unwillingness to make due obeisance to the emperor, might have been seditious; they were not concerned about whether there was any historical basis to Christian doctrinal niceties. (*The Jesus Legend*, p. 41)

On p. 43 of the same book Wells quotes J.J. Walsh ("On Christian Atheism," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 45 (1991), pp. 264-65) who points out that "Pliny evidently knew next to nothing not only about the sect but about his own government's policy towards the sect," since the purpose of his writing about the troublesome Christians in his province to Trajan was to ask for guidance on how he should deal with them.

David wrote:

What degree of specialization does he possess relevant to the subject area? None.

If by 'degree' you mean a certificate of completion from some college course, I don't know. Wells is a professor of German, and many have used this fact to dismiss him as unqualified to speak on these matters. In other words, because the source (Wells himself) is not decorated by some accredited institution in the very field of Christian origins, nothing he argues can be taken seriously. Never mind his arguments, the data he collects to support his conclusions, his observations based on a familiarity with the subject matter which goes back for decades (his first book on Christianity being published in 1971)

Wells' expert command of German, however, does afford him access to a wealth of literature in the field of New Testament studies, because so much literature in the last 200 years in this field is native to this language. Freke and Gandy make the following pertinent point:

Eager to distance themselves from Rome, German Protestant scholars began to search the gospels for the real Jesus. Even up to the present day the majority of such scholars have themselves been Christians, since a theological career at a German university is closed to those who have not been baptized. Yet despite this, rather than giving Christianity a firm historical foundation, as they hoped, Protestant scholars' three centuries of intense scholarship have undermined the literal figure of Jesus completely. (*The Jesus Mysteries*, p. 146)

Of course, we can dismiss Wells because he's not a professor of New Testament Greek if you like.

David wrote:

Now given I don't think you have to be a New Testament historian or textual critic to be critical, but when you're going to swim upstream and insist on largely abandoned styles of form criticism you're making a tall order.

Maybe it's time that someone makes this "tall order"? Then again, asking me to believe that a universe-creating, reality-ruling deity incarnated itself in the form of a human being born of a virgin in first century Palestine, was crucified, entombed and resurrected, and later ascended back to heaven, is not a tall order? Meanwhile, referring to Wells' case as "a tall order" simply because he does not have, say, a Ph.D in New Testament Studies, ignores his heavy reliance on scholars who do. Besides, would it really make any difference if Wells did have a Ph.D in New Testament Studies? Would this suddenly bestow his arguments with a gleam that would capture your attention and make you say, "Hey, this guy's onto something!?" My suspicion is that, even if Wells had 10 doctorates in fields ranging from ancient history, New Testament studies, theology, patristic literature, etc., believers would still find ways to dismiss his verdicts, in spite of the artificial requirement to possess such certifications.

I say artificial here because such a requirement is never an issue when it comes to believing the literalist Christian view of the New Testament. If an individual affirms that everything in the New Testament is historically true, why doesn't he need all these degrees in order to make such an assessment? It is, after all, an assessment, no? For Christians, you can be a high school drop-out ditch-digger who couldn't the word 'truth' if asked to, and still "know" that the New Testament is authentic history, but you have to have degrees up the wazoo in order to challenge such affirmations. This may not reflect your view personally, David, but special pleading of this kind is not uncommon from Christians. It seems that apologists, out of desperation, will reach for anything in order to dismiss challenges to their faith. After all, it is a matter of faith, is it not?

David wrote:

Wells more recently questions the seriousness of the Jesus quests :

The theological world is now in the midst of what is known as "The Third Quest for the Historical Jesus". J. P. Meier allows that "all too often the first and second quests were theological projects masquerading as historical projects" (art. cit., p. 463). We shall see whether their successor fares any better." ([G. A. Wells Replies to Criticisms of his Books on Jesus](#), 2000)

I would like to interact with Wells personally someday, but I think he's a bit old for such affairs and admittedly gets on the Internet infrequently.

I would love to be able to engage an ongoing discussion with Dr. Wells myself. But alas, I don't know how I would even try to do this. The most I've been able to accomplish are brief exchanges with David Kelley (an Objectivist philosopher) and Peter Thomas (narrator of 'Forensic Files'). I'm a big fan of both. To add G.A. Wells to this mix... well, that'd be like having sat down with the Holy Trinity for me.

David wrote:

J.P. Holding did have some interaction with him: Tektonics

Your link did not work, but regardless, I tend not to go to Tektonics unless I'm looking for a source of low entertainment. Turkel is in constant sneer mode and clearly resents anyone who does not share his views. I have come to expect from him only the most expedient of apologetic tactics.

I wrote:

Similarly with the events described in the gospels themselves: how can we know which year, according to the event sequences given in the gospels, when Jesus was crucified?

In response to this, David quoted Luke 3:1:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene

He David wrote:

Tiberius became emperor in August, AD 14 which places John's ministry at October, AD 27. Given the 3 Passover feasts described in John, this would place the crucifixion at AD 30. External sources corroborate that Pilate was Roman governor of Judea, Herod Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee, and Caiaphas was Jewish high priest. Specifically one of these sources would have no reason to acknowledge or accredit Christianity: the Jewish Mishnah and Talmuds. Five of Christ's disciples are named therein (see Klausner, *The Jesus of Nazareth*, pg. 18) Ok, nice but big deal right? Well, if multiple methods of computation bring us to the same date this strengthens the conclusion (and also cast doubt on collaborative effort among the authors). As you know source criticism plays a large role in this, which is why the question of Q-source and Markan priority are important.

Luke 3:1 is about probably the closest (and only) reference in the gospels themselves which can be used to date any of the events they speak of. But even this is not as exacting and definite as David would have it. In his essay [Jesus Variants](#), Peter Kirby points out the following:

From the data provided by Josephus, we estimate that Pilate was prefect of Judea from 26 to 36 CE. The canonical Gospels do tell us that the crucifixion of Jesus was under Pilate and that its day was in some relation to the Passover, which after much puzzling over calendrical systems has produced the dates of 30 and 33 as the most popular years for scholars to place the death of Jesus. (Meier's *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 1, is a good source for this scholarship, with a favored year of 30 CE.) But none of the canonical Gospels give us data that would allow us to fix the date at 33 CE precisely. The closest thing to an absolute reference for dating in the Gospels is in reference to the start of John the Baptist's ministry in "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1) which may be 27 or 28 or 29 CE depending on the method of calculation of the regnal years. Even if there were no data that contradicted a date of the death of Jesus as being 33 CE, there is no ancient source that says this in the first place, so it shouldn't be on the list.

So while the date in mind here "may be 27 or 28 or 29 CE depending on the method of calculation of the regnal years," Luke 3:1 does narrow the timeframe significantly. However, it hardly puts to rest any question on the possibility of legendary development. In the authentically Pauline letters, there is no reference to a crucifixion under Pilate (I Timothy, which offers the New Testament's sole reference to Pilate outside of the gospels and Acts, is pseudonymous). Wells' view is that Pilate came to be linked with Jesus' crucifixion as a natural consequence of two distinct streams of tradition - the view of Jesus in Paul's letters and the Galilean preacher of Q - being fused into one as we find in the latter part of the first century.

First recall the points Wells makes about the Jesus we read about in Paul's letters:

My view is that Paul knew next to nothing of the earthly life of Jesus, and did not have in mind any definite historical moment for his crucifixion. As we saw, holy Jews had been crucified alive in the first and second centuries BC, but traditions about these events, and about the persecuted Teacher of Righteousness, could well have reached Paul without reference to times and places, and he need not have regarded their occurrences as anything like as remote in time as they in fact were. Whenever it was that Jesus had lived obscurely and died, he had, for Paul, returned promptly after death to heaven; and the evidence for this exaltation, and indeed for his whole religious significance, was his recent appearances to Paul and to contemporaries of Paul which signaled that the final events which would end the world were imminent,,. Thus even if the death and resurrection were put at some indefinite time past, it remains quite intelligible that Christianity did not originate before the opening decades of the first century AD. Nor need any supposed relevance to Jesus of the Wisdom literature have been appreciated earlier. (*Can We Trust the New Testament?*, p. 34)

The earliest known tradition of Jesus has him crucified at some unspecified time in the past, treated by Paul as if it were not at all recent, without any indication of the circumstances or place of his crucifixion. The earthly life of Paul's Jesus is as hazy as a wispy vapor. But as interest in Jesus grew, it would be natural for enthusiasts to wonder about Jesus' earthly life.

Movement towards dating the earthly life of the Pauline Jesus in a relatively recent past is intelligible even without the influence on later Christians of Q: For Paul's Jesus came to Earth "when the time had fully come" (Gal. 4:4), and this soon developed in Pauline-type communities into the more specific statement that he had lived "at the end of the times" (Hebrews 9:26; 1 Peter 1:20). Even if this originally meant no more than that his first coming had inaugurated the final epoch (however long) of history (the epoch that would culminate in his return as judge), it would in time be taken to mean that he had lived in the recent past. And to post-Pauline and post-Q Christians of the late first century, familiar as they were with crucifixion as a Roman punishment, his death by crucifixion - already attested by Paul, but not given any historical context in his nor in other early

epistles - would have suggested death at Roman hands, and hence during the Roman occupation of Judea from A.D. 6. From such a premises, coupled with the Q datum of Jesus as a contemporary of John the Baptist, Pilate would naturally come to mind as his murderer, for he was particularly detested by the Jews, and is indeed the only one of the prefects who governed Judea between A.D. 6 and 41 to be discussed in any detail by the two principal Jewish writers of the first century, Philo and Josephus. (*The Jesus Myth*, p. 104)

If you place yourself in the Corinthian church of the day, before the gospels were written and circulated, going by the content of Paul's letters you would probably wonder who this Jesus was. Yes, there would be the post-resurrection appearances that were pointed to as vouchsafing salvation and eternal life. But there would also probably be this lingering sense of wonder about who Jesus was during his earthly life. What was known of this at the time? Paul's letters indicate that Jesus was crucified, but they do not indicate a time or place or specify the circumstances of this event. Also, Paul treats the earthly Jesus as "emptied" of his supernatural powers and status, living in humility and obscurity. The door was thus opened to the imagination, if to nothing else, and as oral traditions were developed and various views were amalgamated (a fact to which Paul's own letters testify), it's hard to see how any traditions which would have eventually prevailed could not involve at least some groping and invention. The Wisdom literature and Old Testament prophets and poetry supplied many of the details which would later be incorporated into the portraits of Jesus. But at this point, we're not dealing with historical accounts, but theological concoction.

David wrote:

Nevertheless, if multiple independent attestations can be sufficiently demonstrated, then the historicity of an event is very probable even to the most skeptical historians (Ehrman, Borg, etc...).

Even if we did have this in the case of the gospels, this would not seal the case for the historicity of the resurrection. Besides, what we have in the case of the gospels is a clear line of dependence, embellishment and development. Matthew and Luke were obviously using Mark's narrative as a model for their own (so they are not "independent sources"), and John's gospel is built on traditions which show at least some familiarity with the basic outline of that model (preaching ministry followed by passion narrative and post-resurrection appearances). Indeed, it is where the authors embellished their own versions of the narrative that variations in the story are most pronounced.

David points to Papias as "external attestation" of Mark, which he dates to 110 AD (some sources, such as [this one](#), dates Papias' writings to AD 130 or even later):

Mark indeed, since he was the interpreter of Peter, wrote accurately, but not in order, the things either said or done by the Lord as much as he remembered. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed Him, but afterwards, as I have said, [heard and followed] Peter, who fitted his discourses to the needs [of his hearers] but not as if making a narrative of the Lord's sayings; consequently, Mark, writing down some things just as he remembered, erred in nothing; for he was careful of one thing - not to omit anything of the things he heard or to falsify anything in them.

Christian apologist Richard Bauckham, acknowledges that the prevailing view among scholars is that Papias' statements here are "historically worthless" as evidence for the Christian view. Bauckham writes:

What Papias says here about the Gospel of Mark is the earliest explicit occurrence of the claim that Peter's teaching lies behind this Gospel. It was therefore subjected to close scrutiny and discussion during the first hundred years or more of modern Gospel scholarship. Some scholars up to the present time have continued to treat it very seriously as important evidence about the origins of the Gospel of Mark, but during the twentieth century it came to be widely regarded as historically worthless. Although the attribution of the Gospel to a certain Mark may be accurate, there is no reason, according to this widespread view, to suppose that this was the John Mark of the New Testament (Acts and Epistles), since this Latin name (*Marcus*) was in very common use, in Greek (*Markos*) as well as Latin. We know from Eusebius that Papias cited 1 Peter (Hist. Eccl. 3.39.17), almost certainly as evidence of the close association of Peter with the Mark known from the New Testament. ([Jesus and the Eyewitnesses](#), p. 203)

In spite of this widespread conclusion among the scholarly community, Bauckham proceeds to argue for the validity of Papias as a reliable witness. In his essay [Was Papias a Reliable Witness?](#) Paul Tobin interacts with Bauckham's case and concludes that, "Contrary to Bauckham, the consensus position is firmly in place: Papias' witness is 'historically worthless'."

David wrote:

As I have pointed out to Robert, if the early Christian community was pumping out lies left and right to build their case for Christ, why not put Peter at the pen on this document instead of Mark who was not an eyewitness? Especially at the time Papias was writing, when the apostolic pedestal found its high point.

It needs to be borne in mind that, certainly by the time of Papias (which is after the gospel narratives had in one form or another become part of Christianity), believers like Papias thought they were passing on tradition. I would not look to Papias as an inventor, but more of a popularizer. As for how the author of the gospel we call *Mark* came to be a person named Mark associated with Peter, Wells explains this as follows:

The ascription of titles, in so far as its basis can be inferred at all, seems to have been a haphazard business. Beare writes in this connection of 'second-century guesses' ([*The Earliest Records of Jesus*], p 13). Mk., for instance, acquired its title probably because 'my son Mark' is mentioned as a close associate of 'Peter the apostle' who poses as the author of I Peter (1:1 and 5:13). This epistle of the late first or early second century, influenced as it is by Pauline theology, introduces 'Mark' as a personage familiar from the Pauline letters (Coloss. 4:10) in order to create the authentic Pauline atmosphere. Nonetheless, it was probably this mention of Mark in a work ascribed to Peter that originated the tradition (preserved by Papias, AD 140) that Mk. was written by one Mark who took down the spoken recollections of Peter ([Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu*], p 8). This tradition was not finally discredited until the rise of form-criticism. At the beginning of this century orthodox commentators on Mk. still insisted that the gospel is a unitary composition, owing its unity to the author's dependence on the eye-witness Peter for all its information. The change in critical standpoint is at once obvious from comparison with Taylor's - also orthodox - commentary (first published in 1952), where stress is laid upon the great diversity of the traditions which Mark collected after they had already been used in the teaching and preaching of the Church. (*Did Jesus exist?*, p. 77)

Bauckham (a Christian apologist) confirms Wells' hypothesis when he writes:

Papias, it is suggested, wishing to give apostolic authority to a Gospel ascribed to an unknown author called Mark, used 1 Pet 5:13 to identify this Mark with Peter's close associate, thus creating the connection he asserts between the Gospel and Peter. ([Jesus and the Eyewitnesses, p. 204](#))

So if Papias was simply preserving what had come to him as a tradition, there is no need to paint him as a brazen inventor of would-be history. As for I Peter, I've already raised pertinent questions on the authorship of this letter in my blog [Did the Author of I Peter See the Risen Jesus of the Gospels?](#)

Surely more to come.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Legends](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:00 AM](#)

10 Comments:

[Robert_B](#) said...

David wrote:

As I have pointed out to Robert, if the early Christian community was pumping out lies left and right to build their case for Christ, why not put Peter at the pen on this document instead of Mark who was not an eyewitness? Especially at the time Papias was writing, when the apostolic pedestal found its high point.

I completely answered this in the prior thread. If David doesn't understand my explanation, then he just doesn't get it.

There were many competing Christian cults and many gospels about in the second century. But there was no central authority that could be regarded as "Christianity" per se. Any idea of an authoritative canon was far in the future after Irenaeus.

Papias' report of what Presbyter John (a likely con-man false prophet) said about the alleged documents, Mark and Matthew, is completely unreliable.

The notion you have that Peter was an eyewitness and Mark his student is viciously circular question begging.

[There was a Gospel attributed to Peter \(circa 70-160\), but its docetic character rendered it unpalatable to the Catholics.](#)

Hegesippus, one of the earliest chroniclers of the church, knew nothing of the canonical gospels. This is consistent with the late dating of the CG.

[August 27, 2008 1:17 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

David:

Jesus is a myth. Regarding the alleged pagan witness' to historicity of Jesus, interested parties may wish to read Jeffery J. Lowder's [Josh McDowell's "Evidence" for Jesus - Is It Reliable?](#)

The [Argument from Silence](#) is quite strong.

[Seneca](#) should have known about Jesus or Paul.

[History's Troubling Silence About Jesus](#) is deafening.

On Flavius Josephus, [Earl Doherty strongly and convincingly details why the ancient Jewish historian did not write anything about JC.](#)

To assume the alleged Christians tortured by [Pliny](#) were evidence of a historical Jesus is to beg the question. See [D.M. Murdock's article on Pliny, Tacitus and Suetonius.](#)

See [Richard Carrier](#) on Julius Africanus quotes Thallus.

If David thinks The Babylonian Talmud can rescue Christianities chestnuts, he should read "The Jesus the Jews Never Knew" by Frank Zindler. The most oft cited bit of Talmud used to trick people into believing Jesus was real is Sanh. 43a. It, however, is a known interpolation into the text made by scribes in response to Christian anti-Jewish Polemic. The passage in context is about Ben Stada's execution in Lydda not Jerusalem. Zindler p. 238-239

[Lucian](#) was NOT a contemporary or eye-witness. Lucian does NOT mention Jesus OR the cult this man who was crucified in Palestine started. No one contest that Christians practiced their religion. The question is was there a historical founder named Yeshua.

[Mara Bar-Serapion](#) is worthless as a witness to the historicity of Jesus.

There was no town or village of Nazareth in the first century. See [The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus by Rene Salm](#)

Jesus is almost the same as many other ancient pagan dying resurrecting savior gods. The spiritualists who made up the Jesus story had to sell something the credulous hordes would believe. All the elements of Jesus were in the air at the time. That is the expectations of the people for a demi-god savior demanded a character with the attributes of Jesus. See [Pagan Origins of the Christ Myth](#)

But more importantly, gods are impossible. [They really are impossible.](#) God cannot exist.

[August 27, 2008 2:24 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Robert_B:

Until you respond to what Drew has written over at DC I will not interact with you. I consider this cowardly, especially in light of the fact that you retitled your blog post and disabled comments.

[August 27, 2008 3:45 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson said: *I did not find this quote on p. 47 of Wells' Did Jesus exist? (I saw a full-page chart instead), nevertheless it reads like something he would write and describes his position. It may be that you have a different edition from mine? Or, you're paraphrasing Wells?*

I cited multiple sources spanning multiple pages, so this isn't a direct quote.

[August 27, 2008 3:45 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

The Wells quote about Tacitus shows me 3 things:

1. Apparently he thinks he can date the document to 120 AD without a shred of evidence.
2. The evidence he does marshal mainly relies on Elmer Merrill's essay written in 1925.
3. The instances of unsupported speculation outnumber the arguments from secondary source material

Not very convincing.

[August 27, 2008 3:59 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *Of course, we can dismiss Wells because he's not a professor of New Testament Greek if you like.*

I would do no such thing, but I will be more skeptical of his unsupported/uncited claims given his lack of formal education in the subject.

Contrary to your perception, a doctoral degree in Biblical theology, history, or languages requires intense study and academic critique by peers and professors....more than just a "certificate of completion."

[August 27, 2008 4:07 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson: *Meanwhile, referring to Wells' case as "a tall order" simply because he does not have, say, a Ph.D in New Testament Studies, ignores his heavy reliance on scholars who do*

Add up the number of scholars he cites who predate 1930 and you'll get my drift.

[August 27, 2008 4:09 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Besides, would it really make any difference if Wells did have a Ph.D in New Testament Studies? Would this suddenly bestow his arguments with a gleam that would capture your attention and make you say, "Hey, this guy's onto something!?" My suspicion is that, even if Wells had 10 doctorates in fields ranging from ancient history, New Testament studies, theology, patristic literature, etc., believers would still find ways to dismiss his verdicts, in spite of the artificial requirement to possess such certifications.

This coming from the guy who said Geisler can't be a professional philosopher because his religious views are "anti-philosophical"...still waiting on that one.

[August 27, 2008 4:10 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

1. Dawson said: *Luke 3:1 is about probably the closest (and only) reference in the gospels themselves which can be used to date any of the events they speak of.*

The very link you provided refutes your own claims, go read it again. Also might want to check out the response given by Metacrock, www.geocities.com/metacrock2000/Jesus_pages/refute_kirby.html
Isn't Peter Kirby the guy who sits around and monitors Wikipedia articles so his views remain intact...impressive. But that's the kind of espousal I've come to expect from atheist apologists ;) Oh wait didn't Kirby convert to a Catholic a year ago? (<http://debunkingchristianity.blogspot.com/2007/04/atheist-peter-kirby-is-now-catholic.html>)

2. Dawson said: *(I Timothy, which offers the New Testament's sole reference to Pilate outside of the gospels and Acts, is pseudonymous)*

Well since you simply asserted it, I can do the same (I Timothy which offers the New Testament's sole reference to Pilate outside of the gospels and Acts, is **not** pseudonymous).

3. Dawson said: *The earliest known tradition of Jesus has him crucified at some unspecified time in the past, treated by Paul as if it were not at all recent, without any indication of the circumstances or place of his crucifixion. The earthly life of Paul's Jesus is as hazy as a wispy vapor. But as interest in Jesus grew, it would be natural for enthusiasts to wonder about Jesus' earthly life.*

Wow I feel like we've been round these tracks before, umm perhaps the James, the brother of the Lord, or maybe all these references I provided about Jesus' earthly ministry in Paul. It's fun to make assertions and feel we've accomplished something, but as someone who loves the truth I am not attracted very much to a position that must defend itself in such a manner. Have you considered that this whole Wells legend argument was started for totally invalid reasons? I wrote a response to your original article and I assumed you were aware that G/T were not addressing the legend theory. Your immediate response was to talk about what "your position" was compatible with. I'm just saying, the whole reason we're even on this conversation is completely misdirected given the nature of the original post.

Dawson said: *If he bases this dating on what we read in the gospels, then claiming that I Cor. 15:3-8 is too early to be legend simply begs the question against the legend theory (which is what Geisler and Turek were seeking to dismiss in the section of their book that I quoted in my blog).*

Clear evidence of importing your legend theory into a strawman internal critique.

4. Dawson: *Even if we did have this in the case of the gospels, this would not seal the case for the historicity of the resurrection.*

Did I claim that it did? No

5. Dawson: *Matthew and Luke were obviously using Mark's narrative as a model for their own (so they are not "independent sources")*

Now you're just being stubborn. Remember **you** were the one that brought up the fact that the Q source is easy to construct and clearly shows a separate source than Mark.

6. "Further confirmation of the Petrine authority behind Mark was supplied in a series of acute linguistic studies by C.H. Turner, entitled 'Marcan Usage', in the *Journal of Theological Studies*...showing, among other things, how Mark's use of pronouns in narratives involving Peter seems time after time to reflect a reminiscence by that apostle in the first person. The reader can receive from such passages 'a vivid impression of the testimony that lies behind the Gospel: thus in 1:20, "we came into our house with James and John: and my wife's mother was ill in bed with a fever, and at once we tell him about her." (F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, pg 33)
In addition Turner lists the following passages in which Mark demonstrates this: Mk 1:21, 29; 5:1, 38; 6:53, 54; 8:22; 9:14, 30, 33; 10:32, 46; 11:1, 12, 15, 20, 27; 14:18, 22, 26, 32

[August 29, 2008 7:35 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Does anyone know why the heck blogger.com doesn't like certain kinds of links in these comments? It seems like they sometimes append blogger.com to the beginning of the link.

I am using the a href="http.." method, maybe there is new html I'm not aware of (I'm pretty old school when it comes to html).

[August 30, 2008 2:13 PM](#)

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