

Another Response to David, Part 5: Paul's Knowledge of Jesus

Since Paul is the earliest writer in the New Testament, a running constant throughout a *rational* examination of Christian origins is the question: What did Paul know of Jesus? Specifically, what did Paul know of the *earthly* Jesus, the Jesus before crucifixion. The gospels did not exist yet when Paul was missionizing his churches and writing his letters. The gospels were written well after this time, and a comparison of what Paul writes in his letters with what we read in the gospel narratives raises some fascinating questions. Scholars for over two centuries now have noted the profoundly different views of Jesus which, on the one hand, the early epistles, including but not limited to Paul's, and on the other the gospels give us. Wells summarizes the problem as follows:

If we now ask what can be learned from Paul of Jesus's pre-crucifixion life, the answer is: nothing except that he was descended from David (Rom. 1:3) and born of a woman under the Jewish law (Gal. 4:4). Paul never mentions Mary or Joseph (nor does any other NT epistle writer) and says nothing to suggest that the birth was from a virgin mother. For him, Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power" by dint of his resurrection (Rom. 1:4), not by a supernatural birth, nor by manifestations of power such as miracle-working or exorcisms during his lifetime. He never even suggests that Jesus had been active in Jerusalem and Galilee. Tom Wright, Dean of Lichfield, says again and again in his 1997 book that Paul preached "Jesus of Nazareth", whereas in fact Paul never mentions Nazareth and says nothing to link Jesus with the place. Within the NT, the title 'Jesus of Nazareth' is used only in Acts... The position is no better in respect to Paul's knowledge of Jesus's teaching. He never suggests that Jesus taught in parables, even though these are quite central to the synoptic teaching. He also never suggests that Jesus was involved in doctrinal conflicts with Pharisees. At no point in his letters where he is expounding the central content of his gospel does he cite or clearly allude to any saying of Jesus. No question was more central to Paul than whether it was necessary for Christians to keep the Jewish law, yet the controversies on the matter recorded in his letters, and even in Acts, show no knowledge of the various teachings on the law that are ascribed to Jesus in the gospels. In these, the parts of the law most prominent are the regulations about Sabbath and about food; and if Jesus's attitudes on these matters had been as lax as some gospel passages suggest, this would surely have surfaced in other documents where these issues are to the fore. According to Mk. 7:19, for instance, he declared all foods clean. Paul can have known nothing of this, for he records a furious quarrel with Peter as to whether it was permissible for Christian Jews and Christian gentiles to eat together (Gal. 2:11-16), and it took a thrice-repeated post-resurrection revelation even to half convince Peter to permissiveness on the matter (Acts 10:9-17). Again, at Gal. 4:10 Paul reproves Christian opponents on the ground that they observe special "days", and this must include Sabbath observance. But he does not support his case with any suggestion that Jesus had transgressed the Sabbath, had allowed his disciples to do the same, and had justified such action publicly in debate - all of which is alleged in the gospels. As to the all-important matter as to whether Christians need to be circumcised, Paul obviously knew nothing in Jesus's teaching or behaviour to which he could appeal, and has to resort to a quite desperate argument in order to controvert the clear doctrine of Genesis 17:10 ("every male among you shall be circumcised"). How arbitrary Paul's argument is has been well brought out by E.P. Sanders's summary of it ([Paul], pp. 55ff). (*The Jesus Myth*, pp. 58-59)

As we note these and other similar points of remarkable difference between the portrait of Jesus in the gospels and Paul's treatment of Jesus in his writings, the tell-tale signs of legend-building begin to emerge and make themselves noticeably apparent. But Christian literalists, anxious to protect their religious confession from the threat that such analysis poses for Christianity, busy themselves with the task of damage-control, hoping to discredit the message-bearers if they can't discredit the message itself.

In the present case, commenter David has listed what he apparently thinks are good indications in Paul's letters that Paul had knowledge of the Jesus we read about in the gospel narratives. I will review these and see whether they really do point to the Jesus of the gospel narratives, or if they are in fact primitive rudiments which later narrative-constructors adapted in their growing yarn of Jesus' pre-crucifixion life.

I wrote:

As for whether or not the gospel writers used Paul as a source, this is unclear. However, as I have shown, many of the teachings which Paul gives as his own or as inspired by his interpretation of 'the scriptures' are put into Jesus' mouth in the gospels. This suggests that later writers were using sources that were influenced by Paul, even if they did not mention or credit Paul.

David responded:

I haven't been shown any examples of this,

You have. Go back and check our exchanges. One of the Wells quotes that I gave lists several examples. There are plenty more, but the Wells quote is sufficient to show this.

David wrote:

but I have heard about lots of things Paul doesn't mention.

Indeed. Does Paul mention Bethlehem? Nazareth? The virgin birth? Son of a carpenter? Escape from the slaughter of the innocents? A baptism by John the Baptist? Miracle-working? Magic cures? A ministry in various towns throughout Judea and in Jerusalem? Conflict with the chief priests? Teaching in parables? The feeding of five thousand? The raising of Jairus' daughter? The raising of Lazarus? A trial before Pilate? A crucifixion outside Jerusalem? An empty tomb? Pentecost? Etc. Etc. Not only is Paul silent on these things, but all the early epistles are! These elements simply weren't part of the legend yet. As the story was retold, they began to be added into the mix, until the resulting product is what we have in the gospels (and many non-canonical writings) today.

David wrote:

What about some things he does tell us about Jesus?

Yes, let's look at them.

David wrote:

Jesus was born in human fashion, as a Jew, and had a ministry to the Jews. (Galatians 4:4)

Yes, Paul does say that Jesus was born. But where was he born? When was he born? Who were his parents? Paul gives us no indication of these things. Paul mentions that he had a mother, but nowhere suggests that he was born a virgin. This legendary element came later as some communities sought to assimilate motifs from rival religions into their own version of Christianity.

David wrote:

Jesus was referred to as "Son of God". (1 Cor. 1:9)

On this, Wells notes significantly:

Paul characteristically applies to [Jesus] titles such as Lord and Son of God - titles which already existed within Judaism and also in pagan religions (see [H. Braun, 'Der Sinn der NT Christology', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 54, pp 350-1) - although Jewish monotheistic influences prevents the earliest Christian writers from calling him God. (*Did Jesus exist?*, p. 18)

If this is true - that the title "Son of God" was already in use "within Judaism and also in pagan religions" - this is another motif which Christianity borrowed from predecessor religions and applied to Jesus. As such, it has theological, but not historical meaning: it does nothing to specify a historical setting to Paul's Jesus.

David wrote:

Jesus was a direct descendent of King David. (Romans 1:3)

David was highly venerated by the Jews, as the legends about him in the OT indicate. Also, since Paul was drawing on OT themes as the palate for his portrait of Jesus, linking him to David would hardly be surprising. Again Wells poignantly nails it:

There are many centuries between David and Paul, and Paul gives no indication in which of them Jesus' earthly life fell. (*Did Jesus exist?*, p. 18)

The reference to Jesus as coming from the seed of David opens the possible timeline for Paul's Jesus significantly.

David wrote:

Jesus prayed to God using the term 'abba'. (Galatians 4:6)

When does Paul have his Jesus do this, and where? How does Paul know? Is Paul making a historical reference, or is he making a theological point? The context of the Galatians passage suggests the latter rather than the former. This interpretation is only buttressed by its appearance in Mark, the earliest gospel:

Jesus in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:36) address God with the Aramaic word 'abba' (father). Mark supplies no witnesses who could have heard what was said, and also finds it necessary to put into Jesus' mouth the Greek translation of the word (making him say: 'Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee'). Nevertheless, Jeremias insists that the logion is genuine since in Jewish traditions God is never address simply as 'abba' without some additional qualifying phrase, such as is preserved in Matthew's 'our father who art in heaven' (['Kennzeichen der ipsisima vox Jesu', in *Synoptische Studien*, Festschrift für A. Wikenhauser], p 89). To this the adequate reply has been made ([Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu*], p 493) that Paul's references to an early Christian practice of 'Abba, Father' (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6) show that 'abba' followed by its Greek translation was a formula current in Hellenistic Christian circles, and that Mark has simply put it into Jesus' mouth. And a leading Jewish scholar (Vermes, [*Jesus the Jew*], pp 210-11) has given evidence that 'abba' was used in the prayer language of the Judaism of the day in precisely the manner in which Jeremias and other Christian scholars have declared to be 'unthinkable'. (*Did Jesus exist?*, p. 75)

So again, we have an early theological reference which was imported into the Christian tradition and later treated as a historical datum.

David wrote:

Jesus expressly forbid divorce. (1 Cor. 7:10)

Does Paul say when, or where, or indicate the circumstances of this delivery? How would Paul know this? That's right, Paul appeals to revelation as the means by which he learned his gospel. Later writers could easily take such references and put them into a portrait of an earthly Jesus purported by some to be historical. How hard would it be to do this?

David wrote:

Jesus taught that 'preachers' should be paid for their preaching. (1 Cor. 9:14)

Another feature that Paul got from the OT. He even quotes Deut. 25:4 in I Cor. 9:9. Paul is not giving evidence of familiarity with an earthly Jesus here; he gives no indication of a historical setting on earth where Jesus would have given such instruction, and attributes the teaching to "the Lord," for Paul, the risen Jesus, not the earthly Jesus. The later writers (i.e., of the gospels) take this reference, which has ecclesiastical significance for Paul, and give it the impression of historical significance by putting the teaching into Jesus' mouth (cf. Mt. 10:10; Lk. 10:7).

David wrote:

Jesus taught about the end-time. (1 Thess. 4:15)

Let's look at what I Thess. 4:15 states:

For this we say unto you by word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

Again, Paul is here appealing to "the Lord" (as opposed to Jesus), which signifies for him the risen savior. Nor Paul does indicate a historical context for the teaching he ascribes to "the Lord." By referring to "we" here (instead of "they" or some other third person reference), Paul indicates (as he does in other passages) his belief that Jesus' return was coming soon, probably even within his own expected lifetime. No such luck. But this did not prevent later writers from adapting the gloom and doom eschatology and putting it into Jesus' mouth.

David wrote:

Paul refers to Peter by the name Cephas (rock), which was the name Jesus gave to him. (1 Cor. 3:22)

Paul tells us that he had a very involved conflict with Peter, but he never tells us that Jesus gave Peter this name. This is not even hinted at in anything Paul says about Peter. In fact, Paul nowhere indicates that Peter was a traveling companion of Jesus on earth before the crucifixion. Later writers were probably perplexed by the use of

two names for Peter, and explained it by having the Jesus of their narratives give the name Cephas to Peter in an exchange which is nowhere given in Paul.

David wrote:

Jesus had a brother named James. (Galatians 1:19)

We've already beaten this horse to death. Paul never gives a brother to *Jesus* - that is, a biological sibling to the earthly, pre-crucifixion Jesus. Paul is clear in reference James as "the brother of *the Lord*," which title signifies the post-resurrection Jesus. James, it was seen, was referred to as one of the "pillars" of the church by Paul. It is most probable then that Paul is referring to James with a fraternity title, similar to the one he uses for an unspecified number of persons in I Cor. 9:5, where he states: "Have we no right to lead about a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" Here Paul is obviously referencing the upper echelon of the Christianity of his day. It would be hard to suppose that Paul is referring to a group of biological siblings of Jesus here. Instead, he's speaking of an inner circle group, who were obviously held in high regard. The assumption that Paul is referring to a biological relationship is generated by reading the gospel details into Paul's letters, when in fact Paul's letters in no way confirm this reading.

David wrote:

Jesus initiated the Lord's supper and referred to the bread and the cup. (1 Cor. 11:23-25)

As I asked before, when does Paul say this happened? Where? Under what circumstances? Who attended this event? Paul doesn't give any details. Later writers came along and supplied them. Paul gave the primitive rudiments, indicating no time, place or historical setting. In fact, I don't even find any indication that Paul is associating "the Lord's supper" with the Passover. It would be temptingly easy for later writers to take what Paul writes here and redress it in a narrative situation that seemed historical, but is essentially just a piece of fiction.

David wrote:

Jesus was betrayed on the night of the Lord's Supper. (1 Cor. 11:23-25)

As above.

David wrote:

Jesus' death was related to the Passover Celebration. (1 Cor. 5:7)

Look at what the passage does say:

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us

Is Paul saying that Jesus was crucified around the Passover holiday? I don't get that from this. This is Pauline symbolism, derived from his Jewish roots, and later writers took references like this and assembled them into their narrative. Again, it would be temptingly easy for them to do this.

David wrote:

The death of Jesus was at the hands of earthly rulers. (1 Cor. 2:8)

The passage says:

Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

It is not clear what Paul means here by "princes of this world" (the ESV translates this phrase as "rules of this age" and the ASV has it as "rulers of this world"). Doherty has some interesting thoughts on this:

Where, then, was Jesus crucified and by whom? Like the myths of the savior gods, this deed took place in the mythical world, the upper spirit realm of Platonic philosophy, where spiritual processes were seen to be located. It was the work of demon spirits. Paul says, in I Corinthians 2:8, that those who "crucified the Lord of glory" were "the rulers of this age." That phrase is not a reference to human authorities on earth, but to the demon spirits,

who were regarded as controlling the world in the present age of history and who would be overthrown with the arrival of the new apocalyptic age... This was the interpretation of 2:8 by ancient commentators like Marcion and Origen. Modern critical scholars have largely followed suit: Brandon, Barrett, Hering, Fredriksen. Paul Ellingworth, *Translator's Handbook for I Corinthians*, p. 46, says: "A majority of scholars think that supernatural powers are intended here." *The Ascension of Isaiah*, a Jewish-Christian document in the Pseudepigrapha, foretells the Son descending through the layers of heaven, hiding his identity from the angels and demons until he reaches the lower celestial sphere, where he is "crucified by the god of the world," meaning Satan (chapter 9). The crucifixion of Paul's Christ was a spiritual event. (*Challenging the Verdict*, pp. 250-251)

So "princes of this world" or "rulers of this age" may in fact not mean human agents, but supernatural agents of evil who have seized control of the world.

In any case, Paul seems to be excusing Jesus' executioners for their ignorance, and granting them a moral caliber that just needed better information. I've known a lot of Christians who accuse all human beings of being guilty of crucifying Jesus (even though those who are alive today weren't around 2000 years ago in the first place).

David wrote:

Jesus underwent abuse and humiliation. (Romans 15:3)

These are themes that are common throughout the Psalms and Isaiah, both of which very highly influenced Paul's views. Romans 15:3, the very passage you cite here, quotes Psalms 69:9, which is attributed by the OT to David! Moreover, when Paul refers to Jesus' abuse and humiliation, he refers to them only vaguely, and gives no historical setting, indicating no specifics of the occasion. Later writers (i.e., of the gospels) take this motif and elaborate on it in their passion scenes, which are variously embellished in the different versions.

David wrote:

Jewish authorities were involved with Jesus' death. (1 Thess. 2:14-16)

Doherty points out for us that many scholars are of the view that 1 Thess. 2:15-16 is an interpolation into an otherwise (for the most part) authentically Pauline letter. He writes:

What then are we to make of the passage in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, about the Jews "who killed the Lord Jesus"? Well, many scholars (e.g., Mack, Koester, Pearson, Meeks, Perkins, Brandon: see the [Bibliography](#) at end) have tended to make short work of it, dismissing it as an interpolation by some later editor or copyist. ([Who Crucified Jesus?](#))

Wells points out that RE Brown, in his *The Death of the Messiah* (p. 378-381), has summarized the reasons for this, and quotes Furnish (*Jesus According to Paul*, p. 70) as saying of this passage that "there are good reasons to think that it has come from a later hand" (in Wells' *The Jesus Legend*, p. 24).

David wrote:

Jesus died by crucifixion. (2 Cor. 13:4 et al)

Yes, Paul does affirm that Jesus died by crucifixion. I don't think anyone with any familiarity with Paul's writing would venture so much as to call this facet of his Jesus into question. It is certainly not a point of contention for me. But what's curious is that Paul does not allude to any of the accompanying details that we find in the gospel passion scenes. Paul nowhere gives any indications of the time or place of Jesus' crucifixion; for all that Paul gives us, it could have happened 100 years (or more) before Paul was running about growing his churches. According to the gospels, Jesus was crucified outside Jerusalem, but you would never learn this going by what Paul has to say. Yes, Paul tells us that Jesus was crucified, but leaves all the details open to a wide assortment of possible variables, and nothing in Paul necessitates the details we find in the gospel narratives, which were written well after Paul's time.

The Suffering Servant motif was already central to the prophets and the Wisdom literature, both of which figure largely in Paul's worldview. As we saw, Paul's Jesus hailed from a lineage of a royal Jewish household, the house of David. Any connection between Paul's view of Jesus and actual historical events was probably vastly different than one familiar only with the gospels might suppose. Wells gives some pertinent clues in the following passage:

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)

David wrote:

Jesus was physically buried. (1 Cor. 15:4)

Does Paul specify that Jesus' dead body was put into a *tomb*? No, he nowhere does this. Does Paul indicate *when* Jesus was buried? No, he does not. Does he indicate *where* Jesus was buried? No, he does not. Does he indicate the circumstances under which he was buried? No, he does not, he only indicates that Jesus died by crucifixion, but indicates nothing of the details of this occasion. Later writers took what is for Paul more of a theological dogma and cast it into a historical context, inventing all kinds of details (e.g., the earthquake, the rising of the saints, the tear in the veil, Joseph of Arimathaea, the packing of the body in spices, the guards at the tomb, the visitation of the women to the tomb, the angels at the tomb, etc.). All these are elements of great story-telling, for sure, but they're only stories, legends by any other name.

The conclusion here is unavoidable: none of the features and motifs which have been discussed here put Paul's Jesus in any specific time, location or situation. Each can be explained without appeal to the gospel narratives, and each could have easily been assimilated by later writers in concocting a narrative of Jesus' life. In fact, what David has isolated for us is some of the raw material that was central to the creation of Christian story-making, the stuff of legends which grew in scale and impressiveness as the yarn was reworked and refashioned to suit new theological needs and new social challenges.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Legends](#)

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

7 Comments:

[Robert_B](#) said...

Greetings Dawson, David and all. Please have a safe and enjoyable holiday. If you drink, do not drive.

Earl Doherty makes a [compelling case for interpolation regarding Gal. 4:4-7](#)

In an essay entitled [The Spuriousness of So-called Pauline Epistles Exemplified by the Epistle to the Galatians](#) by G. A. van den Bergh van Eysinga, a powerful argument is presented that the entirety of Galatians and the rest of the Paulian corpus are pseudepigraphical forgeries.

In this [reader feedback article Earl Doherty](#) elucidates further on the case that the author of Galatians meant a spiritual ontological coming into existence by "ginomai" of woman in Gal 4:4.

Doherty wrote: "if "born (gennao) of woman" is so common to refer to a human being, and Paul is referring to a human being, why does he not use the standard phrase? What would impel him to change the verb? Does this very change not imply that Paul does not intend it to have the same meaning? (Paul's own verb ginomai, by the way, is the one he uses in Romans 1:3 when declaring Jesus as "arising from the seed of David." If he meant "born of the seed of David" in the human sense, why did he—or the writer of this piece of liturgy before Paul, as many scholars view it—not simply use gennao?) I have suggested that the use of the broader ginomai would fit the more mythical context which Paul's Christ inhabits, which is not recent history."

See [for Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon entry for gignomai to come into being](#)

Liddell and Scott have "genomenon" as meaning *of things, to be produced...were the produce of... i.e. were worth...talents,*

But Liddell and Scott have "1. 11), of the father, to beget, engender, Aesch., Soph.; rarely of the mother, to bring forth, for [gennaô](#). This is the word used for born in Gal 4:23 "But he [who was] of the bondwoman was born after the flesh;..."

Doherty's question cannot be honestly dismissed. If the author or interpolator of Galatians 4:4-7 had intended to infer a reference to a human man instead of a spiritual god, why did he not use [gennaô](#) that only means a human birth instead of [ginomai](#) that means to be produced? The writers of the greek epistles were well educated and aware of the subtle distinctions between similar words. They meant what they wrote, but religious ax grinders with an apologetic agenda translated the texts to comport with their religious eisegesis.

[August 29, 2008 9:14 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

The English transliteration, ginomai, of the greek verb gamma-epsilon-nu-omicron-mu-epsilon-nu-omicron-nu is used at <http://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/NTpdf/gal4.pdf>

[August 29, 2008 9:20 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

1. Dawson: *Since Paul is the earliest writer in the New Testament, a running constant throughout a rational examination of Christian origins is the question: What did Paul know of Jesus? Specifically, what did Paul know of the earthly Jesus, the Jesus before crucifixion. The gospels did not exist yet when Paul was missionizing his churches and writing his letters. The gospels were written well after this time, and a comparison of what Paul writes in his letters with what we read in the gospel narratives raises some fascinating questions. Scholars for over two centuries now have noted the profoundly different views of Jesus which, on the one hand, the early epistles, including but not limited to Paul's, and on the other the gospels give us.*

I have no problem with asking about what Paul knew of Jesus. My problem is when we make assertions about his knowledge based solely on lack of evidence. I think arguments from silence can be used in tandem with other evidence to support a conclusion, and indeed this is what you have attempted to do. Your argument for the Gospels being legendary expansion can be roughly generalized to these premises:

P1. The testimony of Paul lacks much of the earthly accounts in the Gospels

P2. The Gospels show internal signs of legendary development

P3. Explanatory power can be derived from pagan mythology to explain some of Paul's ideas about Christ (the Lord's Supper for example)

I have responded to those roughly in this fashion:

R1.1 Paul's intended purpose for the letters is incongruent with the assumption that he "would have" included all known information about Jesus' earthly ministry in addressing his original audience

R1.2 While focusing on the gaps is certainly valid, we must not forget the long list of things Paul **does** tell us about Jesus

R2.1 Thematic differentiation, telescoping, and selective inclusion do not constitute embellishment but merely demonstrates an authorial intent that has its audience in mind. Each Gospel had a clearly different intended audience, and thus includes different relevant content respectively.

R3.1 Explanatory power cannot be derived from pagan mythology because evidence for such has not been provided. Also, "well after this time" is assuming a particular dating for the Gospels - of which arguments are absent - while I have presented several for my assumed dating.

2. Wells said : *No question was more central to Paul than whether it was necessary for Christians to keep the Jewish law, yet the controversies on the matter recorded in his letters, and even in Acts, show no knowledge of the various teachings on the law that are ascribed to Jesus in the gospels*

I simply point out 1 Corinthians 9:10 again. Paul painstakingly refers to Jesus as kurios and the Father as theos. If you wish to argue that this isn't a "title" (since kurios is the name of YHWH elsewhere in the LXX, I contend that the distinction is quite moot) for Jesus please go ahead.

3. Dawson : *But Christian literalists, anxious to protect their religious confession from the threat that such analysis poses for Christianity, busy themselves with the task of damage-control, hoping to discredit the message-bearers if they can't discredit the message itself.*

Now its my turn. "But hyper-skeptic Christian bashers, anxious to protect their religious denials from the threat that such analysis proves for the legend theory, busy themselves with the task of damage-control, hoping to discredit the message-bearers if they can't discredit the message itself." Actually I think you have demonstrated this quite well. :P

4. Dawson said: *if they are in fact primitive rudiments which later narrative-constructors adapted in their growing yarn of Jesus' pre-crucifixion life.*

Well if they are primitive rudiments not based in fact, I do hope you will humor me with an alternate explanation for where they came from (pagan mythology etc.) and provide some concrete evidence with dates.

5. Dawson: *As for whether or not the gospel writers used Paul as a source, this is unclear. However, as I have shown, many of the teachings which Paul gives as his own or as inspired by his interpretation of 'the scriptures' are put into Jesus' mouth in the gospels. This suggests that later writers were using sources that were influenced by Paul, even if they did not mention or credit Paul.*

Yes if we simply assert that they were "put into Jesus' mouth" instead of the more rhetorically neutral "alleged sayings of Jesus" we can really make the point sound much more convincing. But alas, why must be use such tactics if the argument itself stands as firm as we claim.

6. Dawson: *Yes, Paul does say that Jesus was born. But where was he born? When was he born? Who were his parents? Paul gives us no indication of these things. Paul mentions that he had a mother, but nowhere suggests that he was born a virgin. This legendary element came later as some communities sought to assimilate motifs from rival religions into their own version of Christianity.*

Your response is unrelated to what my statement intended to accomplish, which was merely that Paul did say some things about Jesus. Actually you continue to do this for the rest of the post, but I'll only mention it once.

7. Dawson:

On this, Wells notes significantly:

Paul characteristically applies to [Jesus] titles such as Lord and Son of God - titles which already existed within Judaism and also in pagan religions (see [H. Braun, 'Der Sinn der NT Christology', Zeitschrift fur Theologie und Kirche, 54, pp 350-1) - although Jewish monotheistic influences prevents the earliest Christian writers from calling him God. (Did Jesus exist?, p. 18)

If this is true - that the title "Son of God" was already in use "within Judaism and also in pagan religions" - this is another motif which Christianity borrowed from predecessor religions and applied to Jesus. As such, it has theological, but not historical meaning: it does nothing to specify a historical setting to Paul's Jesus.

First the usage in Judaism is vastly different from the usage in pagan religions. I'm assuming he's referring to the passage in Daniel. This phrase in Hebrew is completely different than the pagan concept of gods mating with women to have superhuman offspring. To compare the two is to demonstrate a deficient and surface level understanding of both traditions.

8. David wrote:

Jesus was a direct descendent of King David. (Romans 1:3)

Dawson: David was highly venerated by the Jews, as the legends about him in the OT indicate. Also, since Paul was drawing on OT themes as the palate for his portrait of Jesus, linking him to David would hardly be surprising. Again Wells poignantly nails it:

There are many centuries between David and Paul, and Paul gives no indication in which of them Jesus' earthly life fell. (Did Jesus exist?, p. 18)

The reference to Jesus as coming from the seed of David opens the possible timeline for Paul's Jesus significantly.

So you're asserting your conclusions on the data and saying Paul just made it up. All I was saying is Paul mentions it... .hmm. Seems like the rhetoric just snowballs lately in these posts. Wells poignantly argues from silence, which is hardly unanticipated given his atheist agenda. Sorry I'm having too much fun, I'll stop. :P

9. David wrote:

Jesus prayed to God using the term 'abba'. (Galatians 4:6)

Dawson :*When does Paul have his Jesus do this, and where? How does Paul know? Is Paul making a historical reference, or is he making a theological point? The context of the Galatians passage suggests the latter rather than the former. This interpretation is only buttressed by its appearance in Mark, the earliest gospel:*

The term "abba" is the Aramaic equivalent of "daddy." The fact that Jesus would use such a term to address YHWH, the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is absolutely ludicrous in a Jewish context. What evidence does Vermes present? Don't cite sources to buttress your point if you merely intend to use their assertions and not their arguments. Given I may have committed this error as well, but this was particularly noticeable. Anyway, this kind of thing is what got him crucified in the first place. If the Jews were comfortable with it, then they sure reacted funny (well I guess I'm assuming they really reacted and you would merely contend the reaction was staged to prove a point by the author). If indeed this isn't historical (the usage is multiply attested mind you), then some explanation is required. You focus on Mark, but there are numerous references elsewhere such as Matt 7:21; 10:32-33; 11:27; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10,14; 20:23; 25:34; 26:39, 42,53; Luke 10:22; 22:29; 24:49; plus 22 other occurrences in John.

As Darrell Bock points out: "Source levels here include unique Matthean material, unique Lukan material, and some Matthean-Lukan texts (=Q). The expression is multiple attested." (*Jesus According to Scripture*, pg 592)

So it looks like this tradition has a much more probable explanation if grounded in historical fact than legend, unless an adequate explanation for the legend being dispersed across all possible source material can be conjured up, err I mean postulated. :P

10. David wrote:

Jesus expressly forbid divorce. (1 Cor. 7:10)

Dawson *Does Paul say when, or where, or indicate the circumstances of this delivery? How would Paul know this? That's right, Paul appeals to revelation as the means by which he learned his gospel. Later writers could easily take such references and put them into a portrait of an earthly Jesus purported by some to be historical. How hard would it be to do this?*

This is beginning to become quite tiresome. You are assuming that Paul needs to buttress his doctrinal and theological points with historical context...totally unsupported assertion and the counterfactual has been argued quite convincingly by yours truly. In addition, as you've agreed, Paul's audience was already open to the supernatural so why would he write to them as if they were some skeptic? If you wish for Paul to have such intentions in mind, I will insist that you argue for such an unusual exegetical framework.

11. David wrote:

Jesus taught that 'preachers' should be paid for their preaching. (1 Cor. 9:14)

Dawson: *Another feature that Paul got from the OT. He even quotes Deut. 25:4 in 1 Cor. 9:9. Paul is not giving evidence of familiarity with an earthly Jesus here; he gives no indication of a historical setting on earth where Jesus would have given such instruction, and attributes the teaching to "the Lord," for Paul, the risen Jesus, not the earthly Jesus. The later writers (i.e., of the gospels) take this reference, which has ecclesiastical significance for Paul, and give it the impression of historical significance by putting the teaching into Jesus' mouth (cf. Mt. 10:10; Lk. 10:7).*

Oh I get it so Jesus can't be Jewish and use the Old Testament but Paul clearly does. But you haven't shown where in the OT this teaching (1 Cor 9:14) can be derived from????????? The later writers (i.e., of the gospels) take this reference, which has ecclesiastical significance for Paul, and provide a more in-depth historical context that illuminate Jesus' teachings on the subject (cf. Mt. 10:10; Lk. 10:7).

12. Dawson: *Again, Paul is here appealing to "the Lord" (as opposed to Jesus), which signifies for him the risen savior. Nor Paul does indicate a historical context for the teaching he ascribes to "the Lord." By referring to "we" here (instead of "they" or some other third person reference), Paul indicates (as he does in other passages) his belief that Jesus' return was coming soon, probably even within his own expected lifetime. No such luck. But this did not prevent later writers from adapting the gloom and doom eschatology and putting it into Jesus' mouth.*

Well you've not failed to consistently assert that kurios refers to a risen Jesus as opposed to an earthly Jesus. How exactly does one make such a distinction (hint: pointing out that Paul didn't tell us doesn't count).

1 Cor 12:3 "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit."

And don't forget about the most important verse of all!

Romans 10: 9 "because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised

him from the dead, you will be saved.”

13. David wrote:

Paul refers to Peter by the name Cephas (rock), which was the name Jesus gave to him. (1 Cor. 3:22)

Dawson: Paul tells us that he had a very involved conflict with Peter, but he never tells us that Jesus gave Peter this name. This is not even hinted at in anything Paul says about Peter. In fact, Paul nowhere indicates that Peter was a traveling companion of Jesus on earth before the crucifixion. Later writers were probably perplexed by the use of two names for Peter, and explained it by having the Jesus of their narratives give the name Cephas to Peter in an exchange which is nowhere given in Paul.

Interesting speculation, but my only question is how would one conclude that Peter/Cephas were the same person going from source material alone with no historical backbone?

14. David wrote:

Jesus had a brother named James. (Galations 1:19)

Dawson: We've already beaten this horse to death. Paul never gives a brother to Jesus - that is, a biological sibling to the earthly, pre-crucifixion Jesus. Paul is clear in reference James as "the brother of the Lord," which title signifies the post-resurrection Jesus. James, it was seen, was referred to as one of the "pillars" of the church by Paul. It is most probable then that Paul is referring to James with a fraternity title, similar to the one he uses for an unspecified number of persons in I Cor. 9:5, where he states: "Have we no right to lead about a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" Here Paul is obviously referencing the upper echelon of the Christianity of his day. It would be hard to suppose that Paul is referring to a group of biological siblings of Jesus here. Instead, he's speaking of an inner circle group, who were obviously held in high regard. The assumption that Paul is referring to a biological relationship is generated by reading the gospel details into Paul's letters, when in fact Paul's letters in no way confirm this reading.

What we've seen is you have no argument for your interpretation. Not one of your points has passed the bar. All the citations you quoted were unsupported assertions or admitted speculation, and reference to "extant texts" which you have failed to provide information about. No I'd say the horse has been beaten to death alright but you seem to be confused about who's holding the stick. All you said about the external sources is basically "well they were just propounding the legend from the Gospels, so we can't trust them either."

I have already told you that 1 Cor 9:5 is also addressing the same group of literal brothers mentioned in the Gospel. I guess they misunderstood that one too, and figured it would make for good fiction. You said "It would be hard to suppose that Paul is referring to a group of biological siblings of Jesus here." To which I simply respond that, "It would be hard to suppose that Paul is referring to a group of highly regarded inner circle members (of which Cephas is excluded). The assumption that Paul is not referring to a biological relationship is generated ad-hoc in support of the legend theory's interpretation of Paul's letters, when in fact Paul's letters in no way confirm this reading nor does any external source throughout the first 1700+ years of Christianity."

15. David wrote:

Jesus initiated the Lord's supper and referred to the bread and the cup. (1 Cor. 11:23-25)

Dawson: As I asked before, when does Paul say this happened? Where? Under what circumstances? Who attended this event? Paul doesn't give any details. Later writers came along and supplied them. Paul gave the primitive rudiments, indicating no time, place or historical setting. In fact, I don't even find any indication that Paul is associating "the Lord's supper" with the Passover. It would be temptingly easy for later writers to take what Paul writes here and redress it in a narrative situation that seemed historical, but is essentially just a piece of fiction.

Ignoring the usual tiresome questioning ploys, and your repetitive bald assertions about later writers supplying details (I think you include this in every response to the bullet list, as if reasserting you point provides further argumentation)....uhh oh wait that's all there is. :P

16. David wrote:

Jesus' death was related to the Passover Celebration. (1 Cor. 5:7)

Dawson: Is Paul saying that Jesus was crucified around the Passover holiday? I don't get that from this. This is Pauline symbolism, derived from his Jewish roots, and later writers took references like this and assembled them into their narrative. Again, it would be temptingly easy for them to do this.

See Mk 14:12 and Lu 22:7

17. David wrote:

The death of Jesus was at the hands of earthly rulers. (1 Cor. 2:8)

Dawson: *It is not clear what Paul means here by "princes of this world" (the ESV translates this phrase as "rules of this age" and the ASV has it as "rulers of this world"). Doherty has some interesting thoughts on this:*

It is clear that what Paul means here is both the Jewish rulers and the Roman governor. Doherty supports his absurd, err I mean interesting, Gnostic interpretation by pointing to early Gnostic Christians who consistently blend the two systems together...surprise surprise! If you wish to hide behind what a "majority of scholars think" you better be consistent with that.

If anyone would have been aware of Greek philosophical concepts it would be John, and he clearly doesn't go along with this. Guess he figured he should go along with the earlier accounts and not add his own spin on things, or maybe he didn't know about Paul's source material?

18. David wrote:

Jesus underwent abuse and humiliation. (Romans 15:3)

Dawson: *These are themes that are common throughout the Psalms and Isaiah, both of which very highly influenced Paul's views. Romans 15:3, the very passage you cite here, quotes Psalms 69:9, which is attributed by the OT to David! Moreover, when Paul refers to Jesus' abuse and humiliation, he refers to them only vaguely, and gives no historical setting, indicating no specifics of the occasion. Later writers (i.e., of the gospels) take this motif and elaborate on it in their passion scenes, which are variously embellished in the different versions.*

Wow I'm seeing a trend here Dawson...1)point out "missing" stuff 2)assert the legend theory

Are you using a template or something this is crazy?! How would you like it if every single one of my responses started with "since the Gospels are all historical factual accounts...?"

19. David wrote:

Jewish authorities were involved with Jesus' death. (1 Thess. 2:14-16)

Dawson: *Doherty points out for us that many scholars are of the view that 1 Thess. 2:15-16 is an interpolation into an otherwise (for the most part) authentically Pauline letter. He writes: [insert lots of unsupported assertions and citations to other scholars who may have argued something*

You haven't demonstrated it as an interpolation so really your response shows nothing other than Doherty and others trying to make sense of their Platonic eisegesis of Paul.

Let me just point out again that the whole reason we are debating the legend theory is because you used it to strawman G/T's argument. If at any point you wish to admit this or demonstrate that I'm incorrect, that would be a good reason to call it a day.

[August 30, 2008 4:30 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Robert, David et al.,

Thanks for your contributions to my blog and please pardon my absence. I've had a rough last two weeks... First I had family in town (which did not go well...), then I had a whirlwind week of business travel, then my daughter got sick, then I got sick... Well, I'm happy to report we're all back on the mend and getting better.

I've taken a little time here and there to review David's comments and will be responding hopefully later this week.

As for David's refusal to interact with Robert's several excellent comments, I noted this in my review of the comments and am disappointed by this. David had mentioned someone named Drew if I recall and referred to some earlier controversy. I don't think that took place here at my blog and do not see the relevance. But I want Robert to know that he's welcome to post his thoughts here just as David is.

Regards,
Dawson

[September 15, 2008 5:24 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson,

Good to hear you're well again.

There is no real controversy, but you can read about what transpired with Drew at www.beginningwisdom.blogspot.com (I will probably start blogging here soon as well).

Robert refuses to respond to Drew's critique of his article, and reposted it with a new title and disabled comments on his own blog.

Robert's article:

<http://debunkingchristianity.blogspot.com/2008/07/how-atheist-justifies-use-of-logic.html>

Drew's Response:

<http://beginningwisdom.blogspot.com/2008/07/how-atheist-doesnt-quite-use-logic.html>

There was no intended malice. I was merely making a point to Robert about how one feels when they are being ignored. I was not implying that he was not "welcome to post his thoughts here."

I hope along with noting this insignificant detail, you have also finally reconstructed the G/T argument and shown it invalid on the grounds of circularity. I will be disappointed if you don't. :)

Cheers,
David

[September 15, 2008 7:31 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hello David,

Thank you for the explanation for your behavior. I did not suspect you of malice, it just seemed rather puzzling to me that you would refuse to interact with Robert's comments because he hasn't responded to someone else (a friend of yours perhaps?) on another forum in fact. I checked the link to Robert's article which you provided, and it appears that the comments are open there. So I'm not sure what your complaint is here. Also, I'm not sure why you think Robert is obligated to respond to Drew. If you don't think he is, then what's the problem?

Anyway, in case there were any confusion, I thought it was necessary to clarify that Robert is welcome to post his comments here, though he may already recognize this.

Regards,
Dawson

[September 15, 2008 4:51 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

The post with comments disabled is on Robert's personal blog.

Drew was my roommate but now he's married. I don't think Robert is obligated in any objective sense; however, the article in question basically tries to present a deductive argument for naturalism. I think if one attempts this kind of feat in order to disprove other worldviews, then one should respond to an honest critic in order to clarify the argument. Just my opinion though and honestly I'm not really refusing to interact with Robert it was just to make a point.

Robert, if you're still around feel free to launch your comments in my direction. :)

[September 15, 2008 5:02 PM](#)

[Post a Comment](#)