

Tuesday, July 29, 2008

In Response to David on I Corinthians 15:3-8

I've read through [David's response](#) to [my recent post on I Cor. 15:3-8](#), but am not quite sure what exactly he was trying to argue against my overall point. For instance, while my post interacted with statements made by Geisler and Turek in their book *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be An Atheist*, David, admitting that he has not read the book in question, immediately brought up Gary Habermas' views:

David:

This is Habermas' timeline for the events leading up to the Gospels:

David points out that Habermas dates Jesus' crucifixion to "30 AD." But on what basis, if not the stories found in the NT gospels, can Habermas do this? 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](#)). As I pointed out, there's nothing in I Cor. or any of Paul's other letters (that is, in letters that are authentically Pauline) which puts a time or place to Jesus' resurrection. If the stories about Jesus' resurrection that we find in the gospels are legends built on sources like Paul's "testimony," that testimony cannot be validated ("too early to be legend") by appealing to a dating scheme suggested only by the gospels and later documents influenced by them (like Acts). That would be like using a later Harry Potter book to "validate" one earlier in the series.

In my blog I wrote:

Let's consider some of the statements made here in regard to this highly contested passage.

David responds:

Right off the bat he's out of sync with scholarship. With regards to authorship, 1 Corinthians is almost universally acknowledged to be authentic Pauline material. Even Bart Ehrman affirms it as one of the "undisputed Pauline epistles" (in addition to Romans, Galatians, Philemon, 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philipians).

It's not clear why David thinks he needed to correct me on this point, as I did not even raise the question of the authorship of I Corinthians. My points in response to Geisler and Turek are compatible with the supposition that I Corinthians was penned by Paul himself.

David continued:

Michael Martin in his Case Against Christianity concludes that Paul is the only eyewitness testimony we have to Christ's post-resurrection appearances.

David does not quote Martin, but I suppose that he may be referring to the following passage from Martin's *The Case Against Christianity*:

According to the Gospel story, there were no eyewitnesses to Jesus' actual resurrection. Belief in it must be inferred. What are these inferences based on? First, there are the appearances of the resurrected Jesus. Second, there is the empty tomb. Given these two alleged facts one infers that the miraculous occurred sometime before the discovery of the empty tomb and the postresurrection appearances of Jesus. According to the Gospels, there were indeed eyewitnesses to the resurrected Jesus. *However, we have only one contemporary eyewitness account of a postresurrection appearance of Jesus, namely Paul's.* In all the other cases we have at best second- or thirdhand reports of what eyewitnesses claimed to see that were recorded several decades after the Crucifixion. (P. 81, emphasis added)

Here Martin does refer to Paul as a "contemporary eyewitness" to a *post-resurrection* Jesus. But this is unhelpful in challenging my point. In fact, I already spoke to the matter of Paul claiming to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus when I wrote:

Nothing in the letter itself suggests that the resurrection that Paul speaks of happened any time recently (for all that Paul gives us, his Jesus could have been crucified a century or more earlier, and not necessarily in Palestine for that matter), and only by interpreting Paul's account by reading elements from the gospel stories into it can it be made into a reference to a *recent* event.

That Paul claims to have seen or experienced the resurrected Jesus is not very impressive. Christians whom I have personally known in my own lifetime have claimed this. As Wells points out, "People who claim to see a ghost do not necessarily suppose it to be the wraith of someone recently deceased." (*The Jesus Myth*, p. 125.)

David continued:

Of course [Martin] doesn't believe it but he and a majority of historians/philosophers can agree that Paul was sincere in his belief about the Damascus experience. Doesn't make it true just because Paul believed he saw Jesus.

That's fine, so far as it goes (though we do not learn of a conversion for Paul on the Damascus road, as we read in the book of Acts, from Paul's own hand).

I wrote:

The authors tell us that the First Epistle to the Corinthian church "contains the earliest and most authenticated testimony of the Resurrection itself...I can only ask at this point, "authenticated" by what? And what specifically do the authors think is "authenticated" in this passage?

David responded:

Likely if Habermas is the one who said "authenticated" then he's implying that this material is written by Paul, can be dated pretty accurately and a vast majority of NT scholars agree on the data.

Well, for one thing, it wasn't Habermas I was interacting with, it was Geisler and Turek, which my post makes clear. And the understanding I would get from Geisler and Turek - if I didn't know any better - is that what Paul states in I Cor. 15:3-8 (the very passage they quoted) is sufficiently corroborated to secure its claims, which is simply not the case (where else, for instance, do we read of the resurrected Jesus appearing

to 500 or so people at once?). Paul doesn't even name 5% of the mass of persons he claims to have experienced an appearance of Jesus. Indeed, so far as authentication or corroboration, I Cor. 15:3-8 couldn't be weaker.

Also, as I explain in [a follow-up comment](#) to an article by Robert Price regarding the question of whether or not I Cor. 15:3-11 is an interpolation, I specifically stated that I am allowing that the passage in question was written by Paul.

Moreover, the unexplained claim here that I Corinthians "can be dated pretty accurately" is something I'd like to see elaborated on. As for the claim that "a vast majority of NT scholars agree on the data," this is vague and implies probably much greater uniformity on the matter than really exists. Regardless, I have to stand with my own judgment on the matter, not with what an anonymous crowd is said to affirm. If taken broadly enough, even I could sign onto "agreement on the data." For instance, I agree that I Corinthians is part of the orthodox NT. But I suspect David has something more specific in mind, which he will need to clarify and also back up.

I wrote:

In fact, if the gist of I Cor. 15:3-8 is a creedal formula passed down to him from other believers, it is at best hearsay that he inserts into his letter.

David:

The deal with these early creeds is pretty interesting. There are certain places where Paul's syntax and word choice go completely out of character (scribe wrote his dictations down in some letters) and become pithy, rhythmic cadences. Scholars claim these to be echoes of what the earliest Christian preaching sounded like.

Do *all* scholars say this? Or, just some? The word "scholars" is sometimes thrown around with such abandon that it can be used to suggest every authority in the universe agrees with one's particular position. I would recommend more care in its use.

Also, the existence of uncharacteristically Pauline expressions can also lend itself to the view, very ably argued by Price, that the passage is a later interpolation. But as I point out in my post, if Paul is reciting a creed, then he's essentially giving us hearsay. Apologists seem to want to have it both ways, but that only saddles them with unintended and problematic consequences. The "earliest testimony" suddenly becomes something that Paul is passing on uncritically, failing to offer any substantiation for what it states.

David:

The gospels weren't written down right away.

No, they weren't. In fact, it was decades after the alleged event they seek to portray. Where Paul's talk of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection supply no time or place to it, decades later we have some authors who do, plenty of time for the Jesus legend to develop and enjoy all kinds of embellishments.

David:

There was a period of oral proclamation during which these creedal statements developed to proclaim Jesus' resurrection. (Philippians 2 contains another one of these pertaining to the early belief in Christ's deity by the way).

Yes, "developed" is a key point here.

David:

So what we have in 1 Cor 15:3 'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received : ' After the colon we get the creedal statement.... , 4 ;that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...' The language here is the exact same as the Pharisees used when passing on their traditions to one another...so we have even more reason to think Paul's about to tell us something from oral tradition.

As I have indicated, my point is compatible with the supposition that portions of I Cor. 15:3-8 are either a creedal formulation that Paul is reciting (which in my view essentially relegates it to hearsay) or a post-Pauline interpolation, as Price holds. However, I could see someone taking the point that David gives here as evidence that Paul, a former Pharisee himself, fashioned his own creedal formulation after a style with which he would have been intimately familiar.

David:

So when did Paul hear this material? The consensus among critics is that Paul received this material around 35 AD. His conversion is dated at roughly 32 AD, with 3 years passing before he visits the apostles (Galatians 1:18), from Peter and James. Scholars on both sides have no quarrels with that.

This is really neither here nor there as it pertains to the point I raise in my blog article. It's granted that Paul had to convert to Christianity at some point in time; whether it was AD 32 or earlier or later, is really not relevant. The question is: Is there anything in Paul's letters which suggest that the Jesus he speaks of was *recently* resurrected? Recent *appearances* of a post-resurrection Jesus do not signify a recent resurrection event. Again, Christians whom I have personally known have claimed to have seen the post-resurrected Jesus.

David:

Before giving it to Paul, where did Peter and James get it from?

Again, as I point out in my blog, Paul himself tells us that he did not get his gospel from human sources:

Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to understand that the gospel message I preach is not based on mere human reasoning. I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ. (Gal. 1:11-12)

So to suppose that Paul got what he's passing on in I Cor. 15:3-8 from Peter and James tends to go contrary to what Paul himself tells us.

David then pointed to Ludemann, the Jesus Seminar, and other sources for dating the creed which Paul is supposedly reciting in the passage before us. Again, this is irrelevant to my point.

David:

There was never a time when Jesus was preached as anything less than raised from the dead.

Maybe, but maybe not. The Q layer (the "sayings" source) found in both Matthew and Luke, would seem to be evidence against this claim. "Q certainly does not regard [Jesus'] death as redemptive and does not explicitly mention his resurrection" (Wells, op cit., p. 103). Regardless, even if we accept the claim that "there was never a time when Jesus was preached as anything less than raised from the dead," this would not compel an argument for the veracity of Christian claims. There was never a time when *The Wizard of Oz* did not include a wicked witch of the East. Does this at all mean that *The Wizard of Oz* is anything more than fantasy?

David:

All arguments that a resurrection legend popped up later are squashed if scholarship is correct here.

That's quite a sweeping claim. But getting down to the specifics, "later" than what?

David:

What this argument doesn't do (when presented in isolation) is show the resurrection to be historically true.

Agreed. Whether or not Paul was quoting a creed, whether that creed dates to the early 30s AD, whether there was never a time when Christians preached anything less than a Jesus who was resurrected, none of this compels the conclusion that Jesus really rose from the dead, or that other religious claims of Christianity have any truth to them.

David:

Normally I chide my non-Christian friends for not reading Christian scholarship and vice versa, but in Dawson's case I wish he would check out ANY scholars on the matter. He apparently thinks he is capable of overturning the work of men who have been developing their approaches for decades...and how many sources did he cite? I counted 1 but maybe I missed a few.

I've read my share of "Christian scholars" on a whole variety of topics, but I must admit that I do not find many to be particularly impressive. Geisler and Turek's book is admittedly aimed more at a popular audience, but it's fair game so far as I see it, and it's typical in regard to how blatantly many Christians beg the question when it comes to how they argue against the legend theory. Indeed, the citations which David has posted in his response do little if anything to speak to the issue that I have raised. Most of it consists of namedropping with no actual quotations anyway. Regardless, how many sources do I need to cite in order to qualify for whatever merit badge David thinks I should have in order to speak on these things?

* * *

In response to eheffa, [David wrote](#):

1 Cor 9:1 has to be explained on other grounds than the story in Acts if one contends that the Damascus experience was not part of Paul's belief. Haven't seen any good theories as to what else he could have meant there.

Here Paul identifies his credentials as an apostle - his claim to have "seen Jesus". There really isn't anything here that's troublesome for my position. Many Christians even today claim to have "seen Jesus," but they make this claim even though they did not see a physical person. I'm reminded of Canon Michael Cole's statement about experiencing Jesus. He recounts, "There was one particular experience when I was very, very conscious of the risen Christ, actually standing with me in the church I was serving, asking whether we would make him Lord of that church... I wouldn't say anything about that for 24 hours, it was too personal, too close." (See my [Carr vs. Cole](#).) Paul does not distinguish his experience of Jesus from this kind of experience that Cole describes and claims to have had.

David:

We also see Paul's letters were written for specific purposes and often were more theological than narrational. It's an interesting point, but I'm not sure why I should expect Paul to narrate the gospel.

Why do preachers today constantly cite details from the gospel narratives to make theological points in their sermons? Because they consider the narratives authoritative as vehicles of Jesus' character and teaching. Why, for instance, do preachers constantly incorporate in their sermons and preachings the parables that we find inserted into Jesus' mouth in the gospels? Because they consider them authoritative. As for Paul, I would expect in his letters at least some details about Jesus' life on earth if Paul knew anything about it, because he was determined to "preach Christ crucified" (I Cor. 1:23) and "not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). When was "Christ crucified"? Where was "Christ crucified"? Under what circumstances was "Christ crucified"? Paul's treatment of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is so open-ended and unspecific that for all we know he could be referring to an event that took place five centuries earlier or in some astral plane.

In fact, Paul does give moral teaching that is later found in the gospels attributed to Jesus, but when Paul gives that teaching, he does not cite the gospel Jesus. Observe Wells on this point:

Paul gives it as his own view (Rom. 13:8-10) that the law can be summed up in the one Old Testament injunction "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." According to Lk. 10:25-8, Jesus himself taught that love of neighbor (together with love of God) ensures salvation; but one could never gather from Paul that Jesus had expressed himself on the matter. In 1 Thess. 4:9 it is not Jesus but God who is said to have taught Christians to love one another. And in the injunction not to repay evil for evil but always to do good to all is given in the same epistle (5:15) without any suggestion that Jesus had taught it (as according to the gospels he did in the Sermon on the Mount). In his letter to Christians at Rome Paul says "bless those that persecute you" (12:14 and 17) and "judge not" (14:13). Surely in such instances he might reasonably be expected to have invoked the authority of Jesus, had he known that Jesus had taught the very same doctrines. (The former doctrine is ascribed to him at Mt. 5:44 and Lk. 6:28, and the latter at Mt. 7:1 and Lk. 6:37.) In the same epistle he urges Christians to "pay taxes" (13:6), but does not suggest that Jesus had given such a ruling (Mk. 12:17). It is much more likely that certain precepts concerning forgiveness and civil obedience were originally were originally urged independently of Jesus, and only later put into his mouth and thereby stamped with supreme authority, than that he gave such rulings and was not credited with having done so by Paul and... by other early Christian writers. (*The Historical Evidence for Jesus*, p. 33.)

There are many things for apologists to wrestle with here, but using the gospels to back-date the earlier epistolary layers is simply too problematic to take seriously.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Legends](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [8:00 PM](#)

70 Comments:

[Steven Carr](#) said...

Joseph Smith claimed to have seen the Golden Plates within weeks of having seen the Golden Plates.

Clearly, these claims by Joseph Smith are too early to be a legend.

The one thing missing from 1 Corinthians 15 and any other creed in Paul's letters is any claim that a corpse rose and walked the earth.

All Jesus does is 'appear'

We know that Christians claim Jesus 'appears' on nachos, tortillas and slices of toast.

Claiming Jesus 'appeared' means absolutely nothing.

There are no details.

It is all as vague as Paul's claim to have visited Heaven.

What we can know is that early Christians were never told of corpses rising and eating fish.

Because the Christian converts that Paul was writing to were scoffing at the whole idea of their god choosing to raise corpses.

Converts do not scoff at what converted them...

[July 29, 2008 10:37 PM](#)

[Steven Carr](#) said...

'Its an interesting point, but I'm not sure why I should expect Paul to narrate the gospel.'

Paul was writing to Christians who scoffed at resurrection.

Why doesn't Paul rub their noses in the fact that the very person they worshipped had 'proved' the resurrection in Matthew 24?

Paul struggles to explain what a resurrected body is like, unaware that the person he worshipped had already described a resurrection body as having flesh and bone.

I guess Paul and the other Christians wanted Jesus to butt-out of their discussions, as what he had said was a waste of time, not worth discussing :-)

[July 29, 2008 10:41 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

All very good points, Steven. Thanks for contributing them.

The appearances of Jesus on tortillas and such demonstrate how loose and flexible 'appearance' claims can be. Indeed, when a believer claims that she sees Jesus' face in the burnt marks on a tortilla, how does she know that it's Jesus' face and not, say, Mohammed's, Siddh?rtha's or Rasputin's face that she's seeing? We have no photographs of Jesus to compare the burnt marks on the tortilla to, so why automatically suppose it's Jesus' face she's seeing? It just may very well be that the person 'appeared to' Jesusly wants to be 'appeared to' Jesusly.

For Paul, who claims to have had a personal encounter with the risen Jesus, but who gives no details about what he saw or the circumstances under which he supposedly saw what he saw, the situation is similarly loose and ambiguous, able to be bent by today's apologists into whatever shape they want, when in fact it reads much more like the sighting of a ghost than what we find described in the later gospel stories.

Regards,
Dawson

[July 30, 2008 5:48 AM](#)

[Buzz Stephens](#) said...

Speaking of The Wizard Oz, this Sunday, over at Yahoo's The Judy Garland Experience, we will be having a big Oz blowout featuring all sorts of odd and rare WOZ based audio treats.

If you are a fan of Judy's or Oz it will definitely be worth your while to check it out.

Here is the link:

<http://movies.groups.yahoo.com/group/thejudygarlandexperience/>

[July 30, 2008 7:56 AM](#)

[Vinny](#) said...

Habermas' "minimal facts" approach is all about misdirection. He claims that he's not depending on the gospels. He's depending on facts that a majority of scholars accept. He's hoping that no one will notice that all those scholars are basing their conclusions on the gospels.

I compare it to a fuzzy picture on the sports page that seems to show an umpire blowing a call at the plate and costing the home team the game. 10,000 fans might look at that picture and agree that their team was robbed, but the evidence is still just that one fuzzy picture. Habermas would have you believe that the picture somehow becomes less fuzzy as more and more people look at it.

[July 30, 2008 12:48 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Busy day today, hope my brain is still working...

My purpose as stated was to clarify Habermas' position and also comment on a few things in your article. I probably should have been a little clearer about when I was addressing your argument and when I was presenting Habermas'....apologies on that point.

First I don't agree with your historical method. You require all the evidence for judging Paul to be internal and later external attestation is not admissible. I will attempt to contact Dr. Habermas and see what he thinks of your "you can't use the gospels to date Paul" criteria.

It's not clear why David thinks he needed to correct me on this point, as I did not even raise the question of the authorship of I Corinthians. My points in response to Geisler and Turek are compatible with the supposition that I Corinthians was penned by Paul himself.

So what exactly is contested about the passage then? What evidence have you given for doubting the creed's dating besides your "you can't use the gospels to date Paul" criteria? Who is contesting that besides you?

*In answer to this, they say that Paul "probably received it from Peter and James when he visited them in Jerusalem three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18)."
But Paul himself does not tell us this*

Galatians 2:2 I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

Here Martin does refer to Paul as a "contemporary eyewitness" to a post-resurrection Jesus. But this is unhelpful in challenging my point.

That quote comes straight from the Habermas material. There is a nice 30 minute lecture on the Veritas website (<http://www.veritas.org/>) that outlines his method pretty well.

Moreover, the unexplained claim here that I Corinthians "can be dated pretty accurately" is something I'd like to see elaborated on.

Paul makes it clear in chapter 16 that he wrote this letter from Ephesus during his third missionary journey (53-57 AD)....Is that sufficient?

As for the claim that "a vast majority of NT scholars agree on the data," this is vague and implies probably much greater uniformity on the matter than really exists. That will be another question for Dr. Habermas because he's the one who made this claim, and he's the one who specializes in studying the trends of NT scholars.

But I suspect David has something more specific in mind, which he will need to clarify and also back up.

Not sure what I have in mind, what are you thinking I have in mind? ?

In fact, if the gist of I Cor. 15:3-8 is a creedal formula passed down to him from other believers, it is at best hearsay that he inserts into his letter... Do all scholars say this? Or, just some?.

This assertion about hearsay calls into question your understanding of Jewish oral traditions. How can you possibly relegate the oral traditions of the Pharisees to hearsay?

If you know a scholar who doesn't think that passage is creedal I'd be glad to read him. I have already cited several specific scholars (both liberal and conservative) who assign particular dating to the passage...which sort of refutes your claim that I was being sloppy there. I first mentioned "scholars claim" and then provided examples. How is that misuse?

The "earliest testimony" suddenly becomes something that Paul is passing on uncritically, failing to offer any substantiation for what it states.

Galatians 1:18 may look in English like a social visit, but when he says he went to get acquainted with Peter there is much more implied. The Greek word is istorhsai, which comes from the same root as we derive our word "history" from. Doesn't mean history though. Two major word studies by non-conservatives concluded that istorhsai means an investigative reporter who uses primary source reporting. It was used in the ancient world for a geographer who was mapping out a river, not based on people's directions but going in person to map out the territory. This is not my argument, this is Habermas.

Yes, "developed" is a key point here.

If you are asserting some theory of corruption then ok, I'd like to hear more about how you're premising this argument

The question is: Is there anything in Paul's letters which suggest that the Jesus he speaks of was recently resurrected?

So Paul calls the others apostles why? Does Paul need to explicitly say that James and Peter both saw Christ in the flesh during their lifetime before you accept it?

Regardless, even if we accept the claim that "there was never a time when Jesus was preached as anything less than raised from the dead," this would not compel an argument for the veracity of Christian claims. There was never a time when The Wizard of Oz did not include a wicked witch of the East. Does this at all mean that The Wizard of Oz is anything more than fantasy?

Dawson, drop the rhetoric for goodness sake. The point is that legends don't pop out of thin air...they take time to develop. As NT Wright has pointed out in *The Resurrection of the Son of God*; there were at least 7 distinct mutations in Judaism that occurred after the resurrection appearances. You have an empty tomb, apparitions, and the definite early belief (argued by Habermas to be 30-33 AD) in the resurrection accompanied with the mutations described by Wright. The question is what theory best explains all those elements with the most explanatory power and scope?

That's quite a sweeping claim. But getting down to the specifics, "later" than what?

It certainly varies, but I was referring to the arguments that Jesus' resurrection was dreamed up sometime in the 2nd century by stealing mythology from Hellenistic mystery cults. Tracing the belief back earlier would refute that, correct?

Regardless, how many sources do I need to cite in order to qualify for whatever merit badge David thinks I should have in order to speak on these things?

4 books, 3 scholarly journals, and 2 internet sources (no Wikipedia) ?

There are many things for apologists to wrestle with here, but using the gospels to back-date the earlier epistolary layers is simply too problematic to take seriously.

Common sense historical criticism wins the day I suppose. What's your main problem with dating the Gospels anyway?

[July 30, 2008 11:38 PM](#)

[Steven Carr](#) said...

DAVID

How can you possibly relegate the oral traditions of the Pharisees to hearsay?

CARR

What?

The Pharisees claimed their understanding of the law was based on oral tradition handed down for centuries from Moses?

Christians routinely trash this 'oral tradition of the Pharisees'.

Nor were the disciples ever alleged to have been Pharisees.

[July 31, 2008 1:15 AM](#)

[Steven Carr](#) said...

What empty tomb is there in Paul?

Why does Paul flat-out say Jesus became a spirit?

Why do Christian converts scoff at the whole idea of their alleged god choosing to raise corpses?

Why is Paul unable to find one single piece eyewitness testimony as to what a resurrected body is like, despite the Gospel stories that the person he worshipped had described and demonstrated that a resurrected body was made of flesh and bone?

Christians would laugh themselves stupid if they read early Mormon testimony where Joseph Smith and othe witnesses are very vague about these Golden Plates which 'appeared' to them, and then 30 years later people produce detailed accounts of what these alleged Golden Plates were like, how they were touched and examined by the 'witnesses'.

Why should we not also laugh at Christian accounts where early witnesses waffle on about 'perishability putting on imperishability' when allegedly there were stories of the resurrected Jesus eating fish?

[July 31, 2008 1:21 AM](#)

[Steven Carr](#) said...

Is David basically admitting that Paul never claims to have met any of these 500, or all of the twelve, and he is simply reporting what Peter and James (not one of the twelve) claimed happened?

[July 31, 2008 4:17 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "First I don't agree with your historical method. You require all the evidence for judging Paul to be internal and later external attestation is not admissible."

If by "external attestation" you mean using the gospels to fill in the blanks in Paul's writings, yes, I would object to this. The portrait that Paul gives of Jesus in his letters is vastly different from the portraits we find in the gospel narratives. I see nothing wrong with reading Paul for what Paul has to say and comparing it to what we find in the gospel narratives.

David: "I will attempt to contact Dr. Habermas and see what he thinks of your "you can't use the gospels to date Paul" criteria."

While you're at it, ask him (unless you already know) how he justifies dating the *resurrection* (not the *belief* in the resurrection or the *appearances* of the resurrected Jesus, but the *resurrection* itself) to AD 30. Can he do this without relying on the gospels? Can he get such a date from things which Paul states about the resurrection in his letters - in letters that are authentically Paul's?

I wrote: "It's not clear why David thinks he needed to correct me on this point, as I did not even raise the question of the authorship of I Corinthians. My points in response to Geisler and Turek are compatible with the supposition that I Corinthians was penned by Paul himself."

David: "So what exactly is contested about the passage then?"

The meaning and significance of the passage are obviously hotly contested. Does it contain a creed or not? Is any portion of it a later interpolation? What does Paul mean when he says the post-resurrection Jesus "appeared" to people? What did they "see" (if anything)? Etc. When I referred to I Cor. 15:3-8 as "contested," I did not mean that I dispute the authorship of I Corinthians proper.

David: "What evidence have you given for doubting the creed's dating besides your "you can't use the gospels to date Paul" criteria? Who is contesting that besides you?"

If I Cor. 15:3-8 (Price extends it to v. 11 as a later insertion) is a creed that Paul has imported, I'm not disputing its dating. That's not the issue I've raised, David. The date of the passage is really irrelevant to my point, so dropping the names of a whole bunch of scholars who call it a creed and assign it to some date range is neither here nor there. At best it is of little interest, at worst it's a valueless digression. The issue is with the date of the *resurrection* itself. Paul claims that the post-resurrection Jesus appeared to people who are still alive in his day. Believers typically assume, influenced by the gospels and inclined to read the gospel stories into what Paul says, that this means Jesus was recently resurrected. But Paul does not say or even imply this by what he *does* say. So I'm asking how one can justify dating the *resurrection* of Jesus (the event of Jesus rising from the dead) to AD 30 or any other date, without contaminating what Paul says by reading him through gospel-colored goggles.

I wrote: "The "earliest testimony" suddenly becomes something that Paul is passing on uncritically, failing to offer any substantiation for what it states."

David: "Galatians 1:18 may look in English like a social visit, but when he says he went to get acquainted with Peter there is much more implied."

Paul mentions in passing his visit to Jerusalem and a fifteen day stay with Peter (not quite the same as years and years of Sunday school). Here believers take license to read into this everything they read in the gospels. And this is supposed to serve as substantiation for the assumption that I Cor. 15:3-8 is referring to a recent *resurrection*? That's quite a stretch. It's simply not there.

David: "If you are asserting some theory of corruption then ok, I'd like to hear more about how you're premising this argument."

"Corruption" is not the word I had in mind when I agreed with your use of the word "developed." Is the final rendition of *The Wizard of Oz* a "corruption" of some earlier draft?

Here's a taste from Wells' *Can We Trust the New Testament?*:

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 (cf. above, pp. 7f). 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. (p. 34)

I asked: "The question is: Is there anything in Paul's letters which suggest that the Jesus he speaks of was recently resurrected?"

David: "So Paul calls the others apostles why? Does Paul need to explicitly say that James and Peter both saw Christ in the flesh during their lifetime before you accept it?"

Again, David, you appear not to have grasped the issue I've raised. Claiming to have had an encounter with the risen Jesus is one thing, but when Jesus is thought to have risen from the dead is an entirely different matter - the matter that concerns my criticism of Geilser and Turek and others who assume, by reading Paul through their knowledge of what the gospels say, that Paul was speaking of a *recently resurrected* Jesus. The gospels give a an approximate time and place for Jesus' crucifixion, death and resurrection. Where does Paul do this?

Regards,
Dawson

[July 31, 2008 6:04 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Wells gives a nice summary of some relevant points in the following passage:

In these early days of Christianity, leaders of Christian groups based their authority on the fact that they had been vouchsafed [by] such appearances. Thus Paul, on this basis, claims that he is as much an apostle as the other recipients (I Cor. 9:1). All these resurrection appearances were recent, in that they were experienced (albeit perhaps over a period of years) by persons who were Paul's contemporaries... But Paul does not say that the crucifixion and resurrection were also recent. He simply lists the appearances, beginning with that to Peter and ending with that to himself. This latter, even in the orthodox view, took place some time, perhaps even years, after Jesus' death. In sum, Paul's belief that Jesus' ghost had repeatedly been seen in recent times does not tell us anything about Paul's idea of the date of Jesus' death. It is our familiarity with the gospels - later documents representing later developments in the tradition - that leads us to assume that Paul supposed the appearances to have followed rapidly after the crucifixion and resurrection, and to have been vouchsafed to men who had been companions of a historical Jesus... If (as I believe) Paul did not regard the crucifixion and resurrection as recent events, then the significance of the appearances would have been to convince him that the general resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment of both living and dead, were to occur very soon. Christ was risen: that, for Paul, meant that all would rise. (In this sense, Christ raised from the dead is "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep," I Cor. 15:20.) But now that he was not only risen, but had also begun to appear to men, the final events which would bring the world to an end could not be long delayed. (*The Historical Evidence For Jesus*, p. 43)

And again:

People who claim to see a ghost do not necessarily suppose it to be the wraith of someone recently deceased. (*The Jesus Myth*, p. 125.)

Regards,
Dawson

[July 31, 2008 6:45 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Steven Carr: Paul was a Pharisee;

non sequitur my friend.

Groan....Where does Paul say Jesus became a Spirit?

[July 31, 2008 7:33 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson,

Well I'm pissed now because I lost internet and when I previewed my response it disappeared. Anyhow, a shorter response:

1. I think we can both agree that your argument and Habermas' are not head-on. I have no quarrels if Geisler is misusing him in that book.
2. If you want to dispute resurrection dating, we would need to talk Gospel dating. Have you already posted on that elsewhere?
3. You still haven't given an account for why Paul calls the others "apostles" and constantly has to defend his own apostolic status. If all you need to do is say you've seen the risen Lord to be an apostle, why should Paul worry? If he thought the other apostles were eyewitnesses that supports recent resurrection. You are claiming there is no evidence for a recent resurrection in Paul; I'm saying that is evidence. Clear?
4. Doherty, Price, and Wells...what a skeptic's dream team! (referring to the the 3 scholars presented during the interaction here and over at DC).

Though not in reference to Paul, this reflects my opinion of Wells:

The one published review of his *Who Was Jesus?: A Critique of the New Testament Record*, in part, says:

"Scholars cited in support of his thesis acknowledge problems in the New Testament but not the necessity or soundness of his conclusions. Wells's previous books have not significantly affected New Testament studies, and it is doubtful that this one will"

-Craig W. Beard, Harding Univ. Lib., Searcy, Ark. writing in Library Journal

[July 31, 2008 8:31 AM](#)

[Vinny](#) said...

You still haven't given an account for why Paul calls the others "apostles" and constantly has to defend his own apostolic status. If all you need to do is say you've seen the risen Lord to be an apostle, why should Paul worry? If he thought the other apostles were eyewitnesses that supports recent resurrection. You are claiming there is no evidence for a recent resurrection in Paul; I'm saying that is evidence. Clear?

It is an interesting argument, but I think there are other explanations for Paul's concerns.

The authority of the founding apostles within the sect was already well established before Paul came along. This priority in time could have been enough to drive Paul's concern about establishing his own apostolic authority even if the first apostles' encounter with Christ was limited to visions like Paul's.

[July 31, 2008 9:07 AM](#)

[Steven Carr](#) said...

Paul says Jesus became a spirit in 1 Corinthians 15.

Paul described his former Pharasaic beliefs as 'garbage'.

Why was Paul , as a Pharisee used to handing on tradition :-), quite unable to tell the converts in Christianity what the person they had all worshipped had allegedly said about the nature of a resurrected body?

Why does Paul preach the destruction of the body?

'For we know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands.'

[July 31, 2008 9:28 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Steven Carr....

Jesus raised as a spirit...that would be Jehovah's Witness theology. Read Paul's argument again and pay attention to the phrase "put on." (v.53)

What is the "new building"? (hint: glorification)

To be consistent with your narrow semantic domain for "spirit", how would you interpret 1 Corinthians 2:14-15?

1 Timothy 2:5 is Jesus a man? Can you hold your claim about Jesus being a spirit and be consistent with this reading?

[July 31, 2008 11:06 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "Well I'm pissed now because I lost internet and when I previewed my response it disappeared."

Sounds like a case of "paragraph lost." I know it's very frustrating, and it's happened to me before. Maybe it was the devil trying to hinder your efforts? I tend to compose my comments in MS Word, and save often.

David: "1. I think we can both agree that your argument and Habermas' are not head-on."

If you mean that Habermas' arguments for dating Paul's letters or the post-resurrection appearances Paul mentions in I Cor. 15, I would agree: regardless of when Paul wrote his letters or when we date the post-resurrection appearances he speaks of (even Paul does not indicate when they happened), this would be irrelevant to the timeframe Paul may have had in mind for the event of the crucifixion and resurrection themselves.

David: "I have no quarrels if Geisler is misusing him in that book."

Whether Geisler and Turek are misusing Habermas, is really between Geisler and Turek on the one hand, and Habermas on the other. It's not germane to my points.

David: "2. If you want to dispute resurrection dating, we would need to talk Gospel dating."

If that's the case, then you seem to be conceding that one can only way one can derive a date (even an approximate one) for the resurrection is by reference to the gospels.

David: "Have you already posted on that elsewhere?"

No, not specifically, nor do I see any need to. I would just defer to Wells on the matter. Besides, I don't think it ultimately matters to my point. If Luke was written before 70 AD, for instance, it still would not tell us when Paul thought Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Nor would it put the legend case to rest.

David: "3. You still haven't given an account for why Paul calls the others "apostles" and constantly has to defend his own apostolic status. If all you need to do is say you've seen the risen Lord to be an apostle, why should Paul worry? If he thought the other apostles were eyewitnesses that supports recent resurrection. You are claiming there is no evidence for a recent resurrection in Paul; I'm saying that is evidence. Clear?"

Remember that before his conversion, Paul (as Saul) was a persecutor of Christians. He was an outsider and a late-comer, and also believed he was appointed to be an apostle to the gentiles, whereas the established leadership in Jerusalem were the real kingpins of the new religion at the time and ministered primarily to the circumcized as the intended heirs of the promise. Paul was not one of the original head honchos of Christianity, but he wanted converts to regard his pronouncements as authoritative as the central council's. In I Cor. 9:1, Paul cites seeing the risen Jesus as the necessary credentials for apostleship. This says nothing about when the resurrection was believed to have taken place. Acknowledging that other individuals had seen the resurrected Jesus, as Paul does in I Cor. 15 (indeed, he nowhere distinguishes Peter's and James' experience from his own), does not indicate that Paul thought the event of the resurrection was *recent*. On Paul's view, I don't see why any of the anonymous 500 or so brethren that he mentions in I Cor. 15 could not also claim to be apostles. Maybe some of them did and are simply lost in history. Maybe Paul was unique in supposing this qualified one for apostleship. Many explanations are possible here. But none of this necessitates a recent resurrection for Jesus.

David: "4. Doherty, Price, and Wells...what a skeptic's dream team! (referring to the the 3 scholars presented during the interaction here and over at DC). Though not in reference to Paul, this reflects my opinion of Wells: The one published review of his *Who Was Jesus?: A Critique of the New Testament Record*, in part, says: "Scholars cited in support of his thesis acknowledge problems in the New Testament but not the necessity or soundness of his conclusions. Wells's previous books have not significantly affected New Testament studies, and it is doubtful that this one will" -Craig W. Beard, Harding Univ. Lib., Searcy, Ark. writing in *Library Journal*"

Yes, I realize that apologists will pen their denigrating opinions of Wells, Doherty, Price, etc. That's to be expected. A one- or two-line opinion, however, is not an interaction with the observations and arguments which these critics have raised. I've read a number of attempts to interact with Wells' theses, for instance, and while some display an ingenious knack for invention (many apologists have apparently missed their calling as science fiction authors), they tend to strain the limits of the imagination. Wells interacts with many of his critics in his several books, either directly or indirectly responding to their counterarguments, so many have already been answered. When apologists retreat to supernaturalism (e.g., "the witness of the Spirit" and things along these lines), which happens more often than apologists are probably willing to admit, it's clear they're on the ropes at that point.

What's interesting, David, is how, in your initial reaction to my original blog on the matter, you complained about the paucity of citations to scholarly sources in my little ol' blog article in which I quote Geisler and Turek at length and, as was my purpose, interact with their statements. Recall that you had stated: "in Dawson's case I wish he would check out ANY scholars on the matter. He apparently thinks he is capable of overturning the work of men who have been developing their approaches for decades...and how many sources did he cite?" One reason why I find it hard to take this kind of objection from Christians seriously is because in the long run it probably won't matter a hill of beans how many scholars I consult in support of my conclusions. For here we have the example of G.A. Wells, whose books are chock full of quotes from and references to the scholarly literature, and he is dismissed with the wave of his hand as if he were simply a pesky fly. So in spite of your complaint, it probably wouldn't matter if I had used 5 or 10 or 50 different sources to inform my points - I'm sure you're inventive enough to find a way to dismiss them anyway.

Now, I have quoted several passages written by Wells. Instead of simply dismissing the points Wells raises in those passages that I've quoted, why not engage them directly?

Regards,
Dawson

[July 31, 2008 11:22 AM](#)

[Steven Carr](#) said...

David speaks in riddles, which are a waste of time me trying to guess the purpose of.

After denying that Paul said Jesus became a spirit, David just ignores what he claimed never existed.

Such is the attitude of a closed mind.

Claim somethings never exist, and then simply blank them out when they are shown to exist.

Why did converts to Christianity simply scoff at the idea that their alleged god would choose to raise corpses?

Why does Paul simply not rub their noses in what their Lord and Saviour allegedly claimed about the resurrection?

Why does Paul have to resort to such impenetrable jargon as 'this perishable must put on imperishability', when people allegedly had really good feels of the risen Jesus, who had not put anything on top of anything else (according to the Gospels)?

The answer is obvious.

Nobody had a clue what a resurrected body was like, neither Christian converts, nor Paul, who cannot find one detail of anybody's eyewitness testimony to say what a resurrected being was like.

All Paul knew was that the 'earthly tent' was destroyed, not saved, and that we left the destroyed earthly tent to move into a heavenly building.

But you can hit David over the head all day with a Bible saying Jesus became a spirit, and the present body will be destroyed, and it will not register with him.

He cannot read the Bible with open eyes, because he has been taught to read only what he wants to read.

Even if a million Paul's came to earth to say they believed Jesus became a spirit, David would deny that early Christians believed Jesus became a spirit.

[July 31, 2008 11:36 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

After denying that Paul said Jesus became a spirit, David just ignores what he claimed never existed.

No clue what you're talking about.

No riddles, just asked you to apply your exegesis consistently across Pauline material...pretty standard unless you're just trying to poke holes in your English translation.

You are assuming a definition of spirit... My reading supports both that Jesus is now spirit and body (incorruptible)...fully man. That means YOU have to defend your reading of the text!

you can hit David over the head all day...

Yup you can toss claims at me all day and until you support them I'll likely ignore you. I refuse to return your tactics of rhetoric and name calling...

[July 31, 2008 12:07 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[July 31, 2008 11:58 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

1. To me it seems there is something quirky about the claims you are making, correct me if I'm wrong here:

Some of your arguments lean on this premise:

The gospel accounts are not admissible as historical evidence when looking at Paul.

Then later you say:

Paul doesn't mention some events that are in the gospel accounts, so Paul didn't have the whole gospel. (Actually I'm a little unsure of what your conclusion is about the missing gospel elements in Paul).

Aren't you "clearly relying on the content of later writings - the gospels" to establish what Paul didn't know? Can we read the gospels into Paul or not?

2. If Luke was written before 70 AD, for instance, it still would not tell us when Paul thought Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Nor would it put the legend case to rest. I agree. Just to clarify do you reject both the dating of the gospels and the events described in the gospels?

3. Over and over again you point to things Paul didn't say in his letters and turn that into special pleading about what is possible instead of what is probable...that sounds more like what Christian apologists do (according to a friend of mine). :)

4. You said that Paul is deficient in his knowledge of material found in the gospel accounts (which you agree were written later). Ignoring my first objection:

What is your interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 where Paul tells us he "received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you: that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of Me." After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped saying, "This cup is the new testament in My blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Also where do you stand on the issue of whether Paul is quoting Luke in 1 Timothy 5:18?

5. Thanks for quoting some sources...I said that more Robert's sake who I think is confused about many things on a fundamental level (both about my worldview and his). My point was that for "an excellent essay" (Robert's words) you didn't quote many sources. You are right that did not address your argument.

6. I will interact with some of the Wells' citations. Obviously I can't read his books right this second but you have sparked my interest in him.

As Wells points out, "People who claim to see a ghost do not necessarily suppose it to be the wraith of someone recently deceased." (The Jesus Myth, p. 125.)

I don't think anyone is saying that apparitions alone are sufficient preconditions for the resurrection...probably not the resurrection belief either. Again those who use apparitions are usually trying to establish the best explanation for early Christian belief, drastic Jewish belief mutations, etc. Can't say much more because I don't have the book in front of me.

"Q certainly does not regard [Jesus'] death as redemptive and does not explicitly mention his resurrection" (Wells, op cit., p. 103).

He's talking about Q like I can go pick it up and examine it. The very criteria for constructing Q is going to bias itself against those things is it not?

In fact, Paul does give moral teaching that is later found in the gospels attributed to Jesus, but when Paul gives that teaching, he does not cite the gospel Jesus. Observe Wells on this point: (Wells quote follows)...

Paul already claims his teachings came from direct revelation by Jesus...does he need to cite Him to establish more veracity?

Cheers,
David

[August 01, 2008 12:20 AM](#)

[Steven Carr](#) said...

Paul writes 'The first man Adam became a created being, the last Adam became a life-giving spirit' (pneuma).

Although the person Paul worshipped allegedly claimed that he had not become a 'pneuma', Paul tells Christian converts that Jesus had become a spirit.

The one thing missing from Paul's letters is any claim that a corpse was revived and walked the earth.

Why does Paul preach the destruction of the body?

'For we know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands.'

Paul taught that the earthly body was destroyed, we left it, and moved into a heavenly body.

That is why he thought Christians in Corinth were foolish to discuss how a corpse could be reformed.

Their model of a resurrection was of a corpse being revived, and so they naturally scoffed at the idea.

For who had heard of a corpse being revived?

Paul reminds them that Jesus had become a spirit, using typology which teaches that they too will become 'life-giving spirits'.

As to what a life-giving spirit actually was, Paul had no first-hand experience to draw upon in his letters.

He has to use abstract reasoning, just as though the person he worshipped had never taught that a resurrected being had flesh and bone, and could be touched and could eat.

Paul says God will destroy both stomach and food.

He clearly had never heard a word of any of the Gospel resurrection stories - not even any appearances to the 12 (one of whom was allegedly dead)

[August 01, 2008 4:32 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson,

I received a response from Dr. Habermas. I was very brief in my email because I generally don't like to bombard people out of the blue.

He brought up an interesting point that Galatians 1:19 references "James the brother of the Lord." He also points out that Josephus also calls James the brother of Jesus.

That would directly call into question your claim that NOTHING in Paul suggests a recent resurrection.

Everyone to whom I present your "gospels can't be read into Paul" criteria returns blank stares...I haven't been able to explain why one would start from such a presupposition. Could you help me there so I can at least try to get a real answer?

[August 01, 2008 10:47 AM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

Steven: "Why was Paul, as a Pharisee used to handing on tradition :-), quite unable to tell the converts in Christianity what the person they had all worshipped had allegedly said about the nature of a resurrected body?"

Well, obviously, Paul knew nothing of the imaginary life of Jesus that was composed somewhat later by the gospel evangelists.

[August 01, 2008 7:12 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

david: "Galatians 1:19 references "James the brother of the Lord." He also points out that Josephus also calls James the brother of Jesus."

"Brother of the Lord" is probably an honorific title and not a reference to a sibling relationship. In Acts chapter 1, Mary and the brothers of Jesus make an appearance. After that they are not part of the story. That is not how dynastic struggles within new religions play out. The family members of the "prophet" seek power within the new cult and are generally opposed by the prophet's lieutenants. That the legendary family of Jesus is not recored as being a part of the emerging Jesus cult, is evidence against Gal. 1:19 referring to a sibling relationship.

On Gal. 1:19 Doherty has this:

James "the Brother of the Lord"

There is no denying that Christians for 19 centuries have taken the phrase in Galatians 1:19 as meaning "sibling of Jesus," and traditions that James the Just was a (half) brother to Jesus of Nazareth may well be solely dependent on James' designation as "ton adelphon tou kuriou", which here makes its one appearance in the New Testament epistles. But was Paul referring to a blood brother?

The term "brother" (adelphos) appears throughout Paul's letters, and was a common designation Christians gave each other. In 1 Corinthians 1:1 Sosthenes is called adelphos, as is Timothy in Colossians 1:1. Neither of them, nor the 500+ "brothers" who received a vision of the spiritual Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:6, are being designated as siblings of Jesus or anyone else. "Brothers in the Lord" (ton adelphon en kurio) appears in Philippians 1:14 (the NEB translates it "our fellow-Christians"). Surely this is the clue to the meaning of the phrase applied to James. Indications are that James was the head of a particular conventicle in Jerusalem which bore witness to the spiritual Christ, and this group may have called itself "brethren of the Lord." (Just as the term adelphos was common in Greek circles to refer to the initiates who belonged to the mystery cults.) The position of James as head of this brotherhood may have resulted in a

special designation for him as the brother of the Lord. Or Paul may have used the phrase simply to identify him as one of these "brethren". Thus I cannot agree with Sean that the phrase in Galatians "does not fit any type of Community situation." Note, too, that such designations are always "of the Lord", never "of Jesus."

Paul's listing in 1 Corinthians 15 of those who had undergone a "seeing" of the Christ suggests a number of things. The "more than 500 brothers" seems to be distinct from "all the apostles", although the latter may be a sub-group within the overall brotherhood. Paul implies that 500 is only a portion of it, making it a sizeable organization. Probably its members lived in Jerusalem and its environs, and assembled for meetings and ceremonies. At one of these, a group of over 500 (is this exaggeration on Paul's part, or of the tradition as it came down to Paul?) had some kind of revelatory experience of the spiritual Christ.

The size of this group makes it difficult to believe that it would not have been known in Palestinian circles in its day. If this were a new religion, following an executed messianic pretender or teaching sage, especially one whom all these people were convinced had been raised from the dead, first century commentators would hardly have been so silent about it. But if it were essentially a Jewish sectarian group (the "Lord" of "brothers of the Lord" may even have referred to God), one holding commonplace apocalyptic expectations as well, it would have blended into a landscape with many such manifestations and would not likely have been treated as a separate movement (including by Josephus). However, its size might at the same time have given a certain profile to its leader, James the Just, and notice was taken of him by Josephus—in *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.9.1, where he describes James' murder. (For more on the Josephus passages, including the phrase "brother of the Lord," see Supplementary Article No. 10: The Josephus Puzzle.)

Let's take a close look at 1 Corinthians 9:5, which Sean offers, and note especially the words Paul uses. Here is a literal translation: "Have we not the right to take along a sister (adelphē), a wife, as do the rest of the apostles and the brothers (adelphoi) of the Lord and Cephas?" Look at the word "sister". No one would say that Paul is referring to his own or anyone else's sibling. He means a fellow-believer of the female sex, and he seems to use it in apposition to (descriptive of) the word "wife". Indeed, all translations render this "a believing wife" or "a Christian wife."

This should cast light on the meaning of adelphos, both here and elsewhere. It refers to a fellow-believer in the Lord. Our more archaic rendering as "brethren of the Lord" conveys exactly this connotation: a community of like-minded believers, not "siblings" of each other or anyone else. Thus, a "brother of the Lord," whether referring to James or the 500, means a follower of this divine figure, and in 1 Corinthians 9:5, Paul would be referring to some of these members of the Jerusalem conventicle.

It is sometimes argued that the "brothers of the Lord" mentioned here cannot signify the Jerusalem group with James as its head, since Peter is named separately, and "apostles" are also referred to as distinct from these "brothers". I don't see a problem. Paul himself is an apostle (as he vociferously claims in this passage) and he is not a part of James' group; the reference to "the rest of the apostles" may simply be to missionaries like himself, whether from Jerusalem or other places. Or it may be that he is referring to those among the brothers in Jerusalem who specifically do apostolic work. As for Peter, Paul may simply be picking him out of the group for special mention, as someone well known to his readers, even if only by repute. It is even possible that Peter, like Paul, was not formally one of the "brothers".

Can we find other support for the view that James was not known as the blood brother of Jesus? Two of the non-Pauline epistles offer pretty strong evidence. The letter ascribed to James himself opens this way:

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. . ."

Few believe that James the Just actually wrote this letter, but if a later Christian is writing it in his name, or even if only adding this ascription, common sense dictates that he would have identified James as the brother of the Lord Jesus if he had in fact been so, not simply as his servant. A similar void has been left by the writer of the epistle of Jude. (Few likewise ascribe this letter to the actual Jude, whoever he was.) It opens:

"Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James. . ."

Now if James is Jesus' sibling, and Jude is James' brother, then this makes Jude the brother of Jesus, and so he appears in Mark 6. So now we have two Christian authors who write letters in the name of supposed blood brothers of Jesus, neither one of whom makes such an identification. How likely is this?

Scholars have attempted explanations for this silence, but none of them are convincing. E. M. Sidebottom's claim that the absence of a reference to Jesus by James "would be natural in his brother" is unsupported by any reasoning as to why this would be so. Helmut Koester wonders whether the silence in Jude was "chosen for polemical reasons." J. N. D. Kelly suggests that Jude's reticence was due to "humility and reserve." Too bad the letter itself gives no evidence of such traits, with its doom-laden condemnation of those who follow beliefs and practices which make them "brute beasts." Besides, no one would expect or value such "reserve". And the "avoidance of presumption" (another suggested reason) is hardly a strong characteristic of early Christian writers either.

As in all such cases, commentators ignore the overriding consideration that would surely operate. In the highly contentious atmosphere of much Christian correspondence, nobody passes up anything that would help their cause. For "James" and "Jude", the advantage of drawing on a kinship to Jesus himself to make the letter's position and the writer's authority more forceful would annihilate any other dubious motive for being silent about it.

The standard arguments make even less sense in letters that are pseudonymous, because the writer has chosen to adopt a famous name of the past precisely to add authority to his words. He also makes links to others (such as Jude's link to James) in order to increase that authority. There is no sensible reason to think that such a writer would pass up a link to the greatest authority of all, Jesus himself.

Scholars are particularly concerned to hang onto Jude's relationship to Jesus, since if this letter shows that there was no tradition familiar to its author that Jude was in fact the brother of Jesus, and yet he declares Jude to be the brother of James, then James cannot be the brother of Jesus. And that would be a blow. Mark 6 would have to be acknowledged as an invention, or at best a misinterpretation of earlier terminology. With this much at stake, it is not surprising that not a single commentator I've encountered ever raises the question as to whether there might have been no such tradition in the minds of first century Christian writers. No one uses the silence in the Epistles of James and Jude to question whether in fact Galatians 1:19 has been properly interpreted. In any other historical discipline where confessional considerations do not come into play, such a possibility would be closely examined.

Frank Zindler's book "The Jesus the Jews Never Knew" has a lengthy and thorough debunking of Antiquities 20 as does Doherty, Murdock, Freke and Gandy do in their books.

Habermas knows all this, yet he fallaciously makes the same false and bogus claims again and again.

[August 01, 2008 7:43 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[August 01, 2008 8:16 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

Humphreys at jesusneverexisted.com writes the following about Gal. 1:19

[Now throughout the epistle Paul is using the word brother \(2.4; 3.15; 4.12\) in the sense of member of a brotherhood - not as sibling \(at one point he even calls his readers "my little children" but hardly meaning his offspring!\).](#)

[August 01, 2008 8:18 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

david: "What is your interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:23-25"

The following was composed by me and is not a cut and paste.

The Author of Acts thought the Torah Law came from an angel. In Acts 7:37-38(RSV) Stephen's speech reads in part: "This is the Moses This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us. "

The Apostle Paul thought that the Torah Law came from angels. In Gal 3:19 (RSV) "Why then the law? ... and it was ordained by angels through an intermediary." , Paul directly stated this.

The author of Hebrews thought the same. When discussing the Torah Law in Hebrews 2:2 (RSV),

"For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; ", he ascribes the Torah to angels.

This is how the Paulian Christians were able to get around the assertions of the earlier Jewish Christians that the Torah Laws had to be obeyed. Paul's special pleadings would have carried no argumentative weight if his opponents could appeal to the words of the divine Yahweh. If there were no word's of the divine Yahweh in the Torah Laws, then Paul's contentions were as good as those of the Jewish Christians in the James, Mandaean, Nasoraean, and Ebonite cults. The problem with this view is that it requires the Paulian Christian to steal the concept of the Passover Paschal Lamb sacrifices that under gird the doctrine of the Atonement. If the Torah Laws found at Exodus 12:43-50 and Numbers 9:9-14 were given by angels, then they were never in actual effect by any

god. The Paulist needs to assert the Passover Paschal Lamb sacrifices were in effect to vivify the doctrine of Atonement, but she also needs to deny validity of the Torah Law in order to make Paul's special pleading to the doctrine of Grace seem valid. The early Catholics understood this and consequently they wrote the doctrine that angels delivered the Torah into the mouth of Stephen to facilitate Hellenization of Christianity.

If Yahweh actually exists and is responsible for the Torah law, Christianity is false, and the way to relate to deity is via Judaism. An interesting pair of Biblical contradictions falsifies Christianity, and the archeological record to falsify Judaism. A contradiction entailed between the alleged revelations of Christianity and Judaism is the former's glorification and dependence upon symbolic consumption of blood offered in sacrifice. 1 Cor. 11:23-25 relates " 23: For I received from the Lord, that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, in the night in which he was delivered up, took bread, 24: and having given thanks broke [it], and said, This is my body, which [is] for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25: In like manner also the cup, after having supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye shall drink [it], in remembrance of me. "

Judaism's alleged revelation in Lev 7:22-27 states "22: And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, 26: And no blood shall ye eat in any of your dwellings, whether it be of fowl or of cattle. 27: Whatever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, that soul shall be cut off from his peoples."

Jesus is identified as Yahweh in the following passages. John 1:1, John 1:14, John 8:58, John 10:30-31, John 10:38-39, John 14:9, John 20:28, Acts 20:28, Col 1:16, Col 2:9, 1 Tim 3:16, Titus 2:13, Phil 2:6, Heb 1:8, Rev 1:17, and Rev 22:13.

The Bible assures the reader that Yahweh cannot lie as expounded in the following passages. Num 23:19, 1 Sam 15:29, 2 Sam 7:28, Titus 1:2, Heb 6:18.

The Bible also relates that the Law of Moses is a perpetual Covenant that cannot be rescinded ever. Gen 17:19, Ex 12:14, 17, 24, Lev 23:14,21,31, Deut 4:8-9, 7:9, 11:26-28, 1 Chron 16:15, PS 111:7-8, Psalm 119:151-2, 160, Mal 4:4, Matt 5:18-19, Luke 16:17.

If Yahweh exists, then either Judaism is a true revelation or it isn't. If Moses got a true and correct revelation, then that revelation is incompatible with and contrary to Christianity, and Jesus and Paul were wrong, self-deluded, and Jesus cannot be equal to Yahweh. On the other hand if Moses was a deceiver or a myth, then Judaism is a fictional religious fairy tale, and Jesus and Paul were incorrect, self-deluded, and Jesus cannot be Yahweh because Christianity presupposes Judaism to be a true revelation. Either way Christianity is false, and Jesus is not Yahweh.

If Paul had the truth and his Law of Moses as schoolmaster argument (Gal. 3:24) was true, then either Yahweh lied to Moses or the Bible's assertion that Jesus equals Yahweh is false. Either way the Passover Paschal Lamb sacrifices, that undergird the doctrine of the Atonement, found at Exodus 12:43-50 and Numbers 9:9-14 would be invalid and the entire pretext of Christianity would evaporate. Additionally, if Yahweh is a liar, then it is not most worthy of worship, and . If Yahweh is not most worthy of worship, then it cannot be God and the Christian God must be something else. If the Bible's assertion that Jesus equals Yahweh is false, then Christianity's dependence upon a truthful historical Judaism is also a lie and the use of Old Testament proof texts to support Christian claims is fallacious and there could not then be Christ as Jewish Messiah.

Both Moses and Paul cannot be correct, but both can be wrong. If Moses, the Exodus, the Conquest of Canaan, the Davidic-Solomon-Reboaham unified empire are myths cooked up by the eighth century BCE Judean Yahweh cultists in response to the prosperity of the Omri-Ahab dynasty of the northern Israel kingdom and territorial encroachments of the Assyrian empire, then the Mosaic Law and the Torah are human fabrications. And Jesus, the Jews, and Paul were wrong and self-deluded. Christianity presupposes and requires Judaism to be a true revelation from Yahweh, but if the Bible minimalists are correct, as they appear to be, then Judaism is just another mythological religious fairytale, and the New Testament's equivocation of Jesus and Yahweh is a lie, and there was never a first Passover. Without a first Passover as per the story in Exodus 12, there is no basis for the Passover Paschal Lamb sacrifice laws. This would be fatal for Judaism and Christianity.

[August 01, 2008 8:39 PM](#)

[Robert B](#) said...

david: "Everyone to whom I present your "gospels can't be read into Paul" criteria returns blank stares"

Obviously, the later gospel fiction writers had a very different agenda from that of Paul. Paul's story is very different and became basis for several gnostic cults. The proto Catholics needed a historical Jesus whose followers just happened to be the teachers of the bishops who were the founders of the Catholic church. If there was an ultimate authority who got the ball rolling and handed over the keys to the Catholic's main guy, Peter, then there was a validation for the claim that they should be the bosses.

The gnostics on the other hand were into their own thing and had no need for orthodoxy. If all Christians had be likewise, then there would have been religious anarchy. That was just unacceptable.

Paul knew nothing about the gospel Jesus. So reading the gospel fairy tales into Paul just silly.

[August 01, 2008 8:50 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "1. To me it seems there is something quirky about the claims you are making, correct me if I'm wrong here: Some of your arguments lean on this premise: The gospel accounts are not admissible as historical evidence when looking at Paul. Then later you say: Paul doesn't mention some events that are in the gospel accounts, so Paul didn't have the whole gospel. (Actually I'm a little unsure of what your conclusion is about the missing gospel elements in Paul). Aren't you "clearly relying on the content of later writings - the gospels" to establish what Paul didn't know? Can we read the gospels into Paul or not?"

Essentially, all I'm doing is observing the vast differences between the portraits of Jesus found in the gospels and what Paul says of Jesus. Paul, who is the writer of the earliest record of what early Christians believed, does not tell us when or where or under what circumstances he thought Jesus was crucified and resurrected. In fact, he treats it as if it were something that had happened years, perhaps even decades or longer, before his own encounter with the *risen* Jesus (and even when he mentions his own encounter with Jesus, it is bereft of detail). The gospels do not speak for Paul on this matter, either, and read like later inventions which readers of today's printed

New Testaments use to back-fill details in Paul's letters that he does not himself supply (since they tend to read the gospels before reading Paul, and when they read Paul they assume he's talking about the same Jesus). Moreover, the gospels show evidence that teachings which Paul gave as his own or as revealed to him by a post-resurrection, heavenly Jesus, were put into the earthly Jesus' mouth in the gospel narratives by later writers who developed the story of Jesus' earthly existence and put it into a historical setting, very much like today's historical novels: using historical facts to supply the setting of an otherwise fictitious story. I'm not relying on the later writings to establish what Paul did not know, because I don't have to. All I need to do is look at what Paul did say and note that features found only in the gospels are not in Paul's writings. E.g., a virgin birth, the slaughter of the innocents, a baptism by John the Baptist, performance of miracles and healings, a betrayal by Judas Iscariot, a trial before Pilate, an empty tomb, etc., etc., etc. None of these storybook details, which according to the gospels are momentous in developing who Jesus is, are even hinted at in Paul's letters.

David: "2. [quoting me]: *If Luke was written before 70 AD, for instance, it still would not tell us when Paul thought Jesus was crucified and resurrected. Nor would it put the legend case to rest.* I agree. Just to clarify do you reject both the dating of the gospels and the events described in the gospels?"

Which dating? Or, are you asking if I reject the claim that they can be dated? I don't, but I do observe that there is wide disagreement on the dating of the NT texts (when they were written), and there seems to be no way to assign a date to their writing with any certainty. 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 the end, however, I don't think the issue of dating the NT texts is all that significant. It's understood that the Pauline epistles are the earliest documents in the NT, and that the gospels were written well after Paul's journeys and probably after his letter-writing campaign. Oddly, while Acts is supposed to give us a history of Paul's travels, one would never learn from the book of Acts that Paul wrote any letters which came to be regarded as "inspired" by Christians. Believers tend to dismiss this as a non-issue, but it strikes me as quite baffling.

David: "3. Over and over again you point to things Paul didn't say in his letters and turn that into special pleading about what is possible instead of what is probable...that sounds more like what Christian apologists do (according to a friend of mine). :)"

You'll have to give an example of what you have in mind here. I don't think I've been special pleading anything, so I don't know what you're talking about. Maybe the brief summary I gave above will help clarify things for you. It should not be difficult for anyone who takes the time to compare what is given in the early epistolary record with the portraits of Jesus found in the gospels, to see how different those two layers are in their conception of Jesus. Not only are numerous features found in the gospels not even hinted at in the early epistolary layer (e.g., virgin birth, son of a carpenter, ministry in Palestine, performance of miracles, healings, exorcisms, 12 disciples following Jesus, conflicts with Jewish leadership, betrayal by Judas Iscariot, trial before Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea, an empty tomb, discovery of empty tomb by women, a tarrying time by Jesus after his resurrection before going up to heaven, etc.), there are tell-tale indications that the later narratives of Jesus' life involved some reworking of the early epistolary material to inform their portraits of Jesus, just as we would expect if we're dealing with a legend here.

David: "4. You said that Paul is deficient in his knowledge of material found in the gospel accounts (which you agree were written later). Ignoring my first objection:"

Going by what the gospels say of Jesus, I would - were I to assume that Paul was talking about the Jesus we read about in the gospels - suppose that either Paul lacked knowledge of Jesus' earthly life (which, according to the timeline suggested by believers, would have been just a few years before his conversion), or that he deliberately withheld this knowledge when penning his letters (which I find difficult to fathom). I'm not sure what your "first objection" was to this; you can remind me if you like. But if it's along the lines of "I can't think of any reason why we should expect Paul to mention the virgin birth, etc....," don't bother. There are plenty of reasons why we would expect Paul to give at least some details pertaining to the circumstances of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, since these are central premises to his religious pronouncements, and, as I have already pointed out, he declares that his intention is to "preach Christ crucified" (I Cor. 1:23) and that that he is "determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2).

David: "What is your interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 where Paul tells us he "received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you: that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of Me." After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped saying, "This cup is the new testament in My blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Does Paul indicate when this supposedly happened? Does he indicate where it happened? Does he indicate who was with him? In his letter, he does not indicate any of this. It would be hard to believe that someone reading this could not come along later and graft it into a narrative he was composing about Jesus, supplying the details which Paul does not supply.

David: "Also where do you stand on the issue of whether Paul is quoting Luke in 1 Timothy 5:18?"

I would agree with many scholars today who class the Pastorals (including 1 Timothy) among the corpus of pseudo-Pauline letters. Since you like scholars so much, here are a few you can check out:

A.T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 1982.

M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 3rd ed., 1955.

N. Brox, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, 1969.

V. Hasler, *Die Briefe an Timotheus und Titus*, 1978.

B.S. Easton, *The Pastoral Epistles. Introduction, Translation, Commentary and Word Studies*, 1944.

F.D. Gealy, *The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus*, 1955.

C.K. Barrett, *Pastoral Epistles*, 1963.

J.H. Houlden, *The Pastoral Epistles : I and II Timothy, Titus*, 1976.

F. Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Epistles*, 1994.

M. Davies, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 1996.

Wells gives a nice summary of the arguments for the pseudonymity of I & II Timothy and Titus in his book *The Jesus Myth*, pp. 78-94, in which he interacts with some of the more recent (at that time) arguments put forth by G.W. Knight in his *The Pastoral Epistles*, 1992.

Also, as you acknowledged above, I ascribe to the view that the gospel accounts were written after Paul's letters (so Paul could not be quoting any of the gospels in his letters).

David: "5. Thanks for quoting some sources...I said that more Robert's sake who I think is confused about many things on a fundamental level (both about my worldview and his). My point was that for "an excellent essay" (Robert's words) you didn't quote many sources. You are right that did not address your argument."

Given what I wrote in response to your complaint about me supposedly not citing a sufficient number of "scholarly" sources (scholars don't all speak with one voice, you know), do you now understand why I don't take this kind of complaint very seriously? Wells relies very heavily on scholarly input to inform and support his arguments, thus satisfying this requirement that apologists apparently have. And yet look how capriciously he is dismissed. Two sentences is apparently all it takes to discount anything Wells has to say.

David: "6. I will interact with some of Wells' arguments."

Okay.

Wells writes: "People who claim to see a ghost do not necessarily suppose it to be the wraith of someone recently deceased." (*The Jesus Myth*, p. 125.)

David: "I don't think anyone is saying that apparitions alone are sufficient preconditions for the resurrection...probably not the resurrection belief either. Again those who use apparitions are usually trying to establish the best explanation for early Christian belief, drastic Jewish belief mutations, etc. Can't say much more because I don't have the book in front of me."

Wells supplies this statement in order to make a relevant point, apropos of I Cor. 15:3-8, namely that the claim to have seen an apparition, a ghost, a resurrected Jesus, etc., does not imply the belief that the apparition or ghost belong to someone who had *recently* expired. Paul is the one who claims to have had an encounter with the *risen* Jesus, but gives no indication of when he thinks Jesus was crucified or rose from the dead. Believers assume he thinks it was recent because they're reading details found only in the gospel narratives into the text of his letter. How do they justify this? As I asked earlier, how does Habermas assign 30 AD as the date of the crucifixion and resurrection? Can he do this without relying on what he reads in the gospels? Can he do this based on statements found in Paul's own letters? I don't think he can, and you've not produced any reason to suppose he can. Can you?

Wells: "Q certainly does not regard [Jesus'] death as redemptive and does not explicitly mention his resurrection" (Wells, op cit., p. 103).

David: "He's talking about Q like I can go pick it up and examine it. The very criteria for constructing Q is going to bias itself against those things is it not?"

I don't think so, not necessarily anyway. Q is reassembled by isolating the sayings put into Jesus' mouth that are common to both Luke and Matthew but missing from Mark and John. There are a lot of them, and many are verbatim or very nearly so. The task of recognizing the similarities of and isolating those sayings need not be a bias-borne project.

I wrote: "In fact, Paul does give moral teaching that is later found in the gospels attributed to Jesus, but when Paul gives that teaching, he does not cite the gospel Jesus. Observe Wells on this point: (Wells quote follows)..."

David: "Paul already claims his teachings came from direct revelation by Jesus..."

In other words, if Paul is attributing his teachings to Jesus, he's attributing them to the *risen*, heavenly Jesus who speaks to Paul through revelatory means (however that supposedly works), while the gospels have those teachings coming out of Jesus' mouth during his earthly ministry, about which Paul seems to know nothing. That's quite a nugget to swallow, David.

David: "does he need to cite Him to establish more veracity?"

It's not a question of veracity, per se, but *authority* (which, in the religious mind, entails veracity). Paul clearly wanted his converts to take his teachings as authoritative, and he relies on the OT for this where we would expect him to point to the earthly Jesus of the gospels if he had known that Jesus, during his earthly ministry, had taught on the same things that Paul teaches, which are later attributed to Jesus in the gospels. Besides, today's preachers point to the earthly Jesus of the gospels all the time to substantiate the authority of their pronouncements. How well do you think it would go over if a preacher started giving some novel moral instruction in his sermons, claiming those teachings came directly to him "by revelation" from Jesus? If it is valid for Paul, why isn't it valid for anyone else? God is no respecter of persons, right?

There's also the problem of simply having to believe what Paul says on his own say so. Appealing to Jesus does not overcome this, as this itself would be a claim we're supposed to accept on his say so. How do we know that what he is teaching, is something that a resurrected man-god "revealed" to him? We simply have to take his word for it. (And apologists typically refuse to allow faith to be called "blind".) Even more, how does Paul know that what he is teaching was revealed to him by a deity? Paul was a man like any other, I'd suppose, wasn't he? And, like other men, Paul was capable of imagining things, was he not? How did Paul distinguish what he called "revelation from Jesus" from what he was imagining? Paul does not explain his methodology here. But it's a valid concern so long as the one making such claims also possesses the ability to imagine things.

In relevance to the gospels, however, Wells provides a short list (there are many other examples that can be culled together) where teachings found in the early epistles, teachings which are in no way linked to an *earthly* Jesus, are later put into an earthly Jesus' mouth in the gospel narratives. This is the sort of situation we'd expect to see if the gospel narratives were the product of embellishment on earlier portrait models. In some cases Paul cites the heavenly Jesus as the source of the teachings he gives (more often he cites "the scriptures" or "according to the scriptures" for teachings, and in many cases, as Wells points out, he just gives it as if it were his own), and a decade or more later we find those same teachings put into the mouth of an earthly Jesus. Where

Paul's earthly Jesus was humbled and existed in humility and obscurity, the gospel Jesus was larger than life, performing miracles and gaining wide reputation as a healer. In Mark, the earliest gospel, the portrait begins where his ministry begins, at his baptism at the hands of John the Baptist (a figure which Paul never mentions in his many letters). Luke and Matthew want their Jesus to be something more remarkable, so they give him a miraculous, virgin birth (another gospel feature which Paul never mentions in any of his many letters). John, seeking to make his Jesus even more impressive, does not even give him a virgin birth, but makes him into "the word made flesh," the pre-existent "Logos" that has existed side by side with the Abrahamic god for all eternity. Notice how the legend grows with each retelling. Paul gave the bare basics: a crucified and resurrected Jesus, while the gospels filled in the portrait of Jesus with all kinds of stories that had developed in the meantime.

No one disputes that Paul thinks he had a revelation from Jesus. What exactly was transmitted to Paul's mind through this revelation is not something Paul ever made clear. But let's suppose that Paul thinks the moral teachings that Wells includes in his list of examples came from Jesus through a revelation. This revelation, even according to Christianity, came from the *risen* Jesus. Paul nowhere suggests that Jesus had taught these things during his life on earth. But that's what we find when we get to the gospels: Jesus marching a squad of disciples through the ancient countryside between various towns in Palestine performing miracles, healing the blind, the lame and the infirm, giving moral instruction and teaching in the form of parables. We never learn any of this from Paul. For Paul, Jesus' authority was post-resurrection. For the gospels, his authority preceded his resurrection during an earthly ministry, something Paul does not seem to be aware of.

David: "I received a response from Dr. Habermas. I was very brief in my email because I generally don't like to bombard people out of the blue. He brought up an interesting point that Galatians 1:19 references "James the brother of the Lord." He also points out that Josephus also calls James the brother of Jesus. That would directly call into question your claim that NOTHING in Paul suggests a recent resurrection."

If this is the best "evidence" from a Pauline document for a *recent* resurrection for Jesus (and if there were something stronger, I'd expect you to have come running back with it instead of this), then it is as weak and tenuous as it could get.

First, in regard to Gal. 1:19, the expression "the brother of the Lord" reads like a title that James, as an elder in the church, would have held. See Robert's points above.

Second, in regard to Josephus using this same expression, several scholars (e.g., Rajak, Wells, et al.) have classed this passage (along with the Testimonium) as a Christian interpolation. I tend to find arguments for this quite convincing, enough so that I don't think there's much open to apologist to recover it as genuine.

David: "Everyone to whom I present your "gospels can't be read into Paul" criteria returns blank stares..."

Yes, I would expect such a response, especially if the way you present my position is influenced by appalled Christian bias. But blank stares are not counter-arguments, so this doesn't worry me. In fact, in the debate on Christianity, nothing worries me. That's probably what my detractors find most disturbing about me.

David: "I haven't been able to explain why one would start from such a presupposition."

I do not "start from such a presupposition." In fact, the way you phrase it does not tell the whole story.

David: "Could you help me there so I can at least try to get a real answer?"

I've been trying, David. I've been trying.

Regards,
Dawson

[August 01, 2008 9:06 PM](#)

[Robert B](#) said...

david: "...I refuse to return your tactics of rhetoric and name calling..."

Liar. Your snide insinuations and multiple ad hominem against those you disagree with are easily detected as are your many specious and fraudulent appeals to authority.

BTW, you should apologize for being so uncharitable to Dr. Carrier in the DC thread. He is a brilliant mind.

As for me, I am not confused. My assertion of your primacy of consciousness subjective metaphysics was a gambit in opposition to your bogus arguments from authority. Christians hold a false world view that is entirely subjective in nature. [Dawson has many blogs on that topic.](#)

Since Christianity prevents a person from ascertaining reality, no Christian exegetical authority can have actual knowledge of the facts of reality. Rather than whine about your use of name dropping assertions that Habermas and friends are right because they're published, I choose to attack the foundation of your presumption of knowledge. Its from my military training. In war, kill the source; cut off the supply lines; bomb the industrial base; destroy the will of the enemy to fight. I, then, say it is you who are confused.

But you can escape that by affirming the following.

1. Existence exists absolutely and independently of all consciousness.
2. There are no such things as gods.
3. If Jesus existed, he is dead.
4. I renounce Christianity as a false and harmful mythology lacking basis in reality.

[20 Reasons to Abandon Christianity](#)

[August 01, 2008 9:24 PM](#)

[Robert B](#) said...

Dawson: "Notice how the legend grows with each retelling"

I mentioned Randel Helms' book, [Gospel Fictions](#). In it he cites many examples of such legendary embellishment. Here is one.

In the second chapter Helms points out that in three of the four canonical Gospels that the alleged final dying words of Jesus are recorded differently, and Matthew spins the words for his own purposes. I will cite the text at length as Helms is a better writer than me.

"For example, according to Matthew and Mark, the dying words of Jesus were, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" According to Luke, Jesus' dying words were, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." But according to John they were, "It is accomplished." To put it another way, we cannot know what the dying words of Jesus were, or even whether he uttered any; it is not that we have too little information, but that we have too much. Each narrative implicitly argues that the others are fictional. In this case at least, it is inappropriate to ask of the Gospels what "actually" happened; they may pretend to be telling us, but the effort remains a pretense, a fiction.

The matter becomes even more complex when we add to it the virtual certainty that Luke knew perfectly well what Mark had written as the dying words, and the likelihood that John also knew what Mark and perhaps Luke had wrote, but that both Luke and John chose to tell the story differently."

The interesting thing here is that both the Lukian and Johnine writers were working from Mark and other source documents, but they choose to tell the story in very different ways for doctrinal and theological reasons related to the needs of their faith communities. Helms continues.

"The Gospels are Hellenistic religious narratives in the tradition of the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament, which constituted the "Scriptures" to those Greek-speaking Christians who wrote the four canonical Gospels and who appealed to it, explicitly or implicitly, in nearly every paragraph they wrote.

A simple example is the case of the last words of Christ. Mark presents these words in self-consciously realistic fashion, shifting from his usual Greek into the Aramaic of Jesus, transliterated into Greek letters: "Eloi eloi lama sabachthanei (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? - Mark 15:34). Mark gives us no hint that Jesus is "quoting" Psalm 22:1; we are clearly to believe that we are hearing the grieving outcry of a dying man. But the author of Matthew, who used Mark as one of his major written sources is self-consciously "Literary" in both this and yet another way: though using Mark as his major source for the passion story, Matthew is fully aware that Mark's crucifixion narrative is based largely on the 22nd Psalm, fully aware, that is, that Mark's Gospel is part of a literary tradition (this description would not be Matthew's vocabulary, but his method is nonetheless literary). Aware of the tradition, Matthew knew that no Aramaic speaker present at the Cross would mistake a cry to God (Eloi) for one to Elijah - the words are too dissimilar. So Matthew self-consciously evoked yet another literary tradition in the service both of verisimilitude and of greater faithfulness to the Scriptures: not the Aramaic of Psalm 22:1 but the Hebrew, which he too transliterated into Greek - "Eli Eli" (Matt. 27:46) - a cry which could more realistically be confused for "Eleian". Matthew self-consciously appeals both to literary tradition - a "purer" text of the Psalms - and to verisimilitude as he reshapes Mark, his literary source. Matthew certainly knew that he was creating a linguistic fiction in his case (Jesus spoke Aramaic, not Hebrew.) though just as clearly he felt justified in doing so, given his conviction that since Psalm 22 had "predicted" events in the crucifixion, it could be appealed to even in the literary sense of one vocabulary rather than another, as a more "valid description of the Passion.

Luke is even more self-consciously literary and fictive than Matthew in his crucifixion scene. Though, as I have said, he knew perfectly well what Mark had written as the dying words of Jesus, he created new ones more suitable to his understanding of what the death of Jesus meant - and act with at least two critical implications: First, that he has thus implicitly declared Mark's account a fiction; second, that he self-consciously presents his own as a fictions. For like Matthew, Luke in 23:46 deliberately placed his own work in the literary tradition by quoting Psalm 30 (31):5 in the Septuagint as the dying speech of Jesus: "Into your hands I will commit my spirit" ("eis cheiras sou parathesomai to pneuma mou"), changing the verb from future to present (paratithemai) to suit the circumstances and leaving the rest of the quotation exact. This is self-conscious creation of literary fiction, creation of part of a narrative scene for religious and moral rather than historical purposes. Luke knew perfectly well, I would venture to assert, that he was creating an ideal model of Christian death, authorized both by doctrine and by literary precedent." - from "Gospel Fictions" p. 15-17

Helms makes a good case throughout "Gospel Fictions", for there are many examples of this sort of purposeful editorial revisionism to assert midrashic theological-doctrinaire teachings. The last words of Jesus were and are of utmost importance to Christians as you yourself indicate by citing John 19:30. Yet each of the canonical Gospels tells it differently or spins it differently in the case of Matthew. This shows that the Gospel authors were self-consciously aware they were not dealing with history but rather with pious fiction. Taken together almost all content of the Gospels can be shown to be based on earlier Moses, Elijah, David stories or from bits of liturgical text from the Jewish apocrypha. I recommend Dr. Robert M. Price's book "The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man". Price does a masterful job of illustrating the midrashic nature of the Gospels.

My point in all of this is to note that the story of Jesus is fictional. Whatever Jesus really was, we'll never know. He is lost to history, and all that remains is a sad caricature clothed in layers of obfuscatory religions doctrines hidden behind the stained glass of orthodoxy.

[August 01, 2008 10:02 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

Back to the dating of Luke/Acts:

In "History of the Christian Religion to the Year 200" By Charles Burlingame Waite (full availability on Google books), the acclaimed historian thoroughly details why Marcion's Gospel of the Lord was prior to the canonical Gospel of Luke (p.337-343). Subsequently Waite then presents other reasons why Luke was most likely penned in the late 2nd century.

"There are other considerations, indicating a late origin to this gospel (Luke).

1. It is expressly stated, in the introduction, that many gospels had been written before this one: " Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order, a declararation of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they who from the beginning, were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word, delivered unto us: it seemed good to me, also," .

It is the universal conclusion, that the author of Luke does not here refer to any of the canonical gospels. ' The fact that the other three of those gospels are impliedly

excluded by the language used in Luke, raises a strong implication, that they were not then written. Why would the author refer to many unauthorized gospels, and make no allusion to three which were received as authority? It is an opinion quite generally entertained, that several gospels are referred to in Luke, which are known to have been written in the second century.

Origen considered that the Gospel of the Egyptians and the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, (of the Hebrews) were among the number. ' (1.) Origen, I Inn ill. in Luc. 1. 1; Ambrose, Com. on Luke, 1; Augustine, de Cons. Ev. 1. 4, c. 8; Eusebius, Ecc. Hist. 3. 24; Erasmus, in Luc. 1. 1; 1 Vila rm. de Mat. Sacr. 1. 1, c. 16; Grotius, in Luc. 1. 1; Father Simon, Crit. Hist. of N. T. par. 1, ch. 8; Jones, vol. 1, p. 25; Stowe's Hist, of the Bible, p. 142. (2.) Homily in Luc. 1.1.

Jerome extends the list as follows: "The evangelist Luke declares that there were many who wrote gospels, when he says, 'forasmuch as many,' &c. (c. 1, v. 1), which being published by various authors, gave rise to several heresies. They were such as that according to the Egyptians, and Thomas, and Matthias, and Bartholomew, that of the Twelve Apostles, and Basilides, and Apelles, and others which it would be tedious to enumerate." — Hieron. Prof, in Cotnm. in Matth.

The Gospel of Basilides was written about A. D. 125, and that of Apelles, about 160. Of course, then, according to Jerome, Luke was after 160.

Epiphanius says, in expounding Luke, 1. 1, "Saying: 'Forasmuch as many have taken in hand,' by which he would intimate that there have been many undertakers of the like work. Among them, I suppose, were Cerinthus, Merinthus, and others." [SeealsoEpi. Haer. 51.7.] Cerinthus flourished and wrote about A. D. 145, which Epiphanius thinks was before Luke.

Venerable Bede [A. D. 734] agrees with Jerome, that the Gospels of Basilides and Apelles were among those referred to in Luke. 'Erasmus thought the Acts of Pilate, or Gospel of Nicodemus, was among the number." Jones includes the Gospel of Marcion. ' All these writers, in thus dating the Gospel of Luke subsequent to those here named, impliedly renounce the theory of its apostolic origin.

2. The discrepancies between this gospel and that according to Matthew, have already been pointed out. These differences indicate a late origin for one or both of these gospels, and involve in confusion, every thing connected with the early history of Christ. It is impossible, in the present state of the enquiry, to name the author of this gospel.

(1.) Bede's Works, London, 1844, vol. 10, p. 278.

(2.) Annul . in Luc. 1. 1.

(3.) Jones, vol. 8, Vindication, p. 26.

Westcott (Brooke Foss Westcott, Bishop of Durham 1890-1901) thinks it circulated mostly about Alexandria and Antioch, ' when first published. It may have been written at or near Antioch. In

that case, the person to whom it was addressed, was probably none other than Theophilus, the writer, who afterward, about A. D. 180, became Bishop, of Antioch.

Basnage thinks Luke was the first of the canonical

gospels, ' and there are many reasons for believing he

was correct in that opinion. Michaelis did not consider it inspired;' nor does the author of this, or of either of the canonical gospels, lay any claim to inspiration.

(1.) Canon, p. 68. Note.

(2.) Ann. 60, num. 81.

(3.) Vol. 1, p. 95."

Origen, Jerome, Epiphanius, Hieron, Erasmus, and Venerable Bede all thought Luke was written after the various mid 2nd century Gnostic Christian Gospels listed. That is consistent with the idea that the Lucian author's pen pal was indeed Theophilus, bishop of Antioch 181-188.

In Luke 1:3, the greek word *kratistos* is translated as "most excellent". This title means: [mightiest, strongest, noblest, most illustrious, best, most excellent] and is used in addressing men of prominent rank or office. The Lucian author was writing to one of the movers shakers. Theophilus, bishop of Antioch (181-188) fits nicely as Luke is thought to have been written in Syria.

[August 04, 2008 11:03 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson, I've enjoyed going back and forth this week.

1. *"Nothing in the letter itself suggests that the resurrection that Paul speaks of happened any time recently."*

You have dismissed the evidence presented with little to no argumentation so I'll let the readers decide. I'm still wondering where Paul portrays resurrection as something "that had happened years, perhaps even decades or longer, before?"

2. *"It should not be difficult for anyone who takes the time to compare what is given in the early epistolary record with the portraits of Jesus found in the gospels."*

I have pointed to several verses that parallel gospel accounts, and you didn't demonstrate verses which contradict the gospel accounts Jesus; instead you pointed to the Jesus-life-events that Paul didn't bring up and showed at best its possible he didn't know about them or they were just made up later by the gospel writers (no evidence for this claim).

3. A definition for special pleading: "unexplained claims of exemption from principles commonly thought relevant to the subject matter."

It is a largely held view that the gospels are relevant to Paul? You have deemed the gospels inadmissible and not given any support besides "later documents can't corroborate earlier ones." I would say that constitutes special pleading.

"It is not even clear from what Paul gives us here that either Cephas or James were members of either group."

You made no effort to establish that your theory is more likely than competing theories, so again if you want to argue for that claim in an inductive fashion you will need to demonstrate that your premise is the more probable than competing theories; that's how historical argumentation works is it not? I think it more probable that Paul's audience was aware of the oral tradition about "the twelve" ...otherwise we are left assuming that Paul is sending his audience nonsense material and from an exegetical perspective that requires even more support to overturn competing possibilities. Does he say "delivered" in the past tense? Yes, so at minimum this is not the first time he has delivered some gospel message to Corinth.

"and puts a great burden on the memories of those whom Paul personally missionized, persons who may or may not have been the recipients of Paul's letters"

You're presenting the possibility that Paul was writing to a whole church, of which not one single person was present during his previous missionary visit. Besides, if a child can learn the months of the year why can't a member at Corinth keep straight this short list? Is it possible or probable Dawson?

"Moreover, if Paul is just repeating a creed here, as Geisler and Turek seem to think, then it's quite possible that even Paul himself did not know the names of those who constituted "the twelve."

Paul is going around reciting a creed about things he is clueless about: the same Paul who made a trip specifically to investigate if he was running in vain? I will grant you its possible but not that it's quite possible.

"there are tell-tale indications that the later narratives of Jesus' life involved some reworking of the early epistolary material to inform their portraits of Jesus, just as we would expect if we're dealing with a legend here."

You are arguing that if Jesus is a legend, we would expect expansion in the narratives about his earthly ministry. What of the other elements in the data which do not comport with this theory of legendary expansion, such as the deity of Christ (Paul is more clear than John on this issue). If the theory of legendary expansion fails to best explain all the data (explanatory power and scope) it cannot be considered the most probably historical explanation.

4. *"I'm not sure what your "first objection" was to this; you can remind me if you like."*

My first objection was that you were being inconsistent in chiding apologists who use the gospel content to date events in Paul, and then on the other hand find Paul's account of the Jesus to be deficient in comparison to the content of the gospels.

5. I agree that it's probable that Paul would mention other elements from Jesus' earthly ministry if he were aware of them. Going from what we don't know (your favorite tactic), we can only speculate that what he received by direct revelation and from the other apostles didn't include this material. I see no reason to assume it probable that Paul knew of those events, so why would it matter that he doesn't mention them? At any rate if I granted you that he knew about them. Then no I would not have a good answer for you right now on that...just being honest.

6. *"Does Paul indicate when this supposedly happened? Does he indicate where it happened? Does he indicate who was with him?"*

My point here is that he has given some information also found in the gospels regarding Jesus' earthly ministry, that's all. Just curious, what source critics out there (besides Wells) contend that Paul was a source for the gospels writers?

Just as a reference, other verses that demonstrate a relationship between Paul and the gospels:

I Corinthians 9:14

1 Cor 7:10, 12, 25 (Mark 10:1-12 ; Matt 19:1b-12; Matt 5:32 ; Luke 16:18)

1 Cor 9:14 (Matt 10:9-10 ; Luke 10:7)

1 Tim 6:13 (Jesus' trial before Pilate)

7. *"As I asked earlier, how does Habermas assign 30 AD as the date of the crucifixion and resurrection? Can he do this without relying on what he reads in the gospels? Can he do this based on statements found in Paul's own letters? I don't think he can, and you've not produced any reason to suppose he can. Can you?"*

I did not ask him, and I cannot personally date the creed. I have ordered one of his most thorough books so if he addresses it I'll let you know. My guess is you're right.

8. *"while the gospels have those teachings coming out of Jesus' mouth during his earthly ministry, about which Paul seems to know nothing"*

I think the Lord's Supper passage is adequate evidence against this claim, is it not?

9. *"Paul does not explain his methodology here."*

Paul says he went to visit Peter and James to make sure what he had received from Jesus was accurate, and they approved. I've already discussed the word used for "acquainted" and the ancient connotation of one doing investigative work. What else are you driving at?

"But it's a valid concern so long as the one making such claims also possesses the ability to imagine things."

This standard removes the whole issue from consideration, since we can't know for sure whether anything is imagined... sorry no need to get all solipsistic. If you are consistent in applying this concern than all eyewitness testimony should be disregarded.

10. *"For Paul, Jesus' authority was post-resurrection. For the gospels, his authority preceded his resurrection during an earthly ministry, something Paul does not seem to be aware of."*

Does the Last Supper passage fit this criterion? (I Corinthians 11:23-26)

11. *"If this is the best "evidence" from a Pauline document for a *recent* resurrection for Jesus (and if there were something stronger, I'd expect you to have come running back with it instead of this), then it is as weak and tenuous as it could get."*

I think the evidence provided by Robert is as weak and tenuous as it could get.

First of all the best evidence for a recent resurrection in Paul has been dismissed without substantive argumentation (the Gospels).

Doherty would have us believe "ton adelphon tou kuriou" is a clue to the meaning of the phrase "ton adelphon en kurio" when applied to James. He gives no reference for the alleged group at Jerusalem: "brethren of the Lord." Furthermore, You cannot simply point to the usage of a word (Pauline literature or elsewhere) and demand the wholesale transfer of that semantic usage into the word in question. There is a reason text critics and exegetes for 19 centuries have largely rendered the text that way...it is the most sound exegesis. Competing exegetical theories will need ample support for diverting from the most straight-forward, historically supported, reading of this passage. Doherty has not succeeded in providing that support (here anyway). Humphreys is not even swinging at the ball...we know how Paul uses adelphos

elsewhere and if the only goal is to homogenize Paul's word usage and thus completely render futile any meaningful approach to his language...exegetes would be out of a job.

12. Oh and the minority of scholars who dismiss the Josephus passage allow you to label the passage inadmissible?

[August 04, 2008 11:19 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Hey Robert,

Sorry if I have not been responding to you, but I have limited time to engage in these wonderful affairs. :) I think you have put forth good information related to the dating of Luke, but perhaps we should continue that on the Debunking thread since that's where the Acts discussion originally kicked off.

"Origen, Jerome, Epiphanius, Hieron, Erasmus, and Venerable Bede all thought Luke was written after the various mid 2nd century Gnostic Christian Gospels listed."

Could you provide me the source for that one?

[August 04, 2008 12:44 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote "Nothing in the letter itself suggests that the resurrection that Paul speaks of happened any time recently."

David: "You have dismissed the evidence presented with little to no argumentation so I'll let the readers decide."

Recall, David, that I had asked you how Habermas can assign the date of 30 AD (or any date, for that matter) to the resurrection, whether he could do this without having to rely on the gospels. You said that you would contact Habermas himself and get his input on this question. You came back saying that he mentioned the reference, in Gal. 1:19, which Paul makes to "James, the brother of the Lord." Unless there was something else I missed, this seemed to be the only item in all of Paul's letters (mind you, Paul is the single most prolific author in the NT) by which a connection can supposedly be made to an earthly Jesus that is a contemporary of Paul.

Now, surely even you must admit, David, this is pretty flimsy. In all his letters, had Paul believed that people he had personally met had walked and talked with the earthly, pre-resurrection Jesus, we're supposed to believe he never found an opportunity to mention this, except to refer to this person James as Jesus' brother? Ah, but even here we would be going further than what Paul says, for he does not say "Jesus' brother" or "brother of Jesus," but "brother of the Lord." Robert had already given what I think is a sufficient answer to this. The term "brother" is commonly used, even by Paul (often in the plural; see I Cor. 15:6 for instance!), to indicate membership in some elite fraternity or high ranking zealots. S.G.F Brandon, in his book *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*, suggests that it probably meant "principal servant" (cf. p. 20). Blood relation is quite unlikely what Paul meant. Indeed, when I was a Christian, my fellow churchgoers constantly referred to me as their "brother,"

even though there was no blood relation. This fact did not stop them; to them, I was still "brother Dawson" or "brother Bethrick."

Suffice it to say, nothing in Paul's own use of the expression "the brother of the Lord" indicates that he had a blood relation in mind. In fact, it is chiefly because believers today are so prone to reading details and motifs they find in the gospels into Paul's letters that they suppose this.

David: "I'm still wondering where Paul portrays resurrection as something 'that had happened years, perhaps even decades or longer, before'?"

Please, try to keep context, David. I had written:

*Paul, who is the writer of the earliest record of what early Christians believed, does not tell us when or where or under what circumstances he thought Jesus was crucified and resurrected. In fact, he treats it as if it were something that had happened years, perhaps even decades or longer, before his own encounter with the *risen* Jesus (and even when he mentions his own encounter with Jesus, it is bereft of detail)*

It is because Paul is apparently so disinterested in the earthly life of Jesus (in spite of his determination to know only "Christ crucified" - cf. 1 Cor. 2:2), that he never refers to it in a manner which suggests a time or place. This is not something that had just recently occurred for Paul, otherwise it would be very difficult to explain his silence on this. As I quoted Wells above, "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" (*Can We Trust the New Testament?*, p. 34), my view of Paul has moved toward a very similar position.

I wrote: "It should not be difficult for anyone who takes the time to compare what is given in the early epistolary record with the portraits of Jesus found in the gospels."

David: "I have pointed to several verses that parallel gospel accounts,"

Parallels are to be expected if earlier traditions were incorporated, either directly or indirectly, into later concoctions as communities sought to develop their own Jesus narrative. Indeed, I quoted Wells citing numerous parallels as well, but when it comes to the gospels, Paul's teachings - which he gave as his own or cited the OT for authority - are thrust into an earthly Jesus' mouth, whereas in Paul there's no hint that an earthly Jesus had issued them.

David: "and you didn't demonstrate verses which contradict the gospel accounts Jesus;"

That was not specifically my intention. I could do this, but that will have to wait for another blog.

David: "instead you pointed to the Jesus-life-events that Paul didn't bring up and showed at best its possible he didn't know about them or they were just made up later by the gospel writers (no evidence for this claim)."

What would serve as evidence that a later writer made something up? A writer is not going to come out and say "I'm just making this stuff up, but listen anyway, and take what I say as truth." In fact, many of the gospel details appear very strongly to be reworked OT stories.

David: "3. A definition for special pleading: 'unexplained claims of exemption from principles commonly thought relevant to the subject matter'. It is a largely held view that the gospels are relevant to Paul? You have deemed the gospels inadmissible and not given any support besides 'later documents can't corroborate earlier ones.' I would say that constitutes special pleading.

Just so we're clear, the clause "later documents can't corroborate earlier ones" did not come from me. I've been very clear on this: using the gospels to back-date the resurrection appearances found in I Cor. 15:3-8 in order to discredit the legend theory simply begs the question.

I wrote: "It is not even clear from what Paul gives us here that either Cephas or James were members of either group."

David: "You made no effort to establish that your theory is more likely than competing theories,"

My statement above is not a "theory," just an observation. Does Paul think that Cephas or James were members of the group to which he refers as "the twelve"? It's not clear that he does think this. If he did think this, one might expect him to say "and others of the twelve" or something along those lines which would contextually imply their membership in this group, a group he never mentions anywhere else.

David: "so again if you want to argue for that claim in an inductive fashion you will need to demonstrate that your premise is the more probable than competing theories; that's how historical argumentation works is it not?"

Actually, David, all I need to do is ask those who recoil against my above observation to identify where Paul does make it clear that Cephas and/or James belong to "the twelve." On what basis would I assume that Cephas and/or James are members of the group to which Paul refers as "the twelve"? Not by anything that Paul himself tells us. Again, we're being asked to read Paul's epistles through our knowledge of the gospels. You think this is a legitimate move. I've given a few reasons why I don't think it is.

David: "I think it more probable that Paul's audience was aware of the oral tradition about 'the twelve' ..."

Can you supply the content of what this oral tradition was? If you say "it's the gospels," what is your argument for this? How do you know what notions were circulating at the time? Indeed, Paul's own letters indicate that there were competing gospels and competing notions of Jesus circulating at the time and posing doctrinal hazards for his congregations (cf. II Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6-7). We also know that Paul had disputes with the Jerusalem leadership as well. I'm not so concerned about what you might think is "more probable," but about what the documents say, and what they don't say. Should we just assume, for instance, that Paul believed Jesus was born of a virgin? On what basis? Should we just assume that Paul believed Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist? On what basis? Should we just assume that Paul believed Jesus performed miracles during an earthly incarnation? Can you be certain that the gospel accounts, written a decade or even more after Paul's time, are not stories that developed as a result of literary invention, when the textual record that we have is just as we would expect it to be if they were?

David: "otherwise we are left assuming that Paul is sending his audience nonsense material and from an exegetical perspective that requires even more support to

overturn competing possibilities. Does he say "delivered" in the past tense? Yes, so at minimum this is not the first time he has delivered some gospel message to Corinth."

And I'm not disputing this. But here's the question for you, David: What was the content of what Paul preached during his ministry to Corinth (and to other churches on his missionizing route)? Is it really responsible scholarship to attribute to Paul views that he does not even suggest?

I wrote: "and puts a great burden on the memories of those whom Paul personally missionized, persons who may or may not have been the recipients of Paul's letters"

David: "You're presenting the possibility that Paul was writing to a whole church, of which not one single person was present during his previous missionary visit."

What part of "persons who may or may not have been the recipients of Paul's letters" did you not understand? Clearly I'm allowing for the possibility that some of his letters' recipients were present when he missionized in person; that's also why I mention the burden put on their memories.

David: "Besides, if a child can learn the months of the year why can't a member at Corinth keep straight this short list? Is it possible or probable Dawson?"

For that matter, then, why does Paul need to recite it? Your own question undermines the point you're trying to make with it.

I wrote: "Moreover, if Paul is just repeating a creed here, as Geisler and Turek seem to think, then it's quite possible that even Paul himself did not know the names of those who constituted "the twelve."

David: "Paul is going around reciting a creed about things he is clueless about: the same Paul who made a trip specifically to investigate if he was running in vain? I will grant you its possible but not that it's quite possible."

Just so it's clear that you're disputing my assessments in terms of degree rather than in terms of fundamentals at this point. But as for Paul and his knowledge of the twelve, what does he know about the twelve? And when he mentions "the twelve" as recipients of a post-resurrection appearance by Jesus, why is it "the twelve," and not "the eleven" as we find in the gospels? In Mk. 16:14, we read "Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat..." In Lk. 24:9 we read "And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest," and then at v. 33 "And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them." Paul seems not to know about Judas Iscariot betraying Jesus and committing suicide before Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. If Paul convened with Peter to get his facts straight, how could he have repeated this error? Indeed, if we take the gospel narrative true, how do we explain a creed which speaks of Jesus appearing to "the twelve" instead of "the eleven," as we find it in the gospels? These are some big problems, David.

4. "I'm not sure what your "first objection" was to this; you can remind me if you like."

Davd: "My first objection was that you were being inconsistent in chiding apologists who use the gospel content to date events in Paul, and then on the other hand find Paul's account of the Jesus to be deficient in comparison to the content of the gospels."

Comparing what Paul says of Jesus with what the gospels say of Jesus is not the same thing as using the contents of the gospels to back-date events Paul mentions but to which he never ascribes a date or place.

David: "5. I agree that it's probable that Paul would mention other elements from Jesus' earthly ministry if he were aware of them."

Yes, I would tend to think so myself.

David: "At any rate if I granted you that he knew about them. Then no I would not have a good answer for you right now on that...just being honest."

I am definitely one who appreciates honesty, David.

I wrote: "As I asked earlier, how does Habermas assign 30 AD as the date of the crucifixion and resurrection? Can he do this without relying on what he reads in the gospels? Can he do this based on statements found in Paul's own letters? I don't think he can, and you've not produced any reason to suppose he can. Can you?"

David: "I did not ask him, and I cannot personally date the creed. I have ordered one of his most thorough books so if he addresses it I'll let you know. My guess is you're right."

Again, David, I'm just speculating here. These are some touchy questions, I grant, but I do take them seriously.

8. "while the gospels have those teachings coming out of Jesus' mouth during his earthly ministry, about which Paul seems to know nothing"

David: "I think the Lord's Supper passage is adequate evidence against this claim, is it not?"

No, it isn't. For one thing, it would not undo the fact that Paul gives many moral teachings without even implying that Jesus had taught them during an earthly incarnation while the later gospels put those same teachings in the earthly Jesus' mouth. Also, Paul's rendition of the supper passage is just another example of a motif found in the early epistolary strata that was later woven into a narrative about Jesus' earthly life.

Regarding the question of how someone like Paul could distinguish between what he might call "revelation" and what he might merely be imagining, I wrote: "Paul does not explain his methodology here."

David: "Paul says he went to visit Peter and James to make sure what he had received from Jesus was accurate, and they approved."

That's what he says, but what exactly did they review together, and should we just take it on Paul's word that they approved? What exactly were they approving? What corroborates their approval? Did Peter really confirm that Jesus appeared to "the twelve" when the gospels say "the eleven"? Surely Peter would have known about the defector Judas, no?

I wrote: "But it's a valid concern so long as the one making such claims also possesses the ability to imagine things."

David: "This standard removes the whole issue from consideration, since we can't know for sure whether anything is imagined..."

Do you really believe this, David?

David: "sorry no need to get all solipsistic."

That's not at all where I was going. This is like throwing the baby out with the bath water. If we cannot distinguish between the actual and the imaginary (and above you seem to be saying you cannot), then we would be wrong to call the NT stories truthful in the first place.

David: "If you are consistent in applying this concern than all eyewitness testimony should be disregarded."

Not at all. I do know that people see things, and if their testimony does not contradict things that I know are true, then at least they have some initial congruity with reality going for them. Suppose I'm having a conversation with my brother who's on his cell phone talking to me while driving down a country road. He says at one point that he sees a bunch of kids playing up in a tree. Now, I've seen kids up in trees before. Heck, when I was a kid there was a time when I spent quite a bit a time up in trees in my neighborhood. It's something kids do. So I would have no initial basis to dispute what he claims to see. But if he told me that he saw a bunch of kids levitating in the air or balancing tractor trailers on their noses, I'd think he was pulling my leg. My own brother, mind you, someone I've known all my life and can trust with my own life, and here is an instance where I would not accept what he's telling me. Similarly, if someone told me he saw someone who was confirmed dead rise out of a tomb three days later, I'd think either he was mistaken, the doctor made an error in pronouncing him dead, or that I was being bullshitted. And this would be the case even if I could interview the person to see what he really saw. We can't even do that with Paul, and here you want me to believe what he says on his own say so, even though he gives essentially no detail on what he experienced. So am I really being unreasonable or inconsistent here?

I wrote: "For Paul, Jesus' authority was post-resurrection. For the gospels, his authority preceded his resurrection during an earthly ministry, something Paul does not seem to be aware of."

David: "Does the Last Supper passage fit this criterion? (I Corinthians 11:23-26)"

This is probably the only feature in Paul's letters where he refers at any length to an earthly Jesus. But notice that even here he does not indicate a time or place. He mentions that it was nighttime, but when? And where? I tend to see Paul's version of the sacred meal as something he or others before him have imported into the new religion from the surrounding pagan culture, whose many mystery religions involved sacred meals.

I wrote: "If this is the best "evidence" from a Pauline document for a *recent* resurrection for Jesus (and if there were something stronger, I'd expect you to have come running back with it instead of this), then it is as weak and tenuous as it could get."

David: "I think the evidence provided by Robert is as weak and tenuous as it could get."

Honestly, David, if Paul's reference to "the brother of the Lord" is the best support we can find in his letters for a recent resurrection, a weak and tenuous evidence against it is sufficient IMO.

Well, that's about all I have time for tonight. I have some chores to tend to.

Regards,
Dawson

[August 04, 2008 9:08 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David,

A minor correction here on my part.

You had written: "I did not ask him, and I cannot personally date the creed. I have ordered one of his most thorough books so if he addresses it I'll let you know. My guess is you're right."

And I responded: "Again, David, I'm just speculating here. These are some touchy questions, I grant, but I do take them seriously."

I had meant to say "I'm *not* just speculating here..." In fact, as I think you can tell, I've given these matters a lot of consideration.

Regards,
Dawson

[August 05, 2008 5:53 AM](#)

[Robert B](#) said...

I spent a few moments at the office this morning with Dr. George A. Wells' "Can We Trust the New Testament". He points out that the Christ myth crafted from then notions of Graeco-Roman-Egyptian savior gods is not a silly idea.

"Nevertheless, it is not easy entirely to discount the importance of some pagan idea even in oldest Christianity. They are evident in Paul, and D.G. Bostock - a clergyman writing in a theological journal - has recently argued strongly for his indebtedness to Egyptian religion, a faith which had then spread "all over the classical world." Paul, he says, justifies belief in the resurrection of the dead "on the basis of what the Egyptians believed to be the central principle involved, namely that a person is able to germinate in the manner of a plant from its seed." Paul's example of a grain of wheat (1 Cor. 15:37) "recalls the Egyptian image of the corn growing out the mummified body of Osiris as a sign of the germination of the spirit-body." Moreover, Christ has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor. 15:25); and this, although a natural image, and one used at Psalm 110:1, was also "a marked feature of Egyptian theology in that Osiris is reported to have sat on his enemies in triumph over them." But 'by far the most important parallel between Christ and Osiris is the way that Paul depicts Christ as the archetype of a universal resurrection" (1 Cor. 15:22-23). I would add as a further parallel, that according to Plutarch (see Griffiths, pp 85, 181) the festival of Osiris was spread over three days, his death being mourned on the first and his resurrection celebrated on the night of the third with the joyful shout "Osiris has been found." -

George A. Wells, "Can We Trust the New Testament", 18. (Google books limited preview)

Wells also notes the inapplicability of Tacitus, Josephus and other alleged extra Biblical sources to establishing existence for a historical Jesus.

"Appeal is still sometimes made to Tacitus as having confirmed the gospels' story that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. But the few pagan and Jewish references to Jesus are all too late to serve as such confirmation. The Catholic scholar J.P. Meier allows that Tacitus, and Pliny too, both writing ca. A.D. 112, "reflect what they have heard Christians of their own day say," and so are not "independent extracanonical sources." As for Jewish testimony, "no early rabbinic text ... contains information about Jesus," and later ones "simply reflect knowledge of, and mocking midrash on, Christian texts and preaching" (p.466) Meier does accept Josephus as an independent confirmatory source; but he too was writing the relevant book at a time (around 94 A.D.) when at least some of the gospels were available, and at a place (Rome) where he could well have heard about Jesus from Christians. In any case, few allow that the obviously Christian words in the paragraph about Jesus in his Antiquities are from the pen of this orthodox Jew. Had he believed what is here ascribed to him, he would not have confined his remarks on Jesus and Christianity to a few lines (cf. The detailed discussion of both the Jewish and the Pagan references in Chapter 4 of my 1999a book)." - George A. Wells, "Can We Trust the New Testament", 52. (Google books limited preview)

[August 05, 2008 6:09 AM](#)

[Robert B](#) said...

Further to the question of 1 Cor 15:3-8, Robert M. Price alerts the reader to the thinking of "William O. Walker Jr., has suggested that, contrary to those opinions just reviewed, "in dealing with any particular letter in the corpus, the burden of proof rests with any argument that the corpus or, indeed any particular letter within the corpus... contains no interpolations." [6] Among the reasons advanced by Walker is the fact that

the surviving text of the Pauline letters is the text promoted by the historical winners in the theological and ecclesiastical struggles of the second and third centuries... In short, it appears likely that the emerging Catholic leadership in the churches 'standardized' the text of the Pauline corpus in the light of 'orthodox' view and practices, suppressing and even destroying all deviant texts and manuscripts. Thus it is that we have no manuscripts dating from earlier than the third century; thus it is that all of the extant manuscripts are remarkably similar in most of their significant features; and thus it is that the manuscript evidence can tell us nothing about the state of the Pauline literature prior to the third century.[7]

[6] William O. Walker, Jr., "The Burden of Proof in Identifying Interpolations in the Pauline Letters," NTS 33 (1987), 610-618:615.

[7] Ibid., 614; cf. Bart D. Ehrman, The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 277: "this study has reinforced the notion that theologically motivated changes of the text are to be anticipated particularly during the early centuries of transmission, when both the texts and the theology of early Christianity were in a state of flux, prior to the development of a recognized creed and an authoritative and (theoretically) inviolable canon of Scripture." See also pages 55 and 97."

[Apocryphal Apparitions: 1 Corinthians 15:3-11 As a Post-Pauline Interpolation](#)

Ehrman's oft cited work is validated by Kannaday who agrees that the burden of proof is on the apologist to show their text original to its presumptive source.

"In his 1993 monograph entitled "The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture", Bart Ehrman demonstrated with compelling force that a large number of variant readings in the canonical text were the products of scribes attuned to the Christological controversies of the second and third centuries. He argued that scores of intentional readings were generated in direct response to various "heresies", and could thus be recognized and classified on the basis of their precipitating motivation as anti-docetic, anti-separationist, anti-adoptionist, and anti-patristic. Based on his study, he concluded that copiers of the text who subscribed to "proto-orthodox" beliefs altered that text to make it say what they already thought it meant." - "Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition", Wayne Campbell Kannaday, p.16

Is 1 Cor 15:3-11 an interpolation? The converse question is better. Was 1 Cor. 15:3-11 even written by Paul? Would it not make more sense of the text to posit a furiously scribbling orthodox apologist simply added what he thought necessary to counter the offensive teaching of some heretical group? Is there a smoking gun passage showing Paul had no belief in a recent physical crucified and resurrected Christ? Why yes, there is.

In "The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man", Robert M. Price engages in discussion of Paul L. Couchoud's observation that knocks the wind out of Christianity like a sucker punch in the solar-plexus. "Couchoud pointed out a neglected detail of the important text Phil. 2:6-1, a hymn fragment about the suffer and exaltation of the Christ:

Phil 2:6-11 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, [even death on a cross]. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Price continues: "Scholars agree [4] that the bracketed phrase, "event death on a cross" is secondary, as interrupts the meter of the rest. All agree as well that the hymn text is based ultimately on Isa. 45:22-23.

Isa 45:22 "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.'

Price elucidates: " The Philippians hymn thus delegates what was originally conceived as the exclusive divine dominion of Yahve to his glorified Christ after his suffering, in accord with the ancient mytheme glimpsed in Dan. 7:13-14 of Baal assuming coregency with his father El following his resurrection victory over Mot the death monster. all agree that the Philippians hymn does depict the divine enthronement of the vindicated Christ. But they invariably read the text as if God had bestowed on someone already called Jesus the divine title Kurios, "Lord", equivalent to Adonai in the Old Testament, Couchoud notices that this is not quite what the text says. Instead, what we read is that, because of his humiliating self-sacrifice, an unnamed heavenly being has been granted a mighty name that henceforth should call forth confessions of

fealty from all beings in the cosmos. At the name of "Jesus" every knee should bow,.
Every tongue acknowledge his Lordship.

But, Couchoud reasoned with ineluctable logic, does not this piece of early Christian tradition presuppose a theology of the savior whereby he received the name Jesus only after his death struggle, even as Jacob received the honorific name Israel only after wrestling with God (Gen. 32:24-38)? According to such an understanding, there can have been no Galilean adventures of an itinerant teacher and healer named Jesus. Rather, these stories must necessarily have arisen only at a subsequent stage of belief when the savior's glorification, along with his honorific name Jesus, had been retrojected back before his death. I would suggest that only such a scenario of early Christological development can account for, first the utter absence of the gospel-story tradition from most of the New Testament epistles, and second, the fictive, non-historical character of story after story in the Gospels.

And this in turn implies that the name of Jesus, once it came to be taken for granted as the name of the character, was unwittingly retrojected into the past history of the Character...."

Robert M. Price, "The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man", p.352-353

[4] Ralph P. Martin, "Carmen Christ: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Scholarship and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship", rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1983) pp. lxxxvii-xxxviii, 314-315; Joachim Jeremias, "The Central Message of the New Testament" (New York: Scribner, 1965), p.74 ;Reginald H Fuller, "The Foundations of New Testament Christology", (New York: Scribner, 1965), p.204

A straight forward plain sense reading of the text indicates the unnamed hero is awarded the name of "Jesus" only after performance of and as reward for the salvific act. This indicates that the early cultists from whom the hymn was appropriated and Paul agreed; Christ was a cosmic spirit being. This reading supports the hypothesis that Paul either did not write 1Cor. 15:3-11, or if he did that he meant by "optanomai," that Christ appeared (as imagined by modern devote acolytes) on a taco or in a stain on the wall of a ladies washroom. That this is probable can be ascertained by the cognition that real physical people are not "optanomai" (1 Cor 15;3-8) when seen but are rather "blepo" (2 Cor 4:18) with the physical eye. Steven Carr has pointed out the obvious parsimony of this spiritual vision hypothesis repeatedly.

There is more evidence that 1 Cor. 15:3-8 is a late interpolation or is best understood by the spiritual vision hypothesis. In ACTS 23:26-31 we find Claudius Lysias' letter to Felix. This letter makes no sense in light of a recently physically crucified and resurrecting Jesus, but is readily explained if Paul believed Jesus to be and was always a spiritual divinity that performed its salvific action in the spirit realm or ancient legend. Claudius' letter claims he was present in the council of the Jews when Paul explained his case. Claudius found Paul to be only in dispute with the Jews over a matter of their law. If Claudius had heard Paul say something like, "Jesus was recently a living man who the Jews tricked the Romans into condemning and crucifying, but GOD raised him from the dead. And we know this because he was seen alive by the Apostles". He would have arrested Paul for treason. Claudius Lysias was Greek and likely an initiate of the Elysian mysteries with no belief in a physical bodily resurrection. Claudius, being Tribune and top cop in Jerusalem, would have thought Paul to have assisted the criminal Jesus in escaping or that Paul knew who helped Jesus get away. So instead of sending Paul to Felix with a nice letter, Claudius would have tortured Paul to find out where the Apostles were and would have sent out the troops to find Jesus and the Apostles. So it would be the case that Paul in the council of the

Jews said nothing about Jesus being a man in Jerusalem recently crucified by the Romans and raised from the dead. If however he had instead presented Jesus as a spirit world deity similar to an ordinary god or as a figure of dim ancient legend, Claudius Lysias would have acted as he is recorded as doing in Acts 23. In Rome of the first century, it was a capital crime to deify any person after their death other than the Emperor. If Claudius had heard Paul doing so, he would have arrested Paul on charges of treason. But Claudius sent Paul on to Felix, so Claudius heard Paul and the Jews disputing only about matters of Jewish law. This is very well explained if Paul believed Christ Jesus to be only a spirit world deity or a figure of dim ancient legend. Paul's silence regarding details of the alleged life of Jesus is strong evidence no such life actually existed as we very strongly expect Paul to relate to his congregates in terms of his Lords alleged life.

If the letter of Claudius Lysias' to Felix is historical, then Paul's Christianity was proto-Gnostic-Docetic lacking belief in a recently physically crucified and resurrecting Jesus. This too supports either the interpolation or spiritual vision hypothesis.

[August 05, 2008 8:48 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Robert:

"suppressing and even destroying all deviant texts and manuscripts"

Have you checked out the dialogue Ehrman and Wallace has last year at the Greer-Heard forum? Wallace pressed Ehrman on this very issue, and his main point was you can't have it both ways. The wide geographical dispersion of the text during the 2nd century would have made it impossible for the church leadership to standardize the Pauline corpus.

Also in your footnote *"when both the texts and the theology of early Christianity were in a state of flux, prior to the development of a recognized creed and an authoritative and (theoretically) inviolable canon of Scripture."*

I am pretty sure Ehrman is agreeable regarding Marcion's canon of 140AD and the Muratorian canon of 170AD. They both confirm the same 13 Pauline epistles Christians affirm today; so he must mean early 2nd century.

I should point out that if one wants to be skeptical about the canon, you should wonder why the early church leadership chose to attribute Marcan authorship when they knew he was writing down Peter's words. Why not put Peter at the wheel, if you know that this will guarantee the story gets in the stack?

I think there were certainly scribal emendations but keep in mind Bart knows that this amounts to 1% of the whole sample of variants (about 138,000 words in the NT we have about 300,000-400,000 total variants...1% of those are the are considered both viable and meaningful) What he is arguing is that since most of our textual evidence post-dates the 2nd century (I think we have about 12 manuscripts total from that period), we can't be 100% certain that there weren't theological changes; again, see the debate with Wallace in order to get the perspective on this from a conservative textual critic. At any rate, Ehrman would only be satisfied if we still had the autographa.

[August 05, 2008 9:27 AM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

In Philippians 2:6-11 all the verbs except "huparcho" and "einai" are in the Aorist tense. "Huparcho" and "einai", found in 2:6, are in the Present See tense. The overall meaning then of the passage is one of an on going spiritual activity. There is no indication of any past activity in the Philippians hymn as would be required if Paul had meant reference to a recently historical human Jesus. English translations have been made in accordance with the mythology established by the canonical Gospels.

2:6 "huparcho" Present See tense.

2:6 " hegeomai" Aorist tense.

2:6 "einai" Present See tense.

2:7 "kenoo" Aorist tense

2:7 "lambano" Aorist tense

2:7 "ginomai" Aorist tense

2:8 "heurisko" Aorist tense

2:8 "tapeinoo" Aorist tense

2:8 "ginomai" Aorist tense

2:9 "huperupsoo" Aorist tense

2:9 "charizomai" Aorist tense

2:10 "kampto" Aorist tense

David: "I think there were certainly scribal emendations..."

Nevertheless, the early Jesus freaks still simply made up their stories.

David: "we can't be 100% certain that there weren't theological changes"

On the contrary, we can be 100% certain there were many wholesale emendations and changes. The proto-orthodox priests were wild eyed religious fanatics willing to do anything to win their doctrinal wars. Do not project your own self-image (of a reasonable person) onto those crazed and delusional primitives that crafted Christianity. They like Paul were liars for God. Rom. 3:7, Phil 1:18.

"In his 1993 monograph entitled "The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture", Bart Ehrman demonstrated with compelling force that a large number of variant readings in the canonical text were the products of scribes attuned to the Christological controversies of the second and third centuries. He argued that scores of intentional readings were generated in direct response to various "heresies", and could thus be recognized and classified on the basis of their precipitating motivation as anti-docetic, anti-separationist, anti-adoptionist, and anti-patristic. Based on his study, he concluded that copiers of the text who subscribed to "proto-orthodox" beliefs altered that text to make it say what they already thought it meant." - "Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition", Wayne Campbell Kannaday, p.16

Kannaday's book is recent.

"Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition: Evidence of the Influence of Apologetic Interests on the Text of the Canonical Gospels"

By Wayne Campbell Kannaday

Published by Society of Biblical Literature, 2004

ISBN 1589831012, 9781589831018

"the surviving text of the Pauline letters is the text promoted by the historical winners in the theological and ecclesiastical struggles of the second and third centuries... In short, it appears likely that the emerging Catholic leadership in the churches 'standardized' the text of the Pauline corpus in the light of 'orthodox' view and practices, suppressing and even destroying all deviant texts and manuscripts. Thus it is that we have no manuscripts dating from earlier than the third century; thus it is that all of the extant manuscripts are remarkably similar in most of their significant features; and thus it is that the manuscript evidence can tell us nothing about the state of the Pauline literature prior to the third century."

[6] William O. Walker, Jr., "The Burden of Proof in Identifying Interpolations in the Pauline Letters," NTS 33 (1987), 610-618:615.

[August 05, 2008 10:05 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Robert:

I think D.A. Carson covered the "Aorist Tense Fallacy" in his book, *Exegetical Fallacies*.

[August 05, 2008 10:19 AM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

Robert_b: "The proto-orthodox priests were wild eyed religious fanatics willing to do anything to win their doctrinal wars."

As an example illustrating my point , I direct attention towards the difference between Jeremiah 32:31 and how Jeremiah is quoted in Hebrews 8:9.

I noticed the difference between Jer. 32:31 and Heb. 8:9. (Bible verses are from Young's Literal Translation.)

Not like the covenant that I made with their fathers, In the day of My laying hold on their hand, To bring them out of the land of Egypt, In that they made void My covenant, And I ruled over them -- an affirmation of Jehovah. Jer 31:32 (YLT)

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day of My taking [them] by their hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt -- because they did not remain in My covenant, and I did not regard them, saith the Lord, -- Heb 8:9 (YLT)

In J31:32b we read: "In that they made void My covenant, And I ruled over them", but in H8:9b the text reads: "because they did not remain in My covenant, and I did not regard them". First notice the differences in 32b, it says "they [the Jews] made void My covenant" while in 9b, it says: "because they did not remain in My covenant". This is significant from a theological and doctrinal standpoint. If the Jews voided the covenant as in Jeremiah, then there is no offense against the deity, for the covenant is simply voided. Distinctively different is Hebrews, where "they [the Jews] did not remain in My covenant" means the Jews were liable and culpable for offense against the deity since the covenant was still in effect.

Secondly, in Jer. 31:32b the text says: "...And I ruled over them...", but Heb. 8:9b reads as: "...and I did not regard them...". In the former, Yahweh is still sovereign and the Jews are still his people; however, in the later, Yahweh has abandoned the Jews by no longer regarding them. It appears the Hebraic author cooked the books to make a foundation of lies upon which to build Christianity's doctrine that its believers are the replacements for the Jews as the chosen people.

The author of Hebrews purposefully and knowingly changed the text of Jeremiah 31:32 in order to make these subtle distinctions. This the Hebraic author did despite his "faith" that by placing lies in the "mouth" of the divine Yahweh, he would be incurring the wrath of the deity via way of the "Lake of Fire". This sort of activity in the NT authors and later in the patristic fathers, is strongly supportive of Ehrman. The religious fanatic nut jobs who started the Catholic Church fantasied up from their imaginations Christianity's God.

[August 05, 2008 10:37 AM](#)

[Robert B](#) said...

David: "I think D.A. Carson covered the "Aorist Tense Fallacy" in his book, Exegetical Fallacies."

The only way Carson could be right would be if the Aorist Tense actually means either the past, present, or future tenses. That could only happen if koin greek were not koin greek. But the Law of Identity is in effect, even for people who believe silly things like A is not A or that god exists.

Carson is wrong. The Aorist tense denotes action without regard to temporal situation. In reality, all that exists, exists with regard to time. Thus the Aorist tense can only refer to that which is not part of the physical world, the "spiritual" realm which is not in time.

Christianity was a mystery cult that propounded a "spiritual" technology. Discussion of the nuts and bolts of how such "spiritual" technology could operate would not make sense in reference to actual reality and time. Only the Aorist tense would then suffice for describing actions in the "spirit" realm, for the Aorist tense was intended to preclude understanding related to the real world and time.

Thus Phil. 2:6-11 is very strong evidence Paul had no belief in an actual recent human Jesus.

David, I invite you to renounce Christianity. If you currently belief that disgusting nonsense, you can get started on the road to recovery today. Just say and mean to yourself.

"I reject and renounce Christianity and Jesus belief. In its place I accept a commitment to reality, to reason, to humanity, and most of all to myself. I have a right to exist for me and for me alone."

You can do this. There are no adverse consequences and many benefits. Living a fully actualized life free from the fear of superstition in peace and love is far more fulfilling than wasting your time studying useless and obscene religious dogmas.

[August 05, 2008 11:00 AM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

David: "you should wonder why the early church leadership chose to attribute Marcan authorship when they knew he was writing down Peter's words. Why not put Peter at the wheel, if you know that this will guarantee the story gets in the stack?"

That's a fair question, and I'll do what I can to provide an answer within a few days.

[August 05, 2008 11:50 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson, I'll be brief since I think we've covered a lot of ground.

"Unless there was something else I missed, this seemed to be the only item in all of Paul's letters (mind you, Paul is the single most prolific author in the NT) by which a connection can supposedly be made to an earthly Jesus that is a contemporary of Paul."

Barring information gleaned from the gospels that would be the only one I am aware of (I've only been studying this stuff in my spare time for about a year now). The discussion of "the apostles" was sort of abandoned but I think there is good evidence that Paul knew these early church leaders were head honchos precisely because they hung out with Jesus during his earthly ministry.

Also with respect to "brother of the Lord," it would be unusual for Paul not to call Jesus kurios in this passage. No arguments from me there. How adelphos is commonly used does not settle the issue. I actually think there is some evidence that adelphos could also imply "cousin" but suffice it to say that no small amount of evidence such as presented here will support or refute this.

"I've been very clear on this: using the gospels to back-date the resurrection appearances found in 1 Cor. 15:3-8 in order to discredit the legend theory simply begs the question."

You've been very clear in your assertion, but not your premises.

"Actually, David, all I need to do is ask those who recoil against my above observation to identify where Paul does make it clear that Cephas and/or James belong to "the twelve."

You have narrowed your scope to Pauline material to make your case, which already limits my apologetic if I am to assume your presuppositions (or whatever you want to call them). Needless to say external evidence would establish much more which is why NT historians don't limit themselves to internal evidence. Yes you are correct that I would not be able to demonstrate internally that Paul identified Cephas/James with "the twelve."

"Can you supply the content of what this oral tradition was?"

No and I don't need to. If Paul mentions an oral tradition to Corinth I'm saying it's probable that he "delivered" more information to them prior to reciting this creed.

"Can you be certain that the gospel accounts..."

Competing theories have not shown themselves more probable, but I don't think we're objective here either way. There are biases on both sides which are imported into the interpretation and modeling of the data...so you might say I'm equally skeptical of skepticism and conservative scholarship.

"For that matter, then, why does Paul need to recite it? Your own question undermines the point you're trying to make with it."

He delivered something orally, and then wrote 1 Corinthians. The text (the only evidence you allow in your courtroom) implies that either a) he wrote something nonsensical or b) he had already explained the underlying meaning of the creed. c) this oral tradition was known widely enough amongst Christians that Paul could reasonably expect Corinth to know who "the twelve" were. My question doesn't undermine my point because you are assuming Paul needed to write something. You are putting modernist ideals into Paul.

"If Paul convened with Peter to get his facts straight, how could he have repeated this error?" Do you correct your people when they say the "sun came up this morning"? To me, that would be the equivalent of "the twelve" vs "the eleven" in the ancient mind.

"I tend to see Paul's version of the sacred meal as something he or others before him have imported into the new religion from the surrounding pagan culture, whose many mystery religions involved sacred meals."

When is the earliest evidence we have of mystery religions using sacred meals, like 2nd or 3rd century?

[August 05, 2008 12:59 PM](#)

[madmax](#) said...

Dawson,

Off Topic but... have you read "The Mind of the Bible-Believer" by Edmund D. Cohen? If you have could you comment on what you think of it. I agree with him about the mind control aspects of the Bible but he seems to be a die-hard Kantian and Jungian. He also seems to be sympathetic with theism and religion. If I get him right, he believes in God but just not the God of the Bible. I'm half way through and while there is value to the book, his irrationalism and poor writing skills are wearing me down.

I think you have mentioned this book in your writings which is why I ask.

Thanks

[August 05, 2008 6:05 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

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[August 06, 2008 2:00 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

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[August 06, 2008 2:11 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

David: "you should wonder why the early church leadership chose to attribute Marcan authorship when they knew he was writing down Peter's words. Why not put Peter at the wheel, if you know that this will guarantee the story gets in the stack?"

David's query begs the question in several ways. By asserting that I should be concerned about (presumably) the Jesus myth case because of Christian apologetical assertions that canonical Mark was authored by the legendary secretary John Markus to Simon Peter the Apostle, is to assume that the Gospel story is historical. The historicity of the Gospel story is, however, the issue at question.

It is *Petitio principii* to think there was "leadership" in early Christianity because doing so assumes a "big bang" origin of Christianity with a legendary founder, Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, Christianity was always a schizophrenic diversity of cultic expression characterized by many sects each with a writhing, squirming, wad of competitive would be prophets and apostles. Christianity was never a single organization prior to the darkness of total Catholic control. Asserting there was 2-nd century consensus or unity begs the question.

Its circular reasoning to think that putting Peter at the wheel will guarantee the story gets in the stack because that is to assume the gospel stories are historical. That, however, is the question at issue?

To suggest Irenaeus' agenda of establishing his four gospels as authoritative was contested is to ignore the *Sitz im Leben* of late second century Catholicism and to assume that the other types of Christianity then extant would be in any way influenced by what they considered gross error or that their complaints might be considered by Irenaeus. Would the Gnostics or Jewish-Christian sectarians have been influenced by Irenaeus? Of course not. Would Irenaeus deliberate over the concerns of opposing sectarians? Perposterous nonsense. Who was there in the 2-nd century to say what was scripture and what was not? David is projecting his conception of modern intellectual discussion back onto the ancients. The religious landscape of 2-nd century Rome was a free-for-all. There were Holy Ghost's, Prophets-Of-The-Real-Gods, Apostles-O-Christ-du jure on every street corner. Vast numbers of phony preachers and cult leaders competed for followers and their loot, and there was no end to the fools and loons who willingly followed and coughed up all they had. The much later Church Councils and Synods of the fourth century were 150 to 200 years yet to come relative to Irenaeus. However, his writings were influential with third and fourth century Catholics in establishing preferred dogma. The later churchmen then accepted Irenaeus' recommendations (an reliance on Papias) because his gospels told the story in a manner compliant with their desire to create an authoritative institution issuing command catechism. Irenaeus' claim regarding authorship of Mark stem from Papias. However, the zany notion that the canonical Gospel of Mark was authored by the legendary secretary John Markus to Simon Peter the Apostle as per Papias cannot be substantiated from what historical data we have.

Since the four canonical gospels do not show up in the literary record prior to Irenaeus naming them in "Against Heresies,"

"After their departure (death of Peter & Paul), Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter." - [Against Heresies 3:1:1](#)

we can reasonably accept a strong prior probability that were canonical Mark and Matthew in circulation prior to Irenaeus, that Quadratus of Athens, Aristides, Marcion, Polycarp, Justin Martyr and other early 2-nd century apologists would have used them.

But the early 2-nd century Christian churchmen do not cite or quote canonical Mark and Matthew.

It is likely that Irenaeus ascribed authorship of what we think of as the canonical Gospel According to Mark to Presbyter John's Mark based on data from Papias about a quite different document. [Paul Tobin's case thoroughly refutes evangelical assertions that canonical Mark was the document thought to be known to Papias. He explains:](#)

"The first explicit references to the supposed authors of the gospels were from Irenaeus (c130-200). Thus we see him making references to the gospels according to Mark, Matthew, Luke and John in [Against Heresies \(c 180\)](#):

Against Heresies 3:10:5 Wherefore also Mark, the interpreter and follower of Peter, does thus commence his Gospel narrative: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God..." [Mark 1:1]"

The earliest attempt to give the names of the authors of some of the gospels came just before the middle of the second century. This is the witness of an early Christian named Papias, bishop of Heirapolis. He wrote a now lost work entitled The Five Books of Interpretations of the Oracles of the Lord. The actual time of his writing is unknown, and is now available only in fragments quoted by later Christians. Most scholars place it around 130 CE, but it could well be as late as 150 CE. In any case, this is what Papias wrote - as quoted in Eusebius's (c275-339)

[History of the Church:\(Book III, Chpt.39, Art.1\)](#)

Quoted in History of the Church 3:39:15

And the presbyter said this: Mark the interpreter of Peter, wrote down exactly, but not in order, what he remembered of the acts and sayings of the Lord, for he neither heard the Lord himself nor accompanied him, but, as I said, Peter later on. Peter adapted his teachings to the needs [of his hearers], but made no attempt to provide a connected narrative of things related to our Lord. So Mark made no mistake in setting down some things as he remembered them, for he took care not to omit anything he heard nor to include anything false. As for Matthew, he made a collection in Hebrew of the sayings and each translated them as best they could.

His source for this information is one Presbyter John. Who is this mysterious person whom Papias quoted? We do not know. We do know that he was not one of the apostles, as earlier in the same work Papias wrote this:

Quoted in History of the Church 3:39:3-4

And whenever anyone came who had been a follower of the presbyters, I inquired into the words of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter had said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other disciple of the Lord, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord, were still saying.

Note that the presbyter John is not included in the list of the apostles and is not to be confused with the apostle John who was mentioned earlier in the sentence and in the past tense. There is a further point we should note about the witness of Papias. According to Eusebius (History of the Church 3:39:13-14), Papias was a man "of very limited understanding" who "misunderstood apostolic accounts." In other words he must have been, even for his age, quite credulous. We do not foresee such a person counterchecking the reliability of the information given to him by the presbyter. He probably just accepted what was told to him verbatim.

[Robert_B: Presbyter John's story is that his Mark took notes from speeches delivered by Apostle Peter. Our canonical Mark is a narrative story, not a collection of logia sayings.]

Whatever the case may be as to the reliability of this tradition (which we will consider below), Papias' testimony tells us that the name Mark was attached to the gospel around 130-150 CE. Prior to this the document we call the Gospel According to Mark circulated anonymously. It is unlikely that our Gospel According to Mark was the same document Papias referred to. Richard Bauckham in "Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony" (Eerdmans 2006) admits that modern scholars have regarded Papias testimony on Mark as "historically worthless." (Bauckham, Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: p203) - Paul Tobin's web article

[Was Papias a Reliable Witness?](#)

[Robert_B: We know about Papias from Irenaeus through Eusebius. Both Irenaeus and Eusebius are known to have exaggerated and must be approached skeptically

It is quite certain that the Christian landscape of the 2-nd century was saturated with itinerate, vagabond, preachers-teachers-prophets-apostles who traveled about swindling credulous Christian believers. Even Paul warned about such in 2 Cor 11:4. The Didache warns against such itinerate apostles..

[Let every apostle who comes to you be received as the Lord. But he shall not remain more than one day; or two days, if there's a need. But if he remains three days, he is a false prophet.](#)

[Robert_B: We cannot, therefore, rule out that presbyter John was not a swindling con-man who targeted Papias as a mark.

Richard Packham in "Critique of John Warwick Montgomery's Arguments for the Legal Evidence for Christianity" notes regarding Papias that: "The testimony of Papias is the earliest authority for the authorship of the Apostles, but it is scarcely "solid." We do not even have Papias' direct testimony, since his writings are lost. Our information about Papias' testimony comes only by way of Eusebius, who wrote in the fourth century, and who portrays Papias as being somewhat gullible. The "John" of whom Papias was a student was more likely John Presbyter than John the Evangelist (or John the Apostle, if they can be proven identical). In short, the "solid" evidence is not as solid as Montgomery would like us to believe."

[In "Supernatural Religion: An Inquiry Into the Reality of Divine Revelation", \(full view available on Google Books\) Walter Richard Cassels presents a thoroughly convincing case that canonical Mark is not the same document as that spoken of by Papias. The argument starts on page 276 and runs through 286.](#)

Cassels concluded that: "It is not necessary for us to account for the manner in which the work referred to by the Presbyter John disappeared, and the present Gospel according to Mark became substituted for it. The merely negative evidence that our actual Gospel is not the work described by Papias is sufficient for our purpose. Any one acquainted with the thoroughly uncritical character of the Fathers, and with the literary history of the early Christian Church, will readily conceive the facility with which this can have been accomplished. The great mass of intelligent critics are agreed that our Synoptic Gospels have assumed their present form only after repeated modifications by various editors of earlier evangelical works. These changes have not been effected without traces being left by which the various materials may be separated and distinguished ; but the more primitive Gospels have entirely

disappeared, naturally supplanted by the later and amplified versions. The critic, however, who distinguishes between the earlier and later matter is not bound to perform the now impossible feat of producing the originals, or accounting in any but a general way for the disappearance of the primitive Gospel.

[Tischendorf](#) asks : "How then has neither Eusebius nor any other theologian of Christian antiquity thought that the expressions of Papias were in contradiction with the two Gospels (Mt. And Mk.)?"

The absolute credulity with which those theologians accepted any fiction, however childish, which had a pious tendency, and the frivolous character of the only criticism in which they indulged, render their unquestioning application of the tradition of Papias to our Gospels anything but singular, and it is only surprising to find their silent acquiescence elevated into an argument. We have already, in the course of these pages, seen something of the singularly credulous and uncritical character of the Fathers, and we cannot afford space to give instances of the absurdities with which their writings abound. No fable could be too gross, no invention too transparent, for their unsuspecting acceptance, if it assumed a pious form or tended to edification. No period in the history of the world ever produced so many spurious works as the first two or three centuries of our era. The name of every Apostle, or Christian teacher, not excepting that of the great Master himself, was freely attached to every description of religious forgery. False gospels, epistles, acts, martyrologies, were unscrupulously circulated, and such pious falsification was not even intended, or regarded, as a crime, but perpetrated for the sake of edification. It was only slowly and after some centuries that many of these works, once, as we have seen, regarded with pious veneration, were excluded from the canon; and that genuine works shared this fate, while spurious ones usurped their places, is one of the surest results of criticism that the Fathers omitted to inquire critically when such investigation might have been of value, and mere tradition credulously accepted and transmitted is of no critical value. In an age when the multiplication of copies of any work was a slow process, and their dissemination a matter of difficulty and even danger, it is easy to understand with what facility the more complete and artistic Gospel could take the place of the original notes as the work of Mark." - Cassels, "Supernatural Religion" p.285-286

Charles B. Waite in his definitive - [History of the Christian Religion: To the Year Two Hundred](#) wrote the following about Papias' alleged witness to the Gospels According to Mark and Matthew.

*Such is this far famed testimony (Eusebius, Ecc. Hist. bk. 3, ch. 89.)

That portion relating to the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, may be stated as follows: Eusebius says, that Papias said, that John the presbyter said, in what manner certain writings of Mark and Matthew had been constructed. The value to be attached to any statements of Eusebius, will be considered hereafter. One important circumstance will be noted, in the evidence, as it stands: Notwithstanding this explanation of the apostolic origin of the books, it appears that Papias considered them, as evidence, inferior to oral tradition. That, too, a hundred years after the time, when, as is claimed, they were written. Again, it is contended by able critics, that the language here attributed to Papias, concerning the book written by Mark, cannot be applied to the gospel which bears his name. ' They insist that it must be referred to the Preaching of Peter, or some other document more ancient than the Gospel of Mark. So also of the logia, oracles or sayings of Christ, by Matthew, which were not the same as the Gospel of Matthew.* - "History of the Christian Religion: To the Year Two Hundred", By Charles Burlingame Waite, p.237 (full view on Google books)

Papias' credulity did not escape Eusebius who wrote of him that: [13. For he appears to have been of very limited understanding, as one can see from his discourses. Church History \(Book III, Chpt.39, Art.13\)](#)

That Papias would accept anything is evident by the surviving *fragment of Papias' writing, preserved by Apollinarius of Laodicea, a fourth century Christian bishop, tells of the fate of Judas. It is important to read this passage in full:

Judas did not die by hanging, but lived on, having been cut down before choking. And this the Acts of the Apostles makes clear, that falling headlong his middle burst and his bowels poured forth. And Papias the disciple of John records this most clearly, saying thus in the fourth of the Exegeses of the Words of the Lord:

Judas walked about as an example of godlessness in this world, having been bloated so much in the flesh that he could not go through where a chariot goes easily, indeed not even his swollen head by itself. For the lids of his eyes, they say, were so puffed up that he could not see the light, and his own eyes could not be seen, not even by a physician with optics, such depth had they from the outer apparent surface. And his genitalia appeared more disgusting and greater than all formlessness, and he bore through them from his whole body flowing pus and worms, and to his shame these things alone were forced [out]. And after many tortures and torments, they say, when he had come to his end in his own place, from the place became deserted and uninhabited until now from the stench, but not even to this day can anyone go by that place unless they pinch their nostrils with their hands, so great did the outflow from his body spread out upon the earth. [Fragment 3, from The Apostolic Fathers Translated By J. B. Lightfoot & J. R. Harmer]

Anyone who reads this will immediately notice a few things. Firstly this is a harmonization of the contradictory readings from Matthew 27:3-5 and Acts 1:18-19. [b] Secondly the additional details, like his swollen head, sunken eyes, bloated genitalia, body flowing with pus, emanation of worms and terrible stench are typical motifs used by ancient authors to describe the deserved sufferings of evil men before their deaths. Josephus in Antiquities 17:6:5 described Herod the Great's suffering before his death to include putrefied genitals, emanation of pus and worms and bad stench. Acts 12:23 describes the death of Herod's grandson, Herod Agrippa I by stating that he was struck by an angel and was "eaten by worms." In other words the story about Judas suffering is an expected folkloric expansion of the brief accounts given in the Matthew and Acts. [Maccoby, Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil: p82-84]

Obviously this fable recounted by Papias certainly did not come from eyewitness accounts. Yet he presented it quite matter-of-factly as though he was recounting real history!

There are further examples from available fragments of Papias' writing of the basic unreliability of his writings. He was a teller of tall tales. In the fragment preserved by Philip of Side (c. 380 - c. 439), we hear of the daughters of Philip who would drink snake venom with no ill effects, of a woman resurrected and of those who were raised by Jesus surviving until the early second century!

The aforesaid Papias reported as having received it from the daughters of Philip that Barsabas who is Justus, tested by the unbelievers, drank the venom of a viper in the name of the Christ and was protected unharmed. He also reports other wonders and especially that about the mother of Manaemus, her resurrection from the dead. Concerning those resurrected by Christ from the dead, that they lived until Hadrian. [Fragment 5, from The Apostolic Fathers Translated By J. B. Lightfoot & J. R. Harmer]

We can now see why Eusebius noted that Papias writes of "strange parables" and "mythical tales." The latter's credulousness is strong evidence that Papias was as Eusebius described him: someone of "limited understanding." As for his claim of diligent collection and remembering of the Jesus tradition from the elders, we have an example of this in Irenaeus. Irenaeus cited Papias as his source for this saying of Jesus about the millennium:

Against Heresies 5:33:3-4

As the elders who saw John, the disciple of the Lord, related that they had heard from him how the Lord used to teach in regard to these times, and say: The days will come, in which vines shall grow, each having ten thousand branches, and in each branch ten thousand twigs, and in each true twig ten thousand shoots, and in each one of the shoots ten thousand clusters, and on every one of the clusters ten thousand grapes, and every grape when pressed will give five and twenty metretres of wine...And these things are borne witness to in writing by Papias, the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp, in his fourth book; for there were five books compiled by him

The source of this saying attributed to Jesus is not from any extant Christian writing or oral tradition - but Jewish apocrypha! Compare the passage below from 2 Baruch, a late first century or early second century Jewish pseudepigraphical text.

2 Baruch 29:3-6

And it shall come to pass when all is accomplished that was to come to pass in those parts, that the Messiah shall then begin to be revealed. ...The earth also shall yield its fruit ten thousandfold and on each (?) vine there shall be a thousand branches, and each branch shall produce a thousand clusters, and each cluster produce a thousand grapes, and each grape produce a cor of wine.

The above evidence tells us that Papias was not a careful historian but a credulous second century Christian who seemed eager to believe anything that confirms his faith in Jesus.* - Paul Tobin [Was Papias a Reliable Witness?](#)

In light of this stuff, the question of Peter-Mark-Papias is viscosly circular, for Papias was an unreliable witness. His testimony cannot be taken seriously by any honest exegetical investigator.

[August 06, 2008 2:27 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hello David,

These last two days have been very busy for me, and I don't think tomorrow or Friday will be much different. So I had to be very selective in my response.

David: "Also with respect to 'brother of the Lord', it would be unusual for Paul not to call Jesus kurios in this passage. No arguments from me there. How adelphos is commonly used does not settle the issue. I actually think there is some evidence that adelphos could also imply "cousin" but suffice it to say that no small amount of evidence such as presented here will support or refute this."

I went to biblegateway.com and did a search on keyword 'brother' in the Pauline epistles, and it fetched me 34 results (see [here](#)). Setting aside for a moment Gal. 1:19,

where Paul refers to James as “the Lord’s brother,” not one of the other 33 references using the word ‘brother’ seems to denote a blood relation. In Phil. 2:25 Paul writes:

“Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.”

Now, I don’t know anyone who takes this reference here to mean that Epaphroditus was Paul’s biological sibling. A [commentary about Epaphroditus](#) on biblegateway.com says this about Paul’s reference to him as ‘brother’:

“First, he is my brother, the fundamental term of relationship within the believing community; he is to Paul what the rest of the Philippian Christians are as well.”

So the more we look at this, the more compelling it becomes that Paul used the word ‘brother’ in his letters, pretty much without exception, to indicate a relation within the election, not a biological relation.

I asked: “If Paul convened with Peter to get his facts straight, how could he have repeated this error?”

David: “Do you correct your people when they say the ‘sun came up this morning’?”

The “sun came up this morning” as opposed to what? (And who do you think are “my people”? I just have my wife and daughter, and my wife’s native language is not English, so on occasion I do correct her.)

David: “To me, that would be the equivalent of “the twelve” vs “the eleven” in the ancient mind.”

I don’t think I see what you’re taking as analogous between “the sun came up this morning” and “the twelve” vs. “the eleven.” I suppose if one of “my people” (whoever they may be) said “the sun came up this morning” and another said “the sun came up this afternoon,” that would cause me to question them. Similarly, if Paul is supposed to have gone over with Peter all the details of his gospel, which he claims to have received via revelation directly from the risen Jesus, I would expect that Peter would have made it clear that the post-resurrection Jesus appeared to “the eleven,” as the gospels explicitly state, if in fact the gospel story were true. But if the stories we find in the gospels are later concoctions, stories that had developed for theological purposes and were not recording actual history, then I can see why Paul would not have thought to say that the post-resurrection Jesus had appeared to “the eleven,” since he would not have known about one of the members of “the twelve” defecting prior to Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances.

Either way you slice it, there’s a discrepancy here whose implications for the discussion are sufficient to call itself to our attention. You had accused me earlier of special pleading.

I wrote: “I tend to see Paul’s version of the sacred meal as something he or others before him have imported into the new religion from the surrounding pagan culture, whose many mystery religions involved sacred meals.”

David asked: “When is the earliest evidence we have of mystery religions using sacred meals, like 2nd or 3rd century?”

Scholars have long noted various parallels, some closer than others, between Christianity and pre-Christian religions and religious practices in the ANE. Back in 1899,

Wallis Budge in his *Egyptian Religion* noted (p. 172) that "The ancient Egyptians believed that the deceased must eat the gods and so be imbued with their powers." The mystery religions, whose roots stretch back to the ancient Egyptians, had dominating influence over the pagan world. These religions had various rites of initiation and worship, and they shared certain essentials which are also found in Christianity, such as baptism and sacred meals. Justin Martyr, in defending Christianity against the criticism of his day, wrote, "In saying that the Word was born for us without sexual union as Jesus Christ our teacher, we introduce nothing beyond what is said of those called the Sons of Zeus" (*Apology*, 3). Paul himself, in I Cor., makes it clear that sacred meal rites very similar to Christianity's Eucharist were practiced by other religions in his own day when he writes "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (10:21). So in fact, we don't have to look very far for evidence of rival religions using sacred meals before the 2nd century. It's right there in Paul!

Now, I'm still curious about Paul's claim to have received his information via revelation. How exactly does that work? How can one person be sure that another person has received information from a supernatural source, especially if we cannot interview that person about this claim? How could Paul distinguish what he called "revelation" from what he was imagining? You mention Gal. 2:2 where Paul is apparently saying that he went to Jerusalem to confirm what he learned by revelation. This itself would strike me as odd: if someone learns something by revelation, why would he need other human beings to validate it? When Abraham was told to prepare his son Isaac for sacrifice (Gen. 22), the story does not indicate that he had to go to anyone else to confirm whether or not he got it right. So it's always been very curious to me a) how one supposedly learns something by revelation, b) how that person distinguishes what he claims to have learned by revelation from something he may merely be imagining; and c) why others might be expected to accept such a claim especially when a) and b) are stubbornly difficult if not impossible to explain.

Many Christians have gotten sore at me just for raising these questions, which itself tells me there's something wrong. But you at least seem open to considering them, which is why I'm glad you're sticking around for this discussion.

Regards,
Dawson

[August 06, 2008 7:44 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi Madmax,

Yes, I have read Cohen's book. In fact, I've savoured much of it (particularly the second half where he analyzes the mind-game of Christianity), and have done so in spite of your spot-on criticisms of his work. He makes some amazing observations, but you're right - they're nestled in a frightful worldview of his own, and they have to be picked out from some very over-burdened language. Not an easy read, and I've always wished he could have contained himself in many passages where he just seems to ramble. But it's like panning for gold: there's a lot of dirt and grime and dust, but there are nuggets in there, no doubt about it.

Very good catch, Madmax! I'm glad there's someone out there paying attention.

Regards,

Dawson

[August 06, 2008 7:48 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

David: I hope you are well. I found answers to your questions and posted them. Now its my turn to ask you a question.

If a "traditional" Christian believer accepts the notion of a historical Jesus, James, and Peter, then it would be the case that such a person would reject the "T?bingen School" of New Testament criticism. Consequently, it would follow that a "traditional" Christian believer would accept the Clementine Homilies as having historical worth by portrayal of historical factual information.

In light of such acceptance of the Clementine Homilies, what do you make of the [Epistle of Peter to James ?](#)

In this document, Peter allegedly complains to James about Paul: "For some from among the Gentiles have rejected my legal preaching, attaching themselves to certain lawless and trifling preaching of the man who is my enemy" - Apostle Peter in "Epistle of Peter to James"

If the Epistle of Peter to James is genuine, then it would falsify Pauline Christianity. The amazing fact that Pauline Christianity dominates the landscape of Christian belief, however, would be fatal to Christianity in general if the Epistle of Peter to James were genuine. If there were to be a Holy Spirit leading and guiding Christians to "truth", then it is inexplicable that Pauline Christianity could be the dominate view if the Epistle of Peter to James were genuine. But if the Clementine Homilies describe a set of historical circumstances, then the Epistle of Peter to James probably is authentic. This creates a dilemma.

On the one side, is the "T?bingen School" view that the canonical gospels and Acts were products of the mid to late 2-nd century. If so, then Catholic Christianity was and is a purely human created institution. Protestantism is likewise merely a set of dearly beloved delusions. On the other side of the dilemma rests the realization that the early Jewish Christians held the prior and prime beliefs.

Both horns are fatal to Christianity. In John 14:26 Jesus is alleged to have spoken "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." If the "T?bingen School" view is correct, then Christianity is a product of the late 2-nd century and the Clementine Homilies are fiction. If the Clementine Homilies are true, then Paul was delusional and Jewish Christianity had priority and primacy to claims of correct doctrine. However, since both of these alternatives are contrary to Pauline Christianity and since the Holy spirit was supposed to do the John 14:26 things, then Pauline Christianity could only be triumphant if there was no Holy Spirit it do the John 14:26 things. If there is no Holy Spirit, then there is no Christian God irregardless of whether there was actually a historical Jesus of some sort.

[August 07, 2008 11:27 AM](#)

[Chris](#) said...

In regards the 12 vs 11 discussion point; Just because Judas betrayed Christ doesn't mean that Christ then did not appear to him. If anything I would think it more important that Christ appear to Judas if for no other reason than to show him his error.

[August 07, 2008 12:02 PM](#)

[madmax](#) said...

Dawson,

Thank you for responding and I'm glad your experiences with Cohen match mine; Cohen does offer nuggets of gold and his own world-view is frightful as you say. He accepts Kant's noumenal / phenomenal split and thinks objectivity is getting in touch with the nomenal realm or as he calls it "non-fantasy" or "ultimate truth" (which is Jung's term). It drives me crazy when he goes on for length with that but its worth it when he finally focuses on the mind control aspects of the Bible.

If you ever post on the subject of either Cohen's book or Christian mind-control I will share some more observations with you. I've taken about 10 pages of notes on the book.

Regards,

[August 07, 2008 8:45 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Chris wrote: "In regards the 12 vs 11 discussion point; Just because Judas betrayed Christ doesn't mean that Christ then did not appear to him."

You need to tell this to the authors of the gospels, for as I have quoted, they have the risen Jesus appearing to "the eleven" after Judas defected and killed himself.

Chris: "If anything I would think it more important that Christ appear to Judas if for no other reason than to show him his error."

Apparently the authors of the gospels did not share your opinion on what is important, otherwise I would expect them to have included something to this effect in their gospel narratives. It would be easy for them to do, since what we're dealing with here is ultimately imaginary: one can imagine a resurrected Jesus doing virtually anything he invents in the fantasies of his imagination. But clearly this would be fiction at this point, like medieval tales the still-virgin Mary descending into hell to visit the sinners being tormented there.

But none of this bodes well for Christianity. No matter how you slice it, Paul is in conflict with the gospels here, and the explanations Christians come up with are unsatisfying. The problem is in fact created by Christianity, for Christianity wants us to accept what both Paul and the gospels say as inspired truth. On my view, which in no way partakes in such nonsense, the explanation is simple: Paul (assuming he wrote I Cor. 15:3-8 in the first place) was unaware of the tradition that one of "the twelve" defected and betrayed Jesus, because that tradition was not developed until a later time, when narratives depicting Jesus' earthly existence began to be compiled and put into story form. This is just one of the many strands of evidence demonstrating that what we have in the New Testament is a series of snapshots documenting the growth of an ancient legend, from its more primitive beginnings to a full-fledged "histories"

which cast fictional characters in fictional stories set in otherwise historical settings, much like today's historical novels.

Regards,
Dawson

[August 08, 2008 5:44 AM](#)

[Chris](#) said...

Hi Dawson,

Long time reader, third time commenter.

My comment merely refers to the error your assumption makes in foreclosing against the possibility that Jesus did appear to all 12 as Paul writes. Paul is providing new information, not conflicting information.

Enjoy your blog immensely.

[August 08, 2008 12:41 PM](#)

[chadzwo](#) said...

Chris - I believe Dawson's point is that Judas was dead prior to Jesus resurrection and he therefore could not have appeared to him. Matthew 27:5 - And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. From the most natural way to read this portion of Matthew, it appears Judas was dead well before Jesus death, burial, and resurrection. For the record, I do not agree with Dawson's conclusions but neither do I see Judas as a possible solution to the eleven/twelve issue.

Dawson - sorry to have not posted in response to your questions. Usually by the time I am finished reading all that is written here (or at least the parts I find interesting) I haven't any time left to post. Will try to do so at some point.

[August 08, 2008 11:19 PM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

chadzwo: "I believe Dawson's point is that Judas was dead prior to Jesus resurrection and he therefore could not have appeared to him."

Mark is widely and generally thought to be the first of the canonical gospels. Mark ends at 16:8. The spurious long ending, 16:9-20, is not authentic to Mark. In 16:8 we read:

"They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

There are no post resurrection appearances in canonical Mark. The literary device of the women fleeing in fear and remaining silent was used to explain why the story of a physical resurrection had been unknown up till then. Matthew and Luke both used Mark as a source document and radically changed the story in different ways to suit their doctrinal agendas. That they did so indicates that they did not think of Mark as history. By freely changing the Jesus story, the other gospel evangelists implicitly assert that Mark and their own writings are pious fiction. This is fatal to Christianity.

[August 09, 2008 9:36 AM](#)

[Robert B](#) said...

Chris: "My comment merely refers to the error your assumption makes in foreclosing against the possibility that Jesus did appear to all 12 as Paul writes. Paul is providing new information, not conflicting information. "

Chris begs the question on multiple levels. By asserting Dawson is in error in "foreclosing against the possibility that Jesus did appear", he without justification assumes the supernatural is real. However, the supernatural is simply the negation of all that is natural. All that exists is the natural. Existence exists. It is impossible for other than existence to exist, for all that exists is existence. Assuming the supernatural is to assume the metaphysical primacy of non-existence and consciousness. This is absurd.

By assuming that Paul wrote I Cor. 15:3-8, Chris ignores the very plausible alternative that the passage in question is a post-Pauline interpolation. This is gross question begging. [See Robert M. Price's Apocryphal Apparitions 1 Corinthians 15:3-11 As a Post-Pauline Interpolation](#)

Asserting "Paul is providing new information," is to presume the gospel fairy tales are historically true; that is a fine example of *Petitio principii*, for that is the issue at question.

Chris writes that Paul's story was "not conflicting information." Again he reasons in a circle. Steven Carr's comments demonstrate against the idea that Paul believed in a historical Jesus who rose from the grave like a zombie in a George Romero movie.

The analysis I posted of the ancient hymn fragment found at Philippians 2:6-11 coupled with the implications of the letter of Claudius Lysias renders the notion that Paul believed a corpse rose from its grave and walked about talking and eating fish absurd.

[August 09, 2008 10:12 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson said:

"not one of the other 33 references using the word 'brother' seems to denote a blood relation."

"So the more we look at this, the more compelling it becomes that Paul used the word 'brother' in his letters, pretty much without exception, to indicate a relation within the election, not a biological relation."

1) There are exegetical problems with this, namely the dreaded word study fallacy:

Removing a word from its immediate context robs the intended meaning. Words are the building blocks for units of thought; thus, they should not be isolated when bringing out the author's meaning. Specifically words are used **in a relationship** with other words. If you've studied hermeneutics you already know about the widening contextual units that one must examine when doing exegesis (the sentence, the thought, the parts of an argument, entire argument, the whole letter or narrative, etc...) Tallying up

instances of adelphos does not provide support for a meaning. The examples you provide are not evidence for or against any interpretation. It just shows how often Paul used a word. The object of the preposition, kurios, must be considered when making comparison, not to mention kurios itself (one of the most loaded words in the New Testament).

Where else does Paul present "ton adelphon tou kuriou"?

1 Corinthians 9:5

Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?

My contention is that this group, "the brothers of the Lord", is the same group mentioned throughout the Gospels.

2) I'll grant Robert that James is given an honorific title, but why does the designation as Jesus' sibling not give honor to James? How did James acquire his status as early leader given we have no record of him following Christ during his lifetime. How is honor implied by some "brotherhood" with Jesus that is not physical?

3) Paul uses prepositions very purposely in his preaching (just read that aloud and should go wipe off my monitor). Paul calls his fellow believers **in** Christ (Col 1:7; 4:7). This distinct preposition demands some explanation. Doherty asserts that we should use "brothers in the Lord" as a clue to interpret the phrase, and offers no explanation why. He contends that the early church of James may have been called the "brethren of the Lord" (no evidence given). Ok, but James is **the** brother of the Lord, not a brother of the Lord. Unless definite and indefinite articles are irrelevant in Greek (they're not), then this distinction must be addressed by Doherty as well.

4) Just as a reference, the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* outlines a wide semantic domain for adelphos, which could mean the following: brother, close family member, fellow member of society or religious group, or even the Greek philosophical concept of universal brotherhood. NIDNTT also notes that Paul does not use adelphos when speaking to a gentile audience (for example: Acts 17:22). No honorific titles even mentioned, where is the evidence of such usage for "brother of the Lord?"

5) A mere honorific title fails to explain the "brother of the Lord" as used by later authors who you claim used Paul's material as a source.

6) The early church had no problems with this (Doherty readily concedes this point) until perpetual virginity became an apologetic concern (the Ebionites used Jesus' family to argue against perpetual virginity, see Ireneus *Against Heresies*). Did the Gospel author(s) use this unique phrase in Galatians to fabricate a family for Jesus? If so does that suggest they understood it to be a literal brother? There have been 3 historic positions on the Jesus' brothers:

- a) Orthodox church - they were children from a previous marriage
- b) Catholic church - they were cousins
- c) Protestants - they were Joseph and Mary's later children

The Brother of Jesus by Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner presents a very good critical analysis of all the contemporary theories. I also ran across a shorter summary article here: http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Chilton_James.htm

Jerome quotes Hegesippus' account of James from the fifth book of his lost Commentaries (165-175 AD):

"After the apostles, James the brother of the Lord surnamed the Just was made head of the Church at Jerusalem. Many indeed are called James. This one was holy from his mother's womb. He drank neither wine nor strong drink, ate no flesh, never shaved or anointed himself with ointment or bathed. He alone had the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies, since indeed he did not use woolen vestments but linen and went alone into the temple and prayed in behalf of the people, insomuch that his knees were reputed to have acquired the hardness of camels' knees."

In conclusion, James has historically been understood to be the brother of Jesus. No positive evidence has been provided for your claim.. A unique reading of "brother of the Lord" as found in Galatians (over and against the Gospels which present the sibling) requires more evidence to defend itself against readings that comport across the New Testament. Regardless of the historicity of the Gospels, they support this reading of Galatians. If Paul is the only source prior to the Gospels mentioning James, then one is left wondering why the later writers would use this alleged "spiritual brother" to fabricate an entire family for Jesus.

Also a quick note that "the twelve" in 1 Cor 15 is equivalent to "the twelve disciples". This is a semantic change due to innovation that normally only grammarians concern themselves with; however, I think its worth mentioning. The innovation is specifically called an ellipsis, which is basically when a headword (disciples) is closely associated with a qualifier (twelve). The headword is often omitted due to frequency of use. This lends support to the passage being an oral creed, but my real point here is that if Paul is saying Jesus appeared to the twelve disciples, then how far back could Jesus' death/resurrection be?

Dawson said:

"The "sun came up this morning" as opposed to what?"

Oops, sorry about that. I meant to say "do you correct people" and missed that on the edit.

I'm saying that the "sun came up" is a phenomenological description (from the point of view of the observer) and need not be literally and objectively true in order to be true in the sense the author intended. This would probably be a more liberal view of "the twelve" so I'm not even sure how far I would take that since I haven't studied the literary genres (Gospel narratives vs Paul's letters) closely enough to really argue for an interpretation. I think "the twelve" had become a regular expression for "the group of disciples." The eleven could have been purposely tweaked by the later Gospel writers in an attempt to be more accurate about what happened for narrative purposes (as opposed to reciting a creed). If legendary expansion is true, then we have Gospel writers contradicting one of their sources which itself requires explanation.

I don't see any contradiction for post-resurrection appearances if they happened in this order:

Peter (1 Cor 15:5)

Ten Apostles (Luke 24, John 20:19)

Eleven Apostles (John 20:24)

All Apostles (Matt 28, Mark 16)

James (1 Cor 15:7)

Paul (1 Cor 15:8)

Using your hermeneutic, Paul doesn't tell us which appearance he is talking about so he is only aware of the appearance to the twelve. In accord with Chris here, on what grounds do you assume only one appearance to the apostles?

In response to the mystery cult stuff:

We know next to nothing about Hellenistic mystery cults in the 1st century. What we do know of mystery cults mainly comes from the 3rd-4th centuries and implies there was a period of syncretism and eclecticism during which the cults became more widespread in Rome. This period is most likely when a) they borrowed from Christianity to be popular b)vice versa c)both d)neither.

As for 1 Cor 15 and the worship of Baal of Peor, I don't see the significance. I acknowledge that other religions have traditions, and food is to be among the most commonly selected means of expressing religious concepts and having communal time. Two things in common at the same time does not imply strong dependence, and at best posits weak influence. Paul uses the Old Testament example of Baal worship to discourage the Corinthians from pagan idolatry. This is not explicitly a mystery cult reference and most likely isn't one since they were very exclusive and secretive in bringing new members into their midst. Albert Schweitzer said, "If we possess so few typical statements about Mystery-feasts, is it not partly because they had no very remarkable features and did not take a very exalted position in the hierarchy of the cultus acts?" (*Paul and His Interpreters* pg 195)

Also with respect to Paul himself borrowing doctrines from mystery cults I stand with Grant:

Also "Judaism was a milieu to which doctrines of the deaths and rebirths of mythical gods seems so entirely foreign that the emergence of such a fabrication from its midst is very hard to credit."

Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels*, p. 199

And as Ronald Nash notes:

"Any question for the historical antecedents of the Lord's Supper is more likely to succeed if it stays closer to the Jewish foundations of the Christian faith than if it wanders off into the practices of the pagan cults." (*The Gospel and the Greeks* pg 149). What about the Jewish passover feast!? Bruce Metzger notes, "the Jewishness of the setting, character, and piety expressed in the [Christian] rite is overwhelmingly pervasive in all the accounts of the origin of the supper." (*Methodology* p 17)

J. Gresham Machen's *The Origin of Paul's Religion* has shaped my thinking on the matter considerably.

Justin Martyr was writing to the emperor of Rome to defend against charges of impiety and wickedness leveled against Christians.. His point was that in some respects Christianity was similar to religions that found approval in Rome, and yet Christianity often demanded an even higher morality. Using your own hermeneutic: we don't know which specific elements Martyr was referring to therefore we should conclude that he didn't know about the ones he doesn't mention. :) Comparative religion is not the point here, the point is Martyr is not evidence of mystery cult sacred meals..only of

sacred meals which I openly will acknowledge (even from the Old Testament) has been around since religion.

Dawson said:

Now, I'm still curious about Paul's claim to have received his information via revelation. How exactly does that work?

Perhaps Paul did doubt his revelation experience and sought to have it confirmed by those who claimed to know Jesus. Again this is the whole rub about recent resurrection because you assume that those he went to see only knew a "heavenly risen" Jesus. That is possible, but since Paul's reason for going on the trip was to confirm his experience then I believe that supports that Paul believed Cephas/James really hung out with Jesus and thus has were qualified to verify his experience....otherwise we're left with a delusional Paul going to visit other delusional people to validate his experience...and that is a hard nugget for me to swallow.

Cheers,
David

[August 09, 2008 1:54 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Robert,

Yes, while most Christians would probably have not clue what the T?bingen School is, I think the traditional Christian position would reject this.

As for Clementine I'm not sure. How do you conclude that if a Christian rejects the T?bingen School they necessarily accept the psuedo-Clementine literature?

On the one side, is the "T?bingen School" view that the canonical gospels and Acts were products of the mid to late 2-nd century.

"The demonstration, mainly by English scholars, of the impossibility of the late dates ascribed to the New Testament documents...and the proofs of the authenticity of the Apostolic Fathers and of the use of St. John's Gospel by Justin, Papias, and Ignatius gradually brought Baur's theories into discredit." (from the Wikipedia article which is curiously thorough and shows some unusual marks of scholarship).

The Germans create it, the British correct it, and the Americans corrupt it! :)

[August 09, 2008 2:22 PM](#)

[Vinny](#) said...

Perhaps Paul did doubt his revelation experience and sought to have it confirmed by those who claimed to know Jesus.

I cannot see any evidence in Galatians that Paul ever doubted that he was preaching the gospel correctly. It seems more likely to me that he was concerned that the apostles in Jerusalem had things wrong. Perhaps his fear that he was running his race in vain was the fear that the apostles in Jerusalem were undoing his work by teaching false doctrines.

[August 09, 2008 2:42 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Chris: "My comment merely refers to the error your assumption makes in foreclosing against the possibility that Jesus did appear to all 12 as Paul writes."

Actually, I've made no error, since I'm assessing possibility on the basis of the evidence positively given in the record. And in my view, going by the evidence does not constitute erroneous procedure.

The problem is produced by what is stated: one tradition (Paul's) says that Jesus appeared to "the twelve," while the other (found in the gospels) claims that Jesus appeared to "the eleven." Neither tradition - either the one found in I Cor. 15:3-8 or that of the gospels - gives even a remote suggestion that Jesus appeared to Judas in some afterlife experience. Nowhere in his letters does Paul even mention Judas Iscariot, or that one of "the twelve" defected and committed suicide. It is because Paul offers no details that proposals like the one you give can be imagined and inserted into the record as if Paul may actually have had something like this in mind.

Chris: "Paul is providing new information, not conflicting information."

To be consistent with your own proposal, you would need to refrain from the overtly indicative mood in which you couch this assertion. By affirming it positively, as you do here, you have ventured well beyond the evidence and into the realm of the ad hoc. Besides, we must remember that Paul was the earlier writer here. So he would not have been providing information which the gospel writer overlooked or failed to supply.

Now, if I am in error here, it is because I do not grant to the imagination the power which theists implicitly grant to it. Only they don't want to call it imagination. They have other names for imagination, like "spiritual truth" or "revelation."

But what you offer, Chris, is actually valuable for illustration of one way legends begin to take shape in the minds of the faithful. As I have argued elsewhere, belief in the supernatural invites the believer to retreat deeper and deeper into his imagination. Without doing so, "the fear of God" which is supposed to be the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7) will never take root. (Van Til's autobiographical account of his own conversion experience is illustrative of this point; see [here](#) for example.) Here you have imagined a scenario specifically geared toward resolving a problem in the record, and because you take the supernatural seriously, you bestow what you have imagined with the validity of a legitimate "possibility" that even I am expected to take seriously. What we have in the end, however, is the legend-building process aptly modeled before us as it takes shape. The legend has now grown: after Jesus appears to "the eleven," he descends into hell and appears before Judas Iscariot, who is roasting in tormenting flames licking his entire body throughout, and scolded for his historic offense. This completes "the twelve" that we have in Paul, so now there's no problem. What evidence is there for such an event? None is needed, belief in the supernatural overcomes any need for evidence. As Christian David Slayer wrote on [Grace Forums](#) recently, "If non-believers need proof God exists, then they have no faith." Faith simply eliminates any need for evidence or proof, since it grants primacy to the imaginary.

Regards,

Dawson

[August 10, 2008 1:46 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: "not one of the other 33 references using the word 'brother' seems to denote a blood relation." ... "So the more we look at this, the more compelling it becomes that Paul used the word 'brother' in his letters, pretty much without exception, to indicate a relation within the election, not a biological relation."

David: "1) There are exegetical problems with this, namely the dreaded word study fallacy: Removing a word from its immediate context robs the intended meaning. Words are the building blocks for units of thought; thus, they should not be isolated when bringing out the author's meaning. Specifically words are used in a relationship with other words. If you've studied hermeneutics you already know about the widening contextual units that one must examine when doing exegesis (the sentence, the thought, the parts of an argument, entire argument, the whole letter or narrative, etc...) Tallying up instances of adelphos does not provide support for a meaning. The examples you provide are not evidence for or against any interpretation. It just shows how often Paul used a word. The object of the preposition, kurios, must be considered when making comparison, not to mention kurios itself (one of the most loaded words in the New Testament)."

I have a few points in reaction to all this:

1) None of this provides an argument for a blood relation for James being intended in I Cor. 15.

2) For one we're told that "words are the building blocks for units of thought," but we're also told that "word study" is a fallacy when it comes to trying to understand what someone means when he does not explicitly clarify what he means in what he says. If "words are the building blocks for units of thought" and words are all we have to go by, what else is there in determining what someone means?

3) I take issue with the claim that "words are the building blocks for units of thought." On the contrary, *concepts* are the building block units of thought, while words are symbols for concepts. This is why different languages can exist; different languages have different symbols for very similar concepts. In English I say 'dog', in French I say 'chien', in Russian I say 'sobaka' and in Thai I say 'mah'. The concept is essentially the same between all speakers, but the symbol for that concept varies.

4) I have not attempted to isolate the word "brother" in order to divine Paul's meaning of this word in I Cor. 15; rather, since Paul does not explicitly state what he means, I look to his other uses of this word as a helpful guide. There is nothing wrong with this procedure, especially since Paul is not clear in what he means by "brother of the Lord" when applied to James. Nowhere else does Paul use the word 'brother' to denote a biological relationship; should we look to other people's use of the same word to interpret Paul? Other people have in fact used the word 'brother' to indicate a blood relation. Should we isolate Paul's word 'brother', remove it from the overall context of his use of that word, and assign it the meaning which other users of that word mean by it? Why?

5) Yes, "words are used in a relationship with other words," but if you think Paul means *blood* brother in this context, you need to argue for it, especially since Paul

uses the other word quite habitually to refer to a spiritual rather than biological relationship. I've seen no argument presented to conclude that Paul really meant that James was a biological sibling of the earthly Jesus in I Cor. 15. Do you have one?

6) If Paul is not explicit in what he means by "brother of the Lord" when he uses this phrase, why isn't it the case that "tallying up instances of adelphos does not provide support for a meaning"? Besides, I've done more than merely "tally up" Paul's use of 'brother'; I've looked at his habitual use of the term to discover what he means when he uses it. Why is this invalid, especially if he is not explicit in what he means by it in one specific instance?

David: "Where else does Paul present "ton adelphon tou kuriou"? 1 Corinthians 9:5 'Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?' My contention is that this group, 'the brothers of the Lord', is the same group mentioned throughout the Gospels."

In Matthew 28:10, we find Jesus speaking as follows: "Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me." Here he is referring to unspecified persons as his "brethren." On this Wells points out, "That the disciples (and not Jesus' family) is meant is clear from the sequel. 'The eleven disciples went to Galilee,' where they saw and worshipped the risen one (vss.16-7)." (*The Historical Evidence For Jesus*, p. 169) So if Paul is meaning the disciples here, as you seem to be saying with your statement here, then he is not referring to people related to Jesus by blood, but by a relation of faith.

David: "2) I'll grant Robert that James is given an honorific title, but why does the designation as Jesus' sibling not give honor to James?"

In Christianity, fellowship in Christ clearly supersedes relation by the flesh. We find this in the gospels as well, where Jesus tells his hearers about conditions of discipleship: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). (I do not hate my father, my mother, my wife, my child, my brother and sisters, or my own life, nor will I do so, so I cannot follow Jesus, per his own terms.)

David: "How did James acquire his status as early leader given we have no record of him following Christ during his lifetime."

Do you think that merely by being a biological sibling, James acquired status as an early leader? Again, what record in the early epistles even remotely suggests this?

David: "How is honor implied by some 'brotherhood' with Jesus that is not physical?"

The early Christians obviously thought that "doing the will of God" was of chief importance. This is why the gospel of Mark, which does give Jesus biological brothers (most likely to provide fodder for opposing docetism, a theological rather than chronicling purpose), has Jesus say in their midst, "For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and my sister, and mother" (3:35). So even when we get to the gospels, biological relation is readily eclipsed by one's status as a faithful believer. Indeed, how would honor be implied by a mere biological relationship? If biological relationship were of such importance as to bestow honor upon a sibling, why doesn't Paul honor Jesus' mother Mary, who was, according to the gospels, with child while yet a virgin?

For Paul, James was clearly someone important in the early hierarchy of the church in his day (in Gal. 2:9 he refers to James as one of the "pillars" of the church). He does not explain the credentials belonging to such a position, but given Paul's abhorrence for things of the flesh, it is quite doubtful that a relationship according to the flesh is what gives James the privilege of the honorific title he gives him.

David: "3) Paul uses prepositions very purposely in his preaching"

I would hope so. But one's purpose may be to distract, deflect or confuse. If Paul is vague, given his purposefulness (as you claim), it must be because he was being vague on purpose. No?

David: "(just read that aloud and should go wipe off my monitor)."

Yes, I note your gift for alliteration.

David: "Paul calls his fellow believers in Christ (Col 1:7; 4:7)."

Yes, a relationship that seems quite vague to me, since "Christ" is not a place. Or is it? Perhaps it's a place that is accessible only by means of imagination?

David: "This distinct preposition demands some explanation."

Yes, I agree. And what is Paul's explanation? Or should I ask: Does he give one?

David: "Doherty asserts that we should use "brothers in the Lord" as a clue to to interpret the phrase, and offers no explanation why. He contends that the early church of James may have been called the "brethren of the Lord" (no evidence given). Ok, but James is the brother of the Lord, not a brother of the Lord. Unless definite and indefinite articles are irrelevant in Greek (they're not), then this distinction must be addressed by Doherty as well."

Since you do not quote Doherty, or even cite him, I will:

The term "brother" (*adelphos*) appears throughout Paul's letters, and was a common designation Christians gave to each other. In I Corinthians 1:1 Sosthenes is called *adelphos*, as is Timothy in Colossians 1:1. Neither of them, nor the more than 500 "brothers" who received a vision of the spiritual Christ in [I] Corinthians 15:6, are to be considered siblings of Jesus. "Brothers in the Lord" (*adelphoi en kuri?*) appears in Philippians 1:14 (the NEB translates it "our fellow-Christians"). This is a strong indicator of what the phrase applied to James must have meant. James was the head of a community in Jerusalem which bore witness to the spiritual Christ, and this group seems to have called itself "brethren of/in the Lord." The pre-eminent position of James as head of this group could have resulted in a special designation for him as *the* brother of the Lord. Note, too, that such designations are always "of the lord," never "of Jesus." We might also note that the term *adelphos* was common in Greek circles to refer to initiates who belonged to the mystery cults. (Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle*, pp. 57-58)

So Doherty does, after all, provide an explanation for this distinction.

David: "4) Just as a reference, the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology outlines a wide semantic domain for *adelphos*, which could mean the following: brother, close family member, fellow member of society or religious group, or even the Greek philosophical concept of universal brotherhood. NIDNTT also notes

that Paul does not use adelphos when speaking to a gentile audience (for example: Acts 17:22). No honorific titles even mentioned, where is the evidence of such usage for 'brother of the Lord'?"

Are we to suppose that Paul *never* used "adelphos" when speaking to a gentile audience? Isn't this an argument from silence? Regardless, if you want "brother of the Lord" to indicate a biological sibling, you are invited to present your best case for this.

David: "Did the Gospel author(s) use this unique phrase in Galatians to fabricate a family for Jesus? If so does that suggest they understood it to be a literal brother? There have been 3 historic positions on the Jesus' brothers: a)Orthodox church - they were children from a previous marriage b) Catholic church - they were cousins c) Protestants - they were Joseph and Mary's later children. *The Brother of Jesus* by Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner presents a very good critical analysis of all the contemporary theories. I also ran across a shorter summary article here: http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Chilton_James.htm"

Because it's pertinent, I'll continue with Doherty where I left off:

But there is further indication that early Christians knew of no sibling relationship between James and Jesus. The New Testament epistle of James opens this way: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." ... Few believe that James the Just actually wrote this letter, but if a later Christian is writing in his name, or even if only adding this ascription, common sense suggests that he would have identified James as the *brother* of the Lord Jesus if he had in fact been so, not simply as his servant. A similar void is left by the writer of the epistle of Jude. (Few likewise ascribe this letter to the actual Jude, whoever he was.) It opens: Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and a brother of James..." ... Now if James had been Jesus' sibling, and Jude is James' brother, this would make Jude the brother of Jesus, and he appears as such in Mark 6. So now we have two Christian letters ascribed to supposed blood brothers of Jesus, yet neither one of them makes such an identification. Attempted explanations for this silence are unconvincing. They ignore the overriding fact that in the highly contentious atmosphere of most Christian correspondence, the advantage of drawing on a kinship to Jesus to make the letter's position and the writer's authority more forceful would hardly be passed up. (*The Jesus Puzzle*, p. 58)

David: "Jerome quotes Hegesippus' account of James from the fifth book of his lost Commentaries (165-175 AD):"

"After the apostles, James the brother of the Lord surnamed the Just was made head of the Church at Jerusalem. Many indeed are called James. This one was holy from his mother's womb. He drank neither wine nor strong drink, ate no flesh, never shaved or anointed himself with ointment or bathed. He alone had the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies, since indeed he did not use woolen vestments but linen and went alone into the temple and prayed in behalf of the people, insomuch that his knees were reputed to have acquired the hardness of camels' knees."

Clearly by Hegesippus' time (some 100+ years after Paul), the legend of who James was had grown significantly.

David: "In conclusion, James has historically been understood to be the brother of Jesus."

This is misleading. In his letters, Paul, the earliest NT writer, never refers to Paul as "the brother of *Jesus*. To say that "James has historically been understood to be the brother of Jesus" is agenda-driven revisionism.

David: "No positive evidence has been provided for your claim.. A unique reading of "brother of the Lord" as found in Galatians (over and against the Gospels which present the sibling) requires more evidence to defend itself against readings that comport across the New Testament."

I don't think so. At no point does Paul explicitly indicate that Jesus had any siblings, and a survey of his use of "brother" demonstrates that this was a religious title, not a sibling relationship. I don't need any evidence beyond this. In fact, going just by what Paul says, a sibling relationship would be quite extraordinary for an otherwise ordinary term for Paul. If Paul meant sibling relationship, why doesn't he say "brother of Jesus" instead of "brother of the Lord"? Are the "more than 500 brethren" that Paul mentions in I Cor. 15:3-8 also siblings of Jesus? Why not?

David: "Regardless of the historicity of the Gospels, they support this reading of Galatians."

Actually, the gospels *provide* this reading of Galatians, a reading that is not suggested in the letter itself. We get the notion that a sibling relationship is intended in Galatians only by reading the gospels back into Paul. But if the gospels are legendary, and were developed for theological purposes rather than for purposes of chronicling actual events (which I'm convinced they were), then this is an invalid approach to interpreting Galatians. I realize that Christians won't like this, but they have a very, very difficult time overcoming this.

David: "If Paul is the only source prior to the Gospels mentioning James, then one is left wondering why the later writers would use this alleged 'spiritual brother' to fabricate an entire family for Jesus."

Opposition to the heresy of docetism would provide sufficient motivation for giving Jesus blood relatives. Besides, this need not have been fabrication from whole cloth. If Christians of Paul's time and later did not understand that "brother of the Lord" was a title indicating membership in some core fraternity of leaders or zealots, it could easily have been interpreted as suggesting a sibling relationship. Both the motive and the opportunity were present by the time the gospels were set to paper.

David: "Also a quick note that 'the twelve' in 1 Cor 15 is equivalent to 'the twelve disciples'. This is a semantic change due to innovation that normally only grammarians concern themselves with; however, I think its worth mentioning. The innovation is specifically called an ellipsis, which is basically when a headword (disciples) is closely associated with a qualifier (twelve). The headword is often omitted due to frequency of use."

This may be true, but this explanation seems to be speculation driven by the desire to conform the epistles with the gospels. Regardless, you seem to agree that, if the gospels are true, it would be more accurate to say, in agreement with them, that Jesus appeared to "the eleven," which is what the gospels explicitly state. Moreover, if the tradition that a member of the twelve defected and betrayed Jesus after Paul's time, or independent of his mission circles, the record is just as we would expect it to look in such a case. Paul would have Jesus appear to "the twelve" because he would not have know about a later tradition that has one of them defect from the group.

David: "This lends support to the passage being an oral creed, but my real point here is that if Paul is saying Jesus appeared to the twelve disciples, then how far back could Jesus' death/resurrection be?"

Again, Paul nowhere indicates that any of his contemporaries were fellow travelers with the earthly Jesus. This is a later tradition that has been read back into Paul. Besides, if I Cor. 15:3-8 is a post-Pauline interpolation, as Price has argued, then pointing to this passage as an early creed would be moot. Regardless, Paul never does put any time or place to Jesus' death and resurrection, and speaks of these very vaguely, never indicating the circumstances under which he believed any of this happened, never indicating that any of his contemporaries knew the earthly, pre-crucifixion Jesus, never suggesting that any of the members of leadership whom he mentions were witnesses to Jesus' execution, etc. When he does claim that the post-resurrection Jesus appeared to people living in his own day, Paul gives no details on what they saw, or how they would know it was really Jesus. These read like religious experiences, much like what numerous Christians I have known personally have claimed to have had.

David: "I think 'the twelve' had become a regular expression for 'the group of disciples'."

For all we know, it could have been, but maybe not. It's certainly not an expression that Paul used regularly. I could not find it in any other passage by Paul. So if we want to affirm that it was in regular usage during Paul's day, I'd think we'd need something more than Paul's solitary passing mention of it.

If "the twelve" was an expression that was standardized because it was part of a creed, as many seem to think, how did this creed come to use "the twelve" here if the gospel stories are true, according to which Jesus appeared to "the eleven"? I personally tend to think that "the twelve" had symbolic meaning (so much in the NT is symbolism anyway), corresponding to the twelve tribes, given the early Christians' dependence on OT themes.

David: "The eleven could have been purposely tweaked by the later Gospel writers in an attempt to be more accurate about what happened for narrative purposes (as opposed to reciting a creed)."

What appears to have happened was that the notion of "the twelve" was adopted by certain communities and incorporated into their concocted narratives about an earthly Jesus. It would have been easy for later writers to take such references and give them a significance they did not originally have by making "the twelve" a group of disciples who banded around Jesus during the earthly life they sought to portray in their narratives, where for Paul it had no such meaning (for it is hard to see how Paul could have failed to refer to them as such had he known about them). The reduction to "the eleven" was a natural result, then, of the gospel story which made a member of the original twelve defect and betray Jesus. By this point, the narrative had taken on a life of its own as the primary vehicle for containing doctrine and providing the desired portrait of Jesus. Remember that Paul's letters, even if any of the evangelists were aware of them, were not considered canonical at this point, so there probably would not have been much concern for "contradicting" Paul, especially if the evangelists did not originally intend their narratives to be documenting actual history but rather convey spiritual truths by means of allegory (as many scholars today suggest).

David: "If legendary expansion is true, then we have Gospel writers contradicting one of their sources which itself requires explanation."

I don't think the gospel writers would have considered it a contradiction per se, especially if they didn't think of their own narratives as recording actual historical events. Since, even if they were using Paul as a source, the gospel writers probably would not have considered his writings as divinely ordained or canonical, they most likely would not have taken it as inviolable anyway. As Robert has, I believe correctly, pointed out, that the authors of Matthew and Luke made their own revisions to the narrative found in the gospel of Mark, the evangelists performatively demonstrated that they did not think they were documenting actual history. If they did, then they obviously did not have a very good understanding of what history is.

David: "In accord with Chris here, on what grounds do you assume only one appearance to the apostles?"

I don't. I'm only going by what is stated in Paul's letter, and what Christians want to interpret Paul's reference to "the twelve" to mean. If it means the twelve apostles in the gospels, then it seems there's a problem, since according to the gospel accounts, by the time Jesus started making his post-resurrection appearances, Judas had already eliminated himself from the scene.

David: "I acknowledge that other religions have traditions, and food is to be among the most commonly selected means of expressing religious concepts and having communal time."

In other words, Christianity is not unique in this regard.

David: "Two things in common at the same time does not imply strong dependence, and at best posits weak influence."

We're not talking about flowers or hair growth here, but religious practices which involve symbolism as well as what practitioners value and seek to achieve. If a variety of religions which preceded Christianity incorporated worship practices that involved, for instance, the consumption of bread and wine as symbols for the flesh and blood of a resurrected deity, it's very reasonably doubtful that Christianity's own use of such symbolism would arise independent of such traditions coincidentally. The ANE during Paul's day was swarming with various cultures intermingling and influencing each other. It was in this setting that Christianity first developed. Are we to suppose that traditions from other religions could not have been recast and adopted by adherents who converted to Christianity, very probably from some of these other religions?

David: "Paul uses the Old Testament example of Baal worship to discourage the Corinthians from pagan idolatry."

And he wouldn't have done so in the way that he does in I Cor. if those worship practices did not in a significant way mirror a similar practice in Christianity.

David: "This is not explicitly a mystery cult reference and most likely isn't one since they were very exclusive and secretive in bringing new members into their midst."

Is your concern to dispel the notion that Christianity borrowed from specifically a pagan mystery cult, or that it borrowed from any prior religious model?

David: "Albert Schweitzer said, 'If we possess so few typical statements about Mystery-feasts, is it not partly because they had no very remarkable features and did not take a

very exalted position in the hierarchy of the cultus acts?' (*Paul and His Interpreters* pg 195)"

I don't think we can assume what Schweitzer wants us to assume here. The assessment of whether or not something is "remarkable" depends on a variety of value-informed contexts, which not everyone shares, and criteria which vary according to purpose. I might find remarkable something that Schweitzer might have passed over, and vice versa. Then again, if many or all religions of the time incorporated sacred feast practices (as you seem to acknowledge), then against this relief one religion's sacred feast practices might not seem so remarkable. It's probably the case that a religion was expected to have a feast sacrament. So there was probably little imperative to document them. Besides, the practices of secretive cults would probably not have been prone to being written in the public journals of the time. These cults may have existed for decades or more before anyone took any serious notice of them.

Also, one reason why so few "typical statements about Mystery-feasts" survive may be because they were stamped out by religious rivals. Suppression of anti-Christian works has been well documented. Porphyry's *Adversus Christianos*, for instance, was institutionally put to the torch, and under Constantine possession of it was made a capital offence.

David: "Also with respect to Paul himself borrowing doctrines from mystery cults I stand with Grant: Also "Judaism was a milieu to which doctrines of the deaths and rebirths of mythical gods seems so entirely foreign that the emergence of such a fabrication from its midst is very hard to credit." Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian's Review of the Gospels*, p. 199"

This seems to ascribe a monolithic uniformity to the Judaism of the day which would be very difficult to defend. Within Judaism were many different sects. The Jewish Wisdom literature itself was clearly a profound influence on Paul and people like Philo. In I Cor. 1:24, Paul says that "Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God." This association of Christ with "the wisdom of God" confirms Wells' point that "statements made about Wisdom in [the Wisdom] literature are made of Jesus in the Pauline letters" (*The Jesus Legend*, p. xxvi).

David: "And as Ronald Nash notes: 'Any question for the historical antecedents of the Lord's Supper is more likely to succeed if it stays closer to the Jewish foundations of the Christian faith than if it wanders off into the practices of the pagan cults.' (*The Gospel and the Greeks* pg 149). What about the Jewish passover feast!? Bruce Metzger notes, 'the Jewishness of the setting, character, and piety expressed in the [Christian] rite is overwhelmingly pervasive in all the accounts of the origin of the supper.' (*Methodology* p 17)"

You seem to be wanting it both ways here, David. Above you quoted Grant, who says that "Judaism was a milieu to which doctrines of the deaths and rebirths of mythical god seems so entirely foreign..." but then you quote Nash and Metzger here, who claim that the Christian Eucharist, which has the believer thinking he is actually eating the flesh and drinking the blood of his god, is fully in keeping with Jewish practices. In his cross-examination of Gregory Boyd's attempts to discount the possibility that non-Jewish religious cults of the day, such as the Mithra cult, had influenced the development of the Christian version of a sacred meal practice, Doherty points out:

You claim that Jews would have been horrified by the bull's blood ritual, and no doubt they were. But would they have been any more enamored with the Christian Eucharist, a rite which represented itself as eating and drinking the flesh and blood

of their god? This was something fully in keeping with the mystery religion sacramentalism, especially the ancient cult of Dionysos which also ate and drank the god's flesh and blood. But did it have anything to do with being Jewish? I hardly think so. The traditional Jewish thanksgiving meal had nothing like it, and the idea would have been blasphemy to most Jews, certainly those of the 'mainstream' type you allude to. To represent a man's body and blood as being divine and the source of salvation would have constituted idolatry. By your own argument, Dr. Boyd, how then do we possibly explain a supposed widespread acceptance of this new faith among Jewish circles when it would have involved such abhorrent doctrines and rites? (*Challenging the Verdict*, p. 89)

David: "Justin Martyr was writing to the emperor of Rome to defend against charges of impiety and wickedness leveled against Christians.. His point was that in some respects Christianity was similar to religions that found approval in Rome, and yet Christianity often demanded an even higher morality."

Indeed, here Justin Martyr sought to take advantage of those similarities, similarities which today's Christians try to downplay or even deny. Justin Martyr simply confirms that some features of Christianity were already enjoyed by earlier religions, and he is trying to use this fact in order to garner toleration. He's essentially telling us that Christianity was nothing really new.

I wrote: "Now, I'm still curious about Paul's claim to have received his information via revelation. How exactly does that work?"

David: "Perhaps Paul did doubt his revelation experience and sought to have it confirmed by those who claimed to know Jesus."

You're not addressing my question here. Back up a bit, and let's focus on Paul and his claim to have received his information via revelation directly from Christ. How does this work? How does one "receive" a revelation? How does he know once he's received it that it is in fact a "revelation"? How does he distinguish it from his imagination, a fantasy, a daydream, or just a bright idea? If a person writes a letter and includes in it all this "doctrine" and claims to have received it via revelation from some supernatural being, would you really take that seriously? Apparently so, for you are doing just that in the case of Paul, for this is what Paul claims.

David: "Again this is the whole rub about recent resurrection because you assume that those he went to see only knew a 'heavenly risen' Jesus."

Again, as I pointed out above, Paul nowhere suggests that the people he confers with in Jerusalem were companions of Jesus during his earthly existence. Had Paul known or believed this of Peter and James, it is an understatement to call his silence on this baffling. Moreover, as many commentators have noted, Paul never distinguishes the appearances of Jesus that he claims others experienced from his own experience. He never mentions, for instance, a doubting Thomas who was invited to touch or examine a physical resurrected body's wounds. These are later traditions that were built up to answer the docetists. Furthermore, Paul does not record what specifically he discussed with the individuals he met with in Jerusalem. He is as vague as can be on this, mentioning it only in passing (and even goes on to explain how he rebuked Peter in Antioch - Gal. 2:11-14). Christians typically insert what they read in the gospels into the cracks at this point, even though what Paul gives us in no way indicates the stories we read in the gospels.

Indeed, if Paul had conferred with Peter and learned from him that Jesus was put to death as a result of a trial before Pilate, do you think Paul would tell us that "rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil" (Rom. 13:3)? How could Paul have this view of rulers, a view which is echoed in I Peter 2:14, if he believed Jesus had been crucified under Pilate?

Again, I have known numerous Christians myself who have claimed that Jesus appeared to them. And yet Jesus is supposed to have died nearly 2000 years ago, going by the gospel accounts. Accordingly, Jesus is still appearing to people, thousands of years after he was purportedly put to death and resurrected. So I'm not positing anything that is out of the ordinary for Christian believers.

David: "That is possible, but since Paul's reason for going on the trip was to confirm his experience then I believe that supports that Paul believed Cephas/James really hung out with Jesus and thus has were qualified to verify his experience...."

Actually, Paul appeals to a revelation as his reason for going to Jerusalem. The NLT translates it this way:

"I went there because God revealed to me that I should go. While I was there I met privately with those considered to be leaders of the church and shared with them the message I had been preaching to the Gentiles. I wanted to make sure that we were in agreement, for fear that all my efforts had been wasted and I was running the race for nothing." (Gal. 2:2)

According to what he says of his own journey to Jerusalem, he just says that a revelation told him to. So it's not clear that his "reason for going on the trip" was so that others could "verify his experience." But let's suppose that it was revealed to Paul that this is what he should do. That seems quite superfluous to me. He got his original gospel via revelation (Gal. 1:11-12), and then he gets another revelation telling him to go see some people who will confirm his initial revelation experience, an experience that Paul had when he was not even in the presence of these other people.

David: "otherwise we're left with a delusional Paul going to visit other delusional people to validate his experience...and that is a hard nugget for me to swallow."

That a person might be delusional when it comes to his strongly held beliefs in the supernatural, is no hard nugget to swallow, not for me at any rate.

Regards,
Dawson

[August 10, 2008 1:53 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson, I'll try to be brief though you've given me much to respond to :)

1. Dawson: *On the contrary, concepts are the building block units of thought, while words are symbols for concepts.*

I agree with you, but I'm talking literary analysis here, not linguistic philosophy.

2. Dawson: *"There is nothing wrong with this procedure, especially since Paul is not clear in what he means by "brother of the Lord" when applied to James. Nowhere else does Paul use the word 'brother' to denote a biological relationship; should we look to*

other people's use of the same word to interpret Paul? Other people have in fact used the word 'brother' to indicate a blood relation. Should we isolate Paul's word 'brother', remove it from the overall context of his use of that word, and assign it the meaning which other users of that word mean by it? Why?"

Again, it is the phrase, "brother of the Lord," that finds usage in the later Gospels. To concentrate on the word alone is to limit the explanatory scope of your conclusion. Examining the usage of the phrase in light of the later Gospel writers is valid especially given your view that Paul was a source. This is not context robbery because the phrase is in exactly the same place: amid reference to the disciples, apostles, or Cephas. If in fact the later Gospel writers were not recording eyewitness testimony, but expanding legends, then a better explanation need be given aside from speculating about Docetism. This idea that early authors were willing to fabricate information in order to preserve and progress what they knew to be false is not probable to me; however, since you judge individuals with strongly held beliefs in the supernatural to be especially susceptible to delusions, I understand your position.

3. Dawson: *I've seen no argument presented to conclude that Paul really meant that James was a biological sibling of the earthly Jesus in I Cor. 15. Do you have one?*

-In response to your view of James :

1. Assuming the legendary hypothesis, the later Gospel writers present James as the literal brother. No sufficient alternative explanation has been given for the Gospel writers choosing to fabricate the entire family of Jesus. Arguing apologetic motives requires giving some Gospel dates, which you have declined to discuss.
2. Paul's use of the word adelphos fails to support your interpretation because it necessarily precludes the phrase from possessing more meaning than the word alone.
3. Your interpretation provides little explanatory power, since if "brother of the Lord" simply means James was a Christian, this is nothing unique and honorific at all.

-In support of the traditional view of James :

1. Evidence points to the historicity of the Gospels. In contrast, the legendary theory starts with no evidence, and utilizes arguments from silence in Paul.
2. Assuming non-legendary Gospel narratives, the later Gospel writers confirm that James was indeed the brother of Jesus.
3. Early patristic sources and church historians affirm James as the literal brother of Jesus. (multiple independent attestation)
4. No sources have been presented in which "brother of the Lord" does not reference a sibling relationship; indeed all other sources examined use the phrase specifically to identify Jesus' siblings.

I'm curious as to whether you think James even existed? I'm also curious as to exactly when you date the Gospels? On your view, was James alive when these legends about him being Jesus' brother were being circulated?

4. In response to Matthew 28:10 on which you quoted Wells:

From Fausset Brown Bible commentary:

"go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me—The brethren here meant must have been His brethren after the flesh (compare Mt 13:55); for His brethren in the higher sense (see on Joh2 0:17) had several meetings with Him at Jerusalem before He went to Galilee, which they would have missed if they had been the persons ordered to Galilee to meet Him."

5. Dawson: *In Christianity, fellowship in Christ clearly supersedes relation by the flesh. Is it your position that "brother of the Lord" merely means James was a Christian?*

6. Dawson: *Do you think that merely by being a biological sibling, James acquired status as an early leader? Again, what record in the early epistles even remotely suggests this?*

Let's not get things turned around here. I asked you "How did James acquire his status as early leader given we have no record of him following Christ during his lifetime?" We have a source (Eusebius) indicating Peter gave James leadership of the church when he had to leave Jerusalem, but why? I don't know. I don't think the sibling relationship had much to do with it. The early apostolic period was characterized by those who knew Christ orally passing on their knowledge to others (the Apostle John disciples Polycarp, who disciples Irenaeus etc.). I think James may have had some elevated insights into the life of Christ with which to illuminate the traditions and teachings in the early church. Regardless, I simply want to know how you think James became a leader.

The argument you quoted from Doherty assumes that James would have used his brotherly title for honor. How does that support your position?

Douglas J. Moo (*The Letter of James*, pg 13) points out that
"...physical ties to Jesus became important only after the time of James' death. If anything, therefore, the author's [James epistle] failure to mention the relationship is an argument against the pseudepigraphal view...So many factors- the author's circumstances, his relationship to his readers, the purpose of the letter, the issues in the community - affect the content of the letter that it is precarious in the extreme to draw wide-ranging conclusions from the failure to mention a particular topic."

While I grant Robert's position is possible, I actually don't buy into the honor bit at all. I think James "the brother of the Lord" was used to identify him in Galatians 2. James is very similar to Paul yet very different. They were both anti-Christian Jews who converted after post-resurrection appearances, yet the Biblical picture of James shows him to be closer to his Jewish roots than Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles. In fact they seem to have some conflict in Acts. If Paul intends to bestow honor on James in his letter to the Galatians, why? Just because James is the head honcho in Jerusalem? These aren't leading questions; I'm just curious what you think.

7. *I would hope so. But one's purpose may be to distract, deflect or confuse. If Paul is vague, given his purposefulness (as you claim), it must be because he was being vague on purpose. No?*

Perhaps we haven't taken enough time to understand the original Greek. I'm certainly not ready to render any verdict given the little time I have studied this passage. I also don't aim at solving or proving any of this, but this is a useful way for me to learn more about your position and motivate my future studies. I do hope you're gaining something from this as well.

8. Dawson: *Since you do not quote Doherty, or even cite him, I will:*

I was referring to what Robert has already posted, which you said would suffice to support your position.

Dawson: *So Doherty does, after all, provide an explanation for this distinction.*

Where can we find this early community in Jerusalem identifying themselves as "brethren of/in the Lord?" It doesn't look to me like he covered the definite/indefinite article distinction in the quote you provided. He thinks "brothers in the Lord" is a "strong indicator of what the phrase applied to James must have meant", but doesn't give reasons why. I'm sure he has them, but are they mentioned in his popular

writings? At any rate, he admits some speculation that the phrase "could have resulted in a special designation."

9. Dawson: *Clearly by Hegsippus' time (some 100+ years after Paul), the legend of who James was had grown significantly.*

Gerd Ludeman (in his debate with William Lane Craig on the resurrection, mp3 available online) has argued that legends can radically expand within a single year, so perhaps we should be skeptical of sources even if one year after the fact? How far does this kind of skepticism extend and is it applicable only to the Bible or all historical analysis?

10. Dawson: *This is misleading. In his letters, Paul, the earliest NT writer, never refers to Paul as "the brother of Jesus. To say that "James has historically been understood to be the brother of Jesus" is agenda-driven revisionism.* Kurios is Paul's explicit name for Jesus. I don't think I made an unfair or inaccurate statement.

11. *I don't think so. At no point does Paul explicitly indicate that Jesus had any siblings, and a survey of his use of "brother" demonstrates that this was a religious title, not a sibling relationship. I don't need any evidence beyond this.*

Arguments from silence and a fallacious word study - that evidence is going to mount an argument that refutes 17 centuries of unquestioned literal brotherhood? Come on Dawson, not in my courtroom anyway. Do you contend that the 500 brethren are given just as much honor as James?

12. Dawson: *"Both the motive and the opportunity were present by the time the gospels were set to paper."*

Do you agree with Wells' dating of the Gospels, if not what dates are you assuming here?

13. Dawson: *Since, even if they were using Paul as a source, the gospel writers probably would not have considered his writings as divinely ordained or canonical, they most likely would not have taken it as inviolable anyway. As Robert has, I believe correctly, pointed out, that the authors of Matthew and Luke made their own revisions to the narrative found in the gospel of Mark, the evangelists performatively demonstrated that they did not think they were documenting actual history. If they did, then they obviously did not have a very good understanding of what history is.*

The very nature of Paul's claims about his writings demanded either one accept them as authoritative or reject them as blasphemy. Assuming Markan priority is the correct view, the most we can say is that Matthew and Luke did exactly what their contemporaries did when developing a historical narrative. The statement that they didn't "have a very good understanding of what history is" both demands an explanation for what such a standard would be, and on the surface seems to push modern historical standards on ancient historians.

14. Dawson: *If a variety of religions which preceded Christianity incorporated worship practices that involved, for instance, the consumption of bread and wine as symbols for the flesh and blood of a resurrected deity Has someone provided an example of this?*

15. Dawson: *Is your concern to dispel the notion that Christianity borrowed from specifically a pagan mystery cult, or that it borrowed from any prior religious model? Specifically the Hellenistic mystery cults. Of course Christianity borrowed from a prior religious model. ?*

16. Dawson: *You seem to be wanting it both ways here, David. Above you quoted Grant, who says that "Judaism was a milieu to which doctrines of the deaths and rebirths of mythical god seems so entirely foreign..." but then you quote Nash and Metzger here, who claim that the Christian Eucharist, which has the believer thinking he is actually eating the flesh and drinking the blood of his god, is fully in keeping with Jewish practices.*

Only transubstantiation posits the view you expressed, and this is not the Biblical view of the Eucharist...that is a can of worms best left on the shelf. Regardless, the quotes I presented are not contradictory, and the only way "I want it" is to look at the Eucharist in light of Judaism and its own sacred meals, and also look at what Christ said in the Gospels to institute this practice. The mystery cults are irrelevant to my analysis, and I've given some reasons why I think it's just as likely that mystery cults would have borrowed from Christianity to gain popularity in Rome.

17. Dawson: *In his cross-examination of Gregory Boyd's attempts to discount the possibility that non-Jewish religious cults of the day, such as the Mithra cult, had influenced the development of the Christian version of a sacred meal practice, Doherty points out:*

The Gospels themselves give the negative reaction Jesus received from the Jews when he preached about his body and blood. Doherty's concerns are valid, and NT Wright has written a book (*The Resurrection of the Son of God*) to examine precisely why such significant mutations in Judaism would happen. Neither Doherty nor Price addresses the dating of sources to the alleged cult parallels. Indeed no one making these arguments does, because they know there is nothing in the first century to speak of. The practice of taurobolium is hardly relevant to the Eucharist supper, and again Doherty is assuming transubstantiation.

18. *If a person writes a letter and includes in it all this "doctrine" and claims to have received it via revelation from some supernatural being, would you really take that seriously? Apparently so, for you are doing just that in the case of Paul, for this is what Paul claims.*

I take it unless something can be empirically demonstrated or logically derived, then it doesn't count as evidence? The Christian Worldview does not limit itself this way. The historicity of the Gospels is central to Christian epistemology, as well as the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible.

19. Dawson: *Indeed, if Paul had conferred with Peter and learned from him that Jesus was put to death as a result of a trial before Pilate, do you think Paul would tell us that "rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil" (Rom. 13:3)? How could Paul have this view of rulers, a view which is echoed in I Peter 2:14, if he believed Jesus had been crucified under Pilate?*

I don't see what you're getting at here. Would knowledge of Pilate crucifying Jesus have necessarily changed Paul's opinion of rulers in general, especially given that Paul viewed Jesus' death as a sacrifice willingly taken on for redemptive purposes?

20. I agree with you Paul's reason for going on the trip isn't specifically to validate his experience. I was speculating about Paul's psychological state given the affairs with the Judaizers. Acts doesn't describe this as direct revelation in the same manner Paul had on the road to Damascus. The revelation sent them to preach the gospel, not talk with Cephas and James. The underlying issue at stake was Paul's defense of his gospel message against the Judaizers.

Acts 13

1Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit

*said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
3Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

Cheers,
David

[August 12, 2008 6:14 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

David: "I agree with you, but I'm talking literary analysis here, not linguistic philosophy."

I'm not talking linguistic philosophy either. You had mentioned "the building blocks of thought," and those are concepts, not words. This is basic epistemology, not linguistic philosophy. You can't have language without concepts. The ability to form concepts comes first, but language helps us retain and organize the concepts we've formed.

I wrote: "There is nothing wrong with this procedure, especially since Paul is not clear in what he means by "brother of the Lord" when applied to James. Nowhere else does Paul use the word 'brother' to denote a biological relationship; should we look to other people's use of the same word to interpret Paul? Other people have in fact used the word 'brother' to indicate a blood relation. Should we isolate Paul's word 'brother', remove it from the overall context of his use of that word, and assign it the meaning which other users of that word mean by it? Why?"

David: "Again, it is the phrase, 'brother of the Lord', that finds usage in the later Gospels. To concentrate on the word alone is to limit the explanatory scope of your conclusion. Examining the usage of the phrase in light of the later Gospel writers is valid especially given your view that Paul was a source."

If later writers misunderstood Paul's reference to James as "the brother of the Lord" to mean something other than what Paul understood by it (just as today's Christians have done), then obviously the writings of those later authors are not a good key for interpreting Paul. 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: "This is not context robbery because the phrase is in exactly the same place: amid reference to the disciples, apostles, or Cephas. If in fact the later Gospel writers were not recording eyewitness testimony, but expanding legends, then a better explanation need be given aside from speculating about Docetism. This idea that early authors were willing to fabricate information in order to preserve and progress what they knew to be false is not probable to me; however, since you judge individuals with strongly held beliefs in the supernatural to be especially susceptible to delusions, I understand your position."

Yes, you adhere to supernaturalism on the one hand (which defies explanation), and yet demand more and more and more explanation when it comes to hypotheses involving embellishment, fabrication, misunderstandings that beget further misunderstandings, manipulation of sources (such as OT "prophecies" of Jesus), etc., all couched in a worldview which condemns human beings as depraved liars. Got it.

I wrote: "I've seen no argument presented to conclude that Paul really meant that James was a biological sibling of the earthly Jesus in I Cor. 15. Do you have one?"

In response to your view of James :

David: "1. Assuming the legendary hypothesis, the later Gospel writers present James as the literal brother. No sufficient alternative explanation has been given for the Gospel writers choosing to fabricate the entire family of Jesus. Arguing apologetic motives requires giving some Gospel dates, which you have declined to discuss."

As I mentioned before, they need not have fabricated this from whole cloth. I'll repeat myself: "If Christians of Paul's time and later did not understand that 'brother of the Lord' was a title indicating membership in some core fraternity of leaders or zealots, it could easily have been interpreted as suggesting a sibling relationship." But maybe they did fabricate it from whole cloth, as for instance to combat docetism (which was a view held by the Gnostics of the day). I don't see why this is so difficult to fathom. Doesn't it strike you as a little off to say, on the one hand, that the best explanation is the supernaturalism of Christianity, but the possibility that someone has concocted a fiction is just too difficult to accept for some reason? As for dating the gospels, I would, as have numerous scholars, put the gospels post-70 CE.

David: "2. Paul's use of the word adelphos fails to support your interpretation because it necessarily precludes the phrase from possessing more meaning than the word alone."

I'm not sure what this is supposed to mean. How does Paul's use of the word adelphos "necessarily preclude the phrase from possessing more meaning than the word alone"? If you are thinking that to be my position, how did you get that? As I pointed out before, Paul's use of adelphos in the phrase in question is conspicuous in that he says "brother of the *Lord*" rather than "brother of *Jesus*." For Paul, lordship is clearly post-resurrection, since while in the flesh Jesus was lowly and humble, "emptied" of his powers, and upon his ascension he sat at the right hand of God. Calling James "the brother of the Lord" has much different connotations than saying he is "the brother of Jesus."

David: "3. Your interpretation provides little explanatory power, since if 'brother of the Lord' simply means James was a Christian, this is nothing unique and honorific at all."

Did you read what I had written? Paul clearly thought that James was a "pillar" of the church at the time (I referred you to Gal. 2:9). He was not just another convert in Paul's view.

David: "1. Evidence points to the historicity of the Gospels. In contrast, the legendary theory starts with no evidence, and utilizes arguments from silence in Paul."

Specifically what evidence "points to the historicity of the Gospels"? What exactly do you mean by this? What evidence is there that a deity incarnated itself, was born as a human being to a virgin mother, performed miracles and cured congenital blindness, rebuked demons and devils, raised dead people back to life, and was himself raised back to life after being crucified? We have stories, and stories can be made up. Tell me what evidence supports these stories?

As for the legend theory, I've already pointed to things which Paul says that conflicts with the later record, such as his view of rulers. For Paul, the earthly Jesus was lowly

and humbled, "emptied" of his powers, living in obscurity. By the time we get to the gospels, he was famous throughout the land, a performer of miracles, a healer, a teacher, a rabble-rouser, a menace both to the Jewish priests and the Roman government, things we never learn from Paul, and opposite to what he does indicate of the earthly Jesus. The list goes on. The record we have in Paul and other early epistles is exactly how we would expect to find it if the gospels, which we know were written later, were the product of legend-mongering. There are clear lines of embellishment and fabrication. But if you're guided by faith, I doubt I'm going to convince you of this. You believe the literalist Christian propaganda because you've invested yourself so deeply into its program, and admitting that your leg has been pulled is just too much to bear, especially when the messenger is someone so "loathsome" as a confessed atheist. I realize this, David, I was in your shoes at one point in my life. Only I woke up.

David: "2. Assuming non-legendary Gospel narratives, the later Gospel writers confirm that James was indeed the brother of Jesus."

Assuming that the gospels are true, one could say all kinds of things and get away with it, since he's granting validity to supernaturalism, which is a playground for the mind. Assuming the supernaturalism of the bible, how could I contest Joseph Smith's discovery of the golden plates of Mormonism? We have his own testimony of what he experienced, just as we have Paul's testimony of the resurrected Jesus appearing to him.

David: "3. Early patristic sources and church historians affirm James as the literal brother of Jesus. (multiple independent attestation)"

By which time legends were well in circulation. You already cited the example of Hegesippus. So that's not impressive at all.

David: "4. No sources have been presented in which 'brother of the Lord' does not reference a sibling relationship;"

Here you're just begging the question. If the earliest source (Paul) does not mean a sibling relationship, then what you say here is patently false.

David: "indeed all other sources examined use the phrase specifically to identify Jesus' siblings."

And I've addressed this several times now: had later Christians not known that 'brother of the Lord' was a church title not at all denoting a sibling relationship, it could easily have been mistaken by them as meaning a sibling relationship, or opportunistically seized on in order to contrive such a view. Using 'brother' to denote others as believers was common parlance; it still is today. When I was a Christian, everyone in my church was so eager to call me his brother. Also, it is doubtful that Paul would have put stock in a relationship of the flesh. Nowhere does Paul say that Jesus had any siblings.

David: "I'm curious as to whether you think James even existed?"

For all we know, there may have been several Jameses, or perhaps great confusion over the same James. In his [review of Robert Eisenman's *James the Brother of Jesus*](#), Robert Price points out:

Eisenman has developed a keen sense for the "name game" played in the sources. Most of us have sometime scratched our heads over the tantalizing confusions

latent in the strange redundancy of similar names in the New Testament accounts. How can Mary have had a sister named Mary? Is there a difference between Joseph Barsabbas Justus, Judas Barsabbas Justus, and James the Just? Whence all the Jameses and Judases? Who are Simon the Zealot and Judas the Zealot (who appears in some NT manuscripts and other early Christian documents)? Is Clopas the same as Cleophas? What's going on with Jesus ben-Ananias, Jesus Barabbas, Elymas bar-Jesus, and Jesus Justus? What does Boanerges really mean? Is Nathaniel a nickname for someone else we know of? And so on, and so on. Most of us puzzle over these oddities for a moment--and then move on. After all, how important can they be, anyway? Eisenman does not move on till he has figured it out.... The gospels give prominence to an inner circle of three: Peter, John son of Zebedee and John's brother James. And Galatians has the Three Pillars in Jerusalem: Peter, John son of Zebedee, and Jesus' brother James. What happened here? Surely the inner group of three is intended as preparatory for the Pillars, to provide a life-of-Jesus pedigree for the Pillars. But then why are there two different Jameses? Mustn't they originally have been the same? Eisenman says they were, but certain factions who wanted to play up the authority of the shadowy college of the Twelve against the earlier authority of the Heirs found it politic to drive a wedge between James the brother of Jesus and the Twelve, so James becomes James the Just on the one hand and James the brother of John on the other.

Even when I was a believer, I always found this jumble of names to be quite messy.

David: "I'm also curious as to exactly when you date the Gospels?"

I don't have exact dates. (Does anyone?)

David: "On your view, was James alive when these legends about him being Jesus' brother were being circulated?"

I have no opinion on this. Do we have the birthdates and death dates for anyone mentioned in the New Testament? If Christians don't, why expect me to? Tradition typically puts James' death ca. 62, and as I have stated, I would, along with many others vastly more knowledgeable on the topic than I, put the gospels post-70. However, I don't think the fact that someone is alive is sufficient to preclude legends developing about that individual. I remember back in the early 1980's how many legends were circulating about Eddie Van Halen and his ability as a guitarist. That was 25 or more years ago. The guy is still alive to this day. Legends have a way of developing and persisting among devotees and enthusiasts, regardless of the facts. People who are easily enchanted by fantasy are prime suckers for what may be outright lies. I've seen it in my own day. I have no reason to suspect this was not possible 2000 years ago.

I wrote: "In Christianity, fellowship in Christ clearly supersedes relation by the flesh."

David: "Is it your position that 'brother of the Lord' merely means James was a Christian?"

I've spoken to this already. The phrase "brother of the Lord" as used by Paul most likely indicates that James had some very high position in the Jerusalem church; for Paul, James is one of the "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9). Especially because it references "the Lord" as opposed to "Jesus," the phrase strikes me very much to be a title rather than a reference to a biological sibling. I don't think a reference to a sibling here would at all make sense.

I wrote: "Do you think that merely by being a biological sibling, James acquired status as an early leader? Again, what record in the early epistles even remotely suggests this?"

David: "Let's not get things turned around here. I asked you 'How did James acquire his status as early leader given we have no record of him following Christ during his lifetime?'"

I see that you resist answering my question. At any rate, I will answer yours: I don't know, as there is no contemporary record for this. But it could have been any number of things. He may have been one of the initial ringleaders in Jerusalem, maybe for decades by the time Paul hit the gentile scene. A literal biological relationship is surely not the only (nor the best) explanation for James' rank in the hierarchy of the church at the time. He probably was a teacher, a sage in his own right, someone probably forgotten by history save for some legends that grew around scant references to him that survived in the literature.

David: "We have a source (Eusebius) indicating Peter gave James leadership of the church when he had to leave Jerusalem, but why? I don't know. I don't think the sibling relationship had much to do with it."

Nor do I. As I have pointed out, with references to what Christians were actually teaching (and putting into Jesus' mouth in the gospels) about family, I don't think a sibling relationship would have meant a hill of beans to the early Christians. It was probably a misinterpretation of a title that Paul (and/or others) had used of James, one that was seized upon by later Christians who sought to combat docetism, which very much threatened the literalist view that gained currency in some influential circles.

David: "Douglas J. Moo (The Letter of James, pg 13) points out that '...physical ties to Jesus became important only after the time of James' death.'"

David, this statement right here undermines the view that "brother of the Lord" indicates a sibling relationship. Paul met with James while he was alive, according to what he writes in Galatians. Also, while most sources date James' death to 62 CE, Paul's composition of his letter to the Galatians is usually dated to the early 50s (I've seen no source dating it after 60 CE). So Paul was most likely writing before James met his doom. So if "physical ties to Jesus became important only after the time of James' death," then the situation we have here - where Paul is referring to James as "the brother of the Lord" (mind you, not "of Jesus") before James is even dead - demands some explanation.

Moo: " If anything, therefore, the author's [James epistle] failure to mention the relationship is an argument against the pseudepigraphal view..."

This is almost humorous. So argument from silence carries weight after all, at least when Christian apologists use it, right?

Moo: "So many factors- the author's circumstances, his relationship to his readers, the purpose of the letter, the issues in the community - affect the content of the letter that it is precarious in the extreme to draw wide-ranging conclusions from the failure to mention a particular topic."

Moo is welcome to his opinion, but essentially he's just poo-pooing the objection without really raising any good counter-objection to it. So I can just poo-poo Moo

myself: it is precarious in the extreme to ignore the implications of the failure of the author of the epistle of James to identify himself as the brother of Jesus (as opposed to "of the Lord") when doing so would have greatly strengthened any claim to authority he wants for what he writes in that letter. Meanwhile, if the early communities did not have the tradition

David: "If Paul intends to bestow honor on James in his letter to the Galatians, why? Just because James is the head honcho in Jerusalem? These aren't leading questions; I'm just curious what you think."

I think it's quite possible that Paul's motivations were political.

I wrote: "I would hope so. But one's purpose may be to distract, deflect or confuse. If Paul is vague, given his purposefulness (as you claim), it must be because he was being vague on purpose. No?"

David: "Perhaps we haven't taken enough time to understand the original Greek. I'm certainly not ready to render any verdict given the little time I have studied this passage."

Come now, David, you've definitely "rendered a verdict" on this passage, haven't you? You didn't need to parse the "original Greek" in order to suppose that Paul meant that James is Jesus' sibling, did you?

David: "I also don't aim at solving or proving any of this, but this is a useful way for me to learn more about your position and motivate my future studies. I do hope you're gaining something from this as well."

I blog on the symptomatology of Christianity because I enjoy it, David. It's a work of love for me.

I wrote: "Since you do not quote Doherty, or even cite him, I will:"

David: "I was referring to what Robert has already posted, which you said would suffice to support your position."

If you're going to attack a source, you might want to be familiar with what it says.

Dawson: So Doherty does, after all, provide an explanation for this distinction.

David: "Where can we find this early community in Jerusalem identifying themselves as 'brethren of/in the Lord'?"

Apparently only in inferences that we can make from the scant references in extant texts.

David: "It doesn't look to me like he covered the definite/indefinite article distinction in the quote you provided."

As he makes clear (he even put the word 'the' in italics), Doherty attributes the exclusivity of this title to James' apparent preeminence of James' position. I don't think he needs to spend pages and pages on this.

David: "He thinks 'brothers in the Lord' is a 'strong indicator of what the phrase applied to James must have meant', but doesn't give reasons why."

It's pretty self-explanatory at this point, at least it seems so to me. What else are you looking for?

David: "I'm sure he has them, but are they mentioned in his popular writings? At any rate, he admits some speculation that the phrase 'could have resulted in a special designation'."

Since there's so little to go on, any inference one draws from what little there is, will probably always be subject to the charge of "speculation," as if this in itself were sufficient to write the epitaph over the inference. If you are interested in knowing more of Doherty's views on this, I suggest you do some research - he's got a website with dozens and dozens of articles. If you don't find it there, maybe you could e-mail him and pose your questions directly to him. I'm not a Doherty scholar, so I don't think I am best suited to answering all the wonderful questions you raise.

I wrote: "Clearly by Hegsippus' time (some 100+ years after Paul), the legend of who James was had grown significantly."

David: "Gerd Ludeman (in his debate with William Lane Craig on the resurrection, mp3 available online) has argued that legends can radically expand within a single year, so perhaps we should be skeptical of sources even if one year after the fact? How far does this kind of skepticism extend and is it applicable only to the Bible or all historical analysis?"

Of course, it depends on the content, which can give it away right off (such as if supernatural abilities or feats are attributed to someone). Similarly, if you were a member of a jury in a murder trial, and when the defendant took the stand to testify on his own behalf he claims that the reason why he was found with the murder weapon in his hand in the same room as the murder victim, is because a bat flew into the room, turned into a man, stabbed the victim to death with the murder weapon, then put the murder weapon into his hand and turned back into a bat and flew out of the room right before the police stormed the room, would you believe him, or suspect that he was making this up?

I wrote: "This is misleading. In his letters, Paul, the earliest NT writer, never refers to [James] as 'the brother of Jesus'. To say that 'James has historically been understood to be the brother of Jesus' is agenda-driven revisionism."

David: "Kurios is Paul's explicit name for Jesus. I don't think I made an unfair or inaccurate statement."

Paul's explicit name for Jesus is *Jesus*. Paul also refers to Jesus with the *title* 'Lord'.

Here's [one source](#) which settles the matter:

he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has power of deciding;
master, lord
the possessor and disposer of a thing
the owner; one who has control of the person, the master
in the state: the sovereign, prince, chief, the Roman emperor
is a title of honour expressive of respect and reverence, with which servants greet
their master this title is given to: God, the Messiah

This is explicit in designating 'Lord' as a *title*. Saying that Paul refers to James as "Jesus' brother" or "the brother of Jesus," is misleading, for he never does say this. He refers to James as "brother of the *Lord*" which is significant.

I wrote: "I don't think so. At no point does Paul explicitly indicate that Jesus had any siblings, and a survey of his use of 'brother' demonstrates that this was a religious title, not a sibling relationship. I don't need any evidence beyond this."

David: "Arguments from silence and a fallacious word study - that evidence is going to mount an argument that refutes 17 centuries of unquestioned literal brotherhood?"

I've given more than mere argument from silence, and my word study is not fallacious, David (and you haven't shown it to be either, so there! ;). What we have for 17+ centuries is uncritical acceptance of the Christian party line, David. That's the "unquestioned" part of the "literal brotherhood" here which Paul's passing reference to "brother of the Lord" in no way necessitates. Meanwhile, you have nothing but "tradition" and question-begging gospel-colored goggles going for the sibling relationship interpretation.

David: "Come on Dawson, not in my courtroom anyway."

But David, you've to my courtroom, remember?

David: "Do you contend that the 500 brethren are given just as much honor as James?"

No, I don't, and I don't have to. The "brother of the Lord" station was a high-ranking position. But like James, they were brothers in Christ, religious fellow-worshippers.

I wrote: "Both the motive and the opportunity were present by the time the gospels were set to paper."

David: "Do you agree with Wells' dating of the Gospels, if not what dates are you assuming here?"

I think Wells makes a very good case for the timeline of the writing of the NT documents.

I wrote: "Since, even if they were using Paul as a source, the gospel writers probably would not have considered his writings as divinely ordained or canonical, they most likely would not have taken it as inviolable anyway. As Robert has, I believe correctly, pointed out, that the authors of Matthew and Luke made their own revisions to the narrative found in the gospel of Mark, the evangelists performatively demonstrated that they did not think they were documenting actual history. If they did, then they obviously did not have a very good understanding of what history is."

David: "The very nature of Paul's claims about his writings demanded either one accept them as authoritative or reject them as blasphemy."

I certainly don't accept either horn of this dichotomy, nor would I expect anyone else to, even those sympathetic to Christianity.

David: "Assuming Markan priority is the correct view, the most we can say is that Matthew and Luke did exactly what their contemporaries did when developing a historical narrative."

Actually we can say more than this. There are clear signs of tampering of common sources throughout the synoptics to tailor them to the specific preferences of the writer. It's clear that Matthew and Luke were drawing upon Mark's model, for they follow the same general course. But between Matthew and Luke, who (as many scholars - you like those - have pointed out) were both also drawing on a non-Markan source (referred to in the literature as Q), show differences in rendering the same sayings attributed to Jesus. For instance, consider the following:

Mt. 7:11: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

Lk. 11:13: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

Notice how Luke pushes the promise further into the imaginative realm of the supernatural. Where on Matthew's version, the reader believing the promise could reasonably expect tangible goodies in response to asking the "Father" for them, Luke preempts such expectation by altering the text to say "the Holy Spirit" instead of simply "good things," which is, even on the Christian view, a broader generality. There are many similar examples of such loose handling of source material in the gospels. Clearly these folks were *creating* narratives, not *recording* history.

David: "The statement that they didn't 'have a very good understanding of what history is' both demands an explanation for what such a standard would be, and on the surface seems to push modern historical standards on ancient historians."

Your demand here seems to invite the accusation you pack into the latter half of your statement here, which seems openly baiting to me (and thus raises my suspicion that you're seeking to entrap). But examples like the above clearly show that what we're dealing with in the end is not history, but the development of theological portraits intended to inculcate emotional reactions in readers and at times answer rival theologies, etc.

I wrote: "If a variety of religions which preceded Christianity incorporated worship practices that involved, for instance, the consumption of bread and wine as symbols for the flesh and blood of a resurrected deity."

David: "Has someone provided an example of this?"

Yes, see for instance Freke and Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries*, Robert Price's many articles and several books on the matter, Wells, Doherty, and numerous other sources. I certainly don't have time to spoonfeed you here. But here's a little taste, from [Price's review of NT Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God*](#) (which I have, but have not fully read):

There are three fundamental, vitiating errors running like fault lines through the unstable continent of this book. The first is a complete unwillingness to engage a number of specific questions or bodies of evidence that threaten to shatter Wright's over-optimistically orthodox assessment of the evidence. The most striking of these blustering evasions has to do with the dying-and-rising redeemer cults that permeated the environment of early Christianity and had for many, many centuries. Ezekiel 8:14 bemoans the ancient Jerusalemite women's lamentation for Tammuz, derived from the Dumuzi cult of ancient Mesopotamia. Ugaritic texts make it plain that Baal's death and resurrection and subsequent enthronement at the side of his Father El went back centuries before Christianity and were

widespread in Israel. Pyramid texts tell us that Osiris' devotees expected to share in his resurrection. Marduk, too, rose from the dead. And then there is the Phrygian Attis, the Syrian Adonis. The harmonistic efforts of Bruce Metzger, Edwin Yamauchi, Ron Sider, Jonathan Z. Smith and others have been completely futile, utterly failing either to deconstruct the dying-and-rising god mytheme (as Smith vainly tries to do) or to claim that the Mysteries borrowed their resurrected savior myths and rituals from Christianity. If that were so, why on earth did early apologists admit that the pagan versions were earlier, invented as counterfeits before the fact by Satan? Such myths and rites were well known to Jews and Galileans, not to mention Ephesians, Corinthians, etc., for many centuries. But all this Wright merely brushes off, as if it has long been discredited. He merely refers us to other books. It is all part of his bluff: "Oh, no one takes that seriously anymore! Really, it's so *pass!*"

I wrote: "Is your concern to dispel the notion that Christianity borrowed from specifically a pagan mystery cult, or that it borrowed from any prior religious model?"

David: "Specifically the Hellenistic mystery cults. Of course Christianity borrowed from a prior religious model."

Okay, so long as it's understood that borrowing from pre-Christian religious models was taking place in the molding of the Christian product. There were many sources, including various Jewish sectarian sources, the Wisdom literature, mystery religions, etc.

I wrote: "You seem to be wanting it both ways here, David. Above you quoted Grant, who says that "Judaism was a milieu to which doctrines of the deaths and rebirths of mythical god seems so entirely foreign..." but then you quote Nash and Metzger here, who claim that the Christian Eucharist, which has the believer thinking he is actually eating the flesh and drinking the blood of his god, is fully in keeping with Jewish practices."

David: "Only transubstantiation posits the view you expressed, and this is not the Biblical view of the Eucharist..."

I know a lot of Christians who would vehemently disagree with your claim here (specifically the latter part). If Christians are guided by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, this is most puzzling to me. Doesn't the Holy Spirit help protect believers from doctrinal errors, or does it protect believers only on things that are not important? Or, is doctrine not important?

David: "that is a can of worms best left on the shelf."

Just as long as it is understood that this is a can of worms that Christians have opened and poured all over themselves. It's certainly not my problem.

David: "Regardless, the quotes I presented are not contradictory, and the only way "I want it" is to look at the Eucharist in light of Judaism and its own sacred meals, and also look at what Christ said in the Gospels to institute this practice. The mystery cults are irrelevant to my analysis, and I've given some reasons why I think it's just as likely that mystery cults would have borrowed from Christianity to gain popularity in Rome."

The evidence is clearly the opposite as you have it, but by deeming the mystery cults as "irrelevant to [your] analysis" as you have, you cut yourself off from a vast area of

knowledge and source of evidence. I suspect there's an apologetic reason why you have chosen to do this.

Now David, I did pose some questions on how revelation is supposed to work, but I do not see that you've addressed them. Instead, you seem to prefer trifling over a passing reference to James as "the brother of the Lord," which seems to be a very small matter in comparison to the claim to have received a revelation from a deity.

Also, I do have another question, which I've asked other Christians, but for which I have not received any satisfying responses. My question is this: Why doesn't Jesus just appear before all of us, as he allegedly did before Paul on the road to Damascus (according to Acts anyway), and settle all these conflicts which have raged for 2000 years? I asked a Christian this question once, and his response was "Jesus wants us to have faith" (which only confirms the disjunction between faith and reason). To which I asked another question in response: Are you then saying that Paul, the most prolific writer of the NT, did not have faith?

You may want to consult my blog [The Problem of Saul](#) for some more spicy thoughts on the matter.

Regards,
Dawson

[August 14, 2008 8:06 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson, in my first response to your blog article, I missed that you were trying to posit that Jesus' existence was legendary. I'm accustomed to people arguing that the resurrection was legendary and not the entire events in the Gospels. Perhaps I will back up a moment since I have gotten a hold of the book you were originally referring to, as well as some of Wells' work.

1. You made some statements about Geisler/Turek (G/T) that strike me as quite heavy and unsupported:

In your original blog article, you attempted to cast G/T's argument in opposition to your rendition of Wells' legend theory. I assumed that G/T was indeed arguing against the legend theory, because normally folks don't simply toss a position at an author and criticize them for not dealing with it when the author didn't aim to in the first place. I also assumed when you accused professional philosophers of question begging and lying, that perhaps I shouldn't judge until I could have a look at the source.

Dawson said:

"But if the Jesus story were a legend in the first place - the very premise which our authors are trying to defeat, then appealing to what might have happened or could have happened to Jesus' body simply begs the question, for it assumes precisely what they are called to prove: namely that the story we have of Jesus in the New Testament is not legend. If the story about Jesus is merely a legend, then there was no body to crucify and seal in a tomb or parade through the streets of Jerusalem."

"Geisler and Turek's book is admittedly aimed more at a popular audience, but it's fair game so far as I see it, and it's typical in regard to how blatantly many Christians beg the question when it comes to how they argue against the legend theory."

Simply put, I think you've built a straw man and forced it to beg the question. Does G/T present Habermas' resurrection argument to conclude that the legend theory is false? No. Besides the fact that there are all sorts of "legend theories" and Wells is the most extreme, you are missing out on what is actually being argued. Generally when New Testament scholars speak of "embellishments" or "legend development" they are not necessarily asserting that the narratives are not without any historical seed at all; specifically, G/K are not defending against the supposition that Paul took some pagan mythology to wash down his hallucinations, and then regurgitated some no-less-than maniacal letters with which later writers found much accord and fabricated more complex Jesus tales. Indeed, if G/K is arguing for the historicity of the resurrection and not the historicity of the whole "Jesus story", this is a sound argument.

On that note I contend that if the legend theory you suppose is true, then Paul is completely insane (after all his statements are incoherent without the Gospels being read back into them or assuming his audience had any idea of what he meant), and the Gospel writers are some of the most outrageous fraudsters fiction has ever seen. Now back to this corny book (actually I agree with your analysis there).

G/T is specifically arguing for the historicity of the resurrection, which, as you've pointed out, rests on other premises (the historicity of specific statements made in the Gospels) to support it. It is perfectly valid argumentation to have a series of linked premises (with sub-arguments) that support a larger conclusion. One need not reject or accept the entire New Testament as legend; indeed many critical scholars reject the miracle stories and resurrection as legendary yet find no good reason to reject the descriptions of political events, geography, etc. Regardless, you are misrepresenting G/T and introducing a false dichotomy.

Craig Blomberg discusses this dichotomy:

"It certainly seems fair to say its no more appropriate to take the hardest and most fantastic part of a piece of literature and write all the rest of it off as a result, than it is to take the most sober, corroborated piece of literature and use that as a reason for believing everything else in the document." (*Difficult Questions about the New Testament*, mp3 online).

2. Dawson said: *There's a persistent and annoying perhapsical nature to all this, and puts a great burden on the memories of those whom Paul personally missionized, persons who may or may not have been the recipients of Paul's letters, which - like I Corinthians - was addressed to the church as a whole, not to a specific individual.*

You complain that there is a "perhapsical" nature to this whole idea that Paul's letters were not written in a contextual vacuum. Yet haven't answered my question: is it really more probable that Paul was writing nonsense? I think the legend theory per Wells has much more perhapsing to account for than any theory of New Testament origins. Perhaps the earlier letter to the Corinthians we no longer have (1 Cor 5:9) contains everything that you find lacking in Paul. :)

3. On several counts, you project your modern understanding back into ancient context:

3a. Dawson said: *"They obviously do not have a physical person in mind when they make these kinds of declarations, so why suppose the early Christians were speaking about a physical Jesus when they claimed to have "witnessed" him?"*
If the word "witness" enjoys a very loose meaning for many of today's Christians (and it very often does), why suppose it didn't enjoy similar flexibility among the early Christians?

A word's current usage cannot be transferred anachronistically "backwards" (get it?). The error is counted doubly when you attempt the feat with two different languages. (Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* pg 33)

3b. Dawson: *"If I had seen a man who was actually resurrected from the grave, whom I thought was 'the Son of God,' I would waste no time in writing down exactly what I had seen, where I had seen it and when I had seen it. If I knew of others who had the same experience, I would not hesitate to get their testimony down in writing, or at least to have them endorse such statements of witness. But that's me."*

Do you live in the oral culture of first century Palestine? If you did chances are you'd be illiterate, and if you could read and write could you afford it? How could you assure the transmission of your document?

Even granting your position for the sake of internal critique, how many average people in our modern society have ever written a historical account of some life changing event they experienced? How about the Virginia Tech mass homicide? This was a major event to witness. I was going to school at James Madison University at the time (2 hours down the road), and saw no written accounts circulating amongst my close friends who were only several feet away from the killer that day. Indeed not even blogging about their experiences? No, but they told me plenty about it. Even if they did write some of it down, would it still be around in a couple of millennia? Maybe so with today's standards, but I don't think that even close to a reasonable expectation for 30 AD. Geisler (same book) points out it may very well be the case that Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and James were among the 500 as well as nine who are elsewhere named Apostles (Geisler/Turek, pg 248); if he's right then there are written accounts.

At any rate you recognize transmission problems elsewhere:

On Paul's view, I don't see why any of the anonymous 500 or so brethren that he mentions in I Cor. 15 could not also claim to be apostles. Maybe some of them did and are simply lost in history.

3c. Dawson: *Paul nowhere suggests that Jesus had taught these things during his life on earth. But that's what we find when we get to the gospels: Jesus marching a squad of disciples through the ancient countryside between various towns in Palestine performing miracles, healing the blind, the lame and the infirm, giving moral instruction and teaching in the form of parables. We never learn any of this from Paul.*

It's as if you are surprised by the fact that Paul was writing letters on the road and not historical narrative. Was Paul's purpose in writing those letters to give exhaustive account of Jesus' earthly ministry? No. Would these references have made his arguments more compelling? Perhaps to you, but where has it been argued that the original intended audience shares your worldview? So why blame Paul for not fulfilling your requirements when they are incompatible with Paul's authorial intent?

1 Corinthians 9:10 "To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband"

Now why does Paul put this moral teaching in Jesus' mouth, and then immediately afterwards clarify something that he is saying instead of Jesus? Indeed this teaching was nothing new (Gen 2:24; Mal 2:16).

4. Now to the issue of Gospel dating and how Wells handles external sources:

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)."

"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)

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

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. Price proudly admits that he stands in an older tradition of criticism in his debate with William Lane Craig on the resurrection, but I have yet to find Wells acknowledge his heritage.

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. J.P. Holding did have some interaction with him: [Tektonics](#)

Dawson: *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*

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"

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. 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...).

In Acts there are two significant events with external attestation for their timeline:

1. The expulsion of the Jews to Rome in AD 49 by Emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2, date referenced in Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4)
2. The appointment of Gallio as governor of the province of Achaia in mid AD 51 (based on the Gallio inscription found at Delphi, mentioned in Acts 18:12 in relation to Paul's visit to Corinth)

There is much more to cover about dating the Gospels, but without being lengthy there isn't much more I can say about them (Temple destruction in 70 AD, War of 66AD, death of Paul and Peter from Josephus, Nero in 64 AD etc...).

A good essay on dating Luke/Acts (generally historians prefer these two books because of the amount of historical data mentioned therein):

<http://leonardooh.wordpress.com/2008/04/17/on-dating-luke-acts-and-it%E2%80%99s-synoptic-consequence/>

Mark has external attestation from Papias in 110 AD:

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.

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.

5. Dawson: *I'm not talking linguistic philosophy either. You had mentioned "the building blocks of thought," and those are concepts, not words. This is basic epistemology, not linguistic philosophy. You can't have language without concepts. The ability to form concepts comes first, but language helps us retain and organize the concepts we've formed.*

This is a silly quibble, but just so you don't think I'm being dishonest in what I stated: "Words are the unit of thought in most of our thinking and writing; they are the bricks of our conceptual formulation." (Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation 3 ed.*, page 128)

6. Regarding the word study fallacy you keep insisting is proper exegesis:

Straight out of a hermeneutics textbook, under the heading of "word-count fallacy": "We make this mistake when we insist that a word must have the same meaning every time it occurs. For example, if we are confident that a word carries a certain meaning in seven of its eight occurrences in Scripture, we might be tempted to conclude that it must have the same meaning in its eighth occurrence. Yet as Darrel Bock maintains, "word meanings are determined by context, not word counts." (Bock, "New Testament Word Analysis pg. 111, *A Hands on Approach To Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible, Duvall pg 130*)

7. You deem my inquiries about James as trifling, but even Wells himself says that his theory stands or falls on this. Indeed the reason I have pressed this point is because

your original statement about a recent resurrection in Paul demand such evidence be discussed.

Wells:

"If Paul means blood brother of a historical Jesus, then it would suffice to establish--against my view--that Jesus had really lived in the first half of the first century. Furthermore, I must admit that this interpretation of Paul's words does seem the immediate and obvious one. Here, then, is a case where what seems to be the plain sense of a text . . . would weigh very heavily indeed against my view of Christian origins." (HEJ, 167)

Similarly regarding "the twelve":

"If these words were really written by Paul, then it looks as though he was aware that Jesus chose twelve disciples; and if Paul in this respect corroborates what the gospels say, then it would be reasonable to infer that he also knows the principle facts of Jesus' life . . ." (DJE, 124)

In order to get himself out of the quagmire he's created ;) , Wells must argue that the Corinthian passage is an interpolation (*DJE*, pg 124) even though every single shred of manuscript evidence includes the full passage. That means there is zero textual warrant for his claim. This constitutes special pleading. You said you were ok with the creed being authentic though right?

In addition, Wells must reject both references to Jesus in Josephus to hold up his theory. Written around 93-94 AD, Josephus' writings clearly link Jesus to his disciples and connect his crucifixion to Pilate. Now I grant that many register concern about the authenticity *Antiquities 18:3*, but who else is rejecting all references to Jesus? Wells of course.

Princeton Seminary's James Charlesworth: "We can now be as certain as historical research will presently allow that Josephus did refer to Jesus." (*Jesus Within Judaism*, pg. 96)

In addition, Wells **must** also twist the reference in Josephus about James to be consistent. According to the passage "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James" met his death after the death of the procurator Porcius Festus, yet before Lucceius Albinus took office (*Antiquities 20.9*)...which is also where we derive the traditional date of 62 AD for his death.

At any rate Wells has since changed his mind about the existence of Jesus, so now his earlier critiques of Paul need to be re-assessed and I seriously doubt they will maintain consistency. Apparently Q has persuaded him that Jesus may have been a real person.

'A final argument against the nonexistence hypothesis comes from Wells himself. In his most recent book, *The Jesus Myth* (1999), Wells has moved away from this hypothesis. He now accepts that there is some historical basis for the existence of Jesus, derived from the lost early "gospel" "Q" (the hypothetical source used by Matthew and Luke). Wells believes that it is early and reliable enough to show that Jesus probably did exist, although this Jesus was not the Christ that the later canonical Gospels portray. It remains to be seen what impact Wells's about-face will have on debate over the nonexistence hypothesis in popular circles.', Van Voorst, Robert E, 'NonExistence Hypothesis', in Houlden, James Leslie (editor), 'Jesus in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia', page 660 (Santa Barbara: 2003)

In a lecture given in 2003, he admits that Paul probably did believe that Jesus was an actual Jewish man who was crucified. (<http://www.bede.org.uk/gawells.htm>)

How do you square this with your statement given your relied on Wells for nearly all citations made during our interection?

Dawson: *Now, surely even you must admit, David, this is pretty flimsy. In all his letters, had Paul believed that people he had personally met had walked and talked with the earthly, pre-resurrection Jesus, we're supposed to believe he never found an opportunity to mention this, except to refer to this person James as Jesus' brother?*

Perhaps like Antony Flew we should assume his old age has withered his critical faculties :) But enough about Wells, I just didn't want you to think I was swatting him away so quickly. I will continue to read his works and possibly if I ever start a blog address more fully the issues with the legend theory.

Dawson said: *For here we have the example of G.A. Wells, whose books are chock full of quotes from and references to the scholarly literature, and he is dismissed with the wave of his hand as if he were simply a pesky fly. So in spite of your complaint, it probably wouldn't matter if I had used 5 or 10 or 50 different sources to inform my points - I'm sure you're inventive enough to find a way to dismiss them anyway.*

I think there is a lot of inventive dismissal going on when you build a theory on the absence of evidence.

8. 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.*

I haven't been shown any examples of this, but I have heard about lots of things Paul doesn't mention. What about some things he does tell us about Jesus?

- Jesus was born in human fashion, as a Jew, and had a ministry to the Jews. (Galatians 4:4)
- Jesus was referred to as "Son of God". (1 Cor. 1:9)
- Jesus was a direct descendent of King David. (Romans 1:3)
- Jesus prayed to God using the term "abba". (Galatians 4:6)
- Jesus expressly forbid divorce. (1 Cor. 7:10)
- Jesus taught that "preachers" should be paid for their preaching. (1 Cor. 9:14)
- Jesus taught about the end-time. (1 Thess. 4:15)
- Paul refers to Peter by the name Cephas (rock), which was the name Jesus gave to him. (1 Cor. 3:22)
- Jesus had a brother named James. (Galatians 1:19)
- Jesus initiated the Lord's supper and referred to the bread and the cup. (1 Cor. 11:23-25)
- Jesus was betrayed on the night of the Lord's Supper. (1 Cor. 11:23-25)
- Jesus' death was related to the Passover Celebration. (1 Cor. 5:7)
- The death of Jesus was at the hands of earthly rulers. (1 Cor. 2:8)
- Jesus underwent abuse and humiliation. (Romans 15:3)
- Jewish authorities were involved with Jesus' death. (1 Thess. 2:14-16)
- Jesus died by crucifixion. (2 Cor. 13:4 et al)
- Jesus was physically buried. (1 Cor. 15:4)

(from <http://www.bede.org.uk/jesusmyth.htm>)

9. *Yes, you adhere to supernaturalism on the one hand (which defies explanation), and yet demand more and more and more explanation when it comes to hypotheses involving embellishment, fabrication, misunderstandings that beget further misunderstandings, manipulation of sources (such as OT "prophecies" of Jesus), etc., all couched in a worldview which condemns human beings as depraved liars. Got it.*

Not even close Dawson, and I'm surprised you would hurl such insults if you are really laboring in love as you claim. It only makes the discussion less productive.

10. *David: "3. Your interpretation provides little explanatory power, since if 'brother of the Lord' simply means James was a Christian, this is nothing unique and honorific at all."*

Dawson: *Did you read what I had written? Paul clearly thought that James was a "pillar" of the church at the time (I referred you to Gal. 2:9). He was not just another convert in Paul's view.*

This doesn't at all lend credence to your argument about the meaning of the phrase in Galatians 1. Paul could say James was purple in chapter 2, but why assume that has any bearing on the meaning of a phrase in chapter 1?

11. *Specifically what evidence "points to the historicity of the Gospels"? What exactly do you mean by this? What evidence is there that a deity incarnated itself, was born as a human being to a virgin mother, performed miracles and cured congenital blindness, rebuked demons and devils, raised dead people back to life, and was himself raised back to life after being crucified? We have stories, and stories can be made up. Tell me what evidence supports these stories?*

It seems like you have only supernatural events in mind for the historicity of the Gospels. There are voluminous works out there on the historical Jesus from all spectrums of the issue which give evidence for this. Need I summarize them all here?

12. Dawson: *As for the legend theory, I've already pointed to things which Paul says that conflicts with the later record, such as his view of rulers.*

I already asked how Paul's general description of rulers is relevant to a specific description in the Gospels.

13. Dawson: *You believe the literalist Christian propaganda because you've invested yourself so deeply into its program, and admitting that your leg has been pulled is just too much to bear, especially when the messenger is someone so "loathsome" as a confessed atheist. I realize this, David, I was in your shoes at one point in my life. Only I woke up.*

It's rather unfortunate that my beliefs be relegated to mere "devotion to a system." It's not as if you have any particular insistence on the negation of my beliefs, or hold stock in the legend theory for any reasons relevant to your own Christianity experience. No not at all! I am completely biased and blind because of my worldview and you are the wise old atheist waking me up with the somber light of disbelief. I find that rather silly, but amusing nonetheless. :)

I'm 24 years old and grew up in a Christian home in the deep Southern Bible belt. I wildly abandoned my parents' faith in college and eagerly followed the natural sciences as the sole means of attaining truth. I did things I never dreamed of (and will have nightmares about later in life), having been freed from the morality of my youth.

Then, through events in my life, God took hold of me. I picked up the Bible and actually read its claims about God, mankind, and the world as well as the relationship between them. It makes perfect sense to me, and everything in the Bible meshes with what I've experienced personally in my "walk", or whatever the popular Christian word is these days. In addition, I find the 4 facts about the resurrection very compelling. So you see, from my perspective I too woke up, and I was also in your shoes. Actually I know a limited amount about your shoes, but I think you have a great deal of confidence in your dismissal of Christianity. I'm sure you've thought this, but I'm always one to say doubt everything even your skepticism.

14. *David: "4. No sources have been presented in which 'brother of the Lord' does not reference a sibling relationship;"*

Dawson: Here you're just begging the question. If the earliest source (Paul) does not mean a sibling relationship, then what you say here is patently false.

I intended to exclude the verse in question from that statement and should have done so explicitly. I guess given how quickly you accuse people of begging the question; I should be clearer. :)

15. *David: "indeed all other sources examined use the phrase specifically to identify Jesus' siblings."*

Dawson: And I've addressed this several times now: had later Christians not known that 'brother of the Lord' was a church title not at all denoting a sibling relationship, it could easily have been mistaken by them as meaning a sibling relationship, or opportunistically seized on in order to contrive such a view. Using 'brother' to denote others as believers was common parlance; it still is today. When I was a Christian, everyone in my church was so eager to call me his brother. Also, it is doubtful that Paul would have put stock in a relationship of the flesh. Nowhere does Paul say that Jesus had any siblings.

Are you basing your assertions about later Christians on what is probable or what is possible? If all your probability assessments rely on the legend theory, I think you're in big trouble.

16. *Dawson: I've spoken to this already. The phrase "brother of the Lord" as used by Paul most likely indicates that James had some very high position in the Jerusalem church; for Paul, James is one of the "pillars" of the church (Gal. 2:9).*

You've given no evidence that "brother of the Lord" indicates this, and neither have the quotes you provided. Speculating about unnamed "extant texts" doesn't do much for me.

17. *Dawson: Especially because it references "the Lord" as opposed to "Jesus," the phrase strikes me very much to be a title rather than a reference to a biological sibling. I don't think a reference to a sibling here would at all make sense.*

Actually when the alleged ossuary of James was found, one of the reasons some critical scholars rejected it as authentic was precisely because it named him "brother of Jesus."

18. *Dawson: I see that you resist answering my question. At any rate, I will answer yours:*

On the contrary, I clearly stated that I didn't think James' sibling status had much to do with it.

At any rate I was pointing out in that response that the apostles had their own disciples too. We have those disciples putting John at the side of Jesus::

Irenaeus in 180 AD quotes the disciple of John (Polycarp):

John, the disciple of the Lord, who leaned back on his breast, published the Gospel while he was resident at Ephesus in Asia.

Are all these ancient historians spewing legend material uncritically? External sources seem to be the biggest problem for the legend theory. Do you really intend to reject every piece of evidence simply because it came later and "could have" been embellished? The cumulative case is rather devastating; indeed, not even Christian apologists explaining away apparent Bible contradictions have attempted the maneuvers of proponents of the extreme legend theory.

19. David: *"Douglas J. Moo (The Letter of James, pg 13) points out that '...physical ties to Jesus became important only after the time of James' death.'"*

Dawson: *"David, this statement right here undermines the view that "brother of the Lord" indicates a sibling relationship."*

Absolutely not, because I clearly said that I reject the position that Paul is honoring James with the phrase.

Paul met with James while he was alive, according to what he writes in Galatians. Also, while most sources date James' death to 62 CE, Paul's composition of his letter to the Galatians is usually dated to the early 50s (I've seen no source dating it after 60 CE). So Paul was most likely writing before James met his doom. So if "physical ties to Jesus became important only after the time of James' death," then the situation we have here - where Paul is referring to James as "the brother of the Lord" (mind you, not "of Jesus") before James is even dead - demands some explanation.

It only demands explanation given a position I do not hold.

Why is any scholar that disagrees with your position a "Christian apologist?"

Dawson: *Moo is welcome to his opinion, but essentially he's just poo-pooing the objection without really raising any good counter-objection to it. So I can just poo-poo Moo myself: it is precarious in the extreme to ignore the implications of the failure of the author of the epistle of James to identify himself as the brother of Jesus (as opposed to "of the Lord") when doing so would have greatly strengthened any claim to authority he wants for what he writes in that letter. Meanwhile, if the early communities did not have the tradition*

Given Paul's situation when he penned many of his letters, it is surprising he wrote anything at all. Its not just Moo's opinion either - its sound exegesis. Ignore the literary genre and cultural context, and you've guaranteed the text can say whatever you'd like to support your theory. On top of that, how much easier to work from what the text doesn't say!

20. David: *"Come on Dawson, not in my courtroom anyway."*

Dawson: *But David, you've to my courtroom, remember?*

I think each of us can judge for ourselves.

21. David: *"The very nature of Paul's claims about his writings demanded either one accept them as authoritative or reject them as blasphemy."*

Dawson: *I certainly don't accept either horn of this dichotomy, nor would I expect anyone else to, even those sympathetic to Christianity.*

So someone can claim to be giving direct orders from God and believers would be pass? about judging the authority of his statements?

22. Dawson: *Actually we can say more than this. There are clear signs of tampering of common sources throughout the synoptics to tailor them to the specific preferences of the writer. It's clear that Matthew and Luke were drawing upon Mark's model, for they follow the same general course. But between Matthew and Luke, who (as many scholars - you like those - have pointed out) were both also drawing on a non-Markan source (referred to in the literature as Q), show differences in rendering the same sayings attributed to Jesus.*

In general about the whole Luke/Matthew issue:

I think a lot of the alleged "tampering" is simply each author demonstrating a purpose and an intended audience. Is a modern Bible translation doing this when it utilizes common imagery and syntax that an English speaking audience can better understand?

Specific points about these passages:

22a. Some manuscripts for Luke 11:13 read ?????? ??????, or "the good spirit."

22b. There is the issue of the authors placement of this narrative within the theme he is developing for his audience:

"The Lukan parallel in 11:9-13 comes in a context where prayer is the issue. The point is fundamentally the same, but Luke narrows the focus. Rather than speaking of good gifts, he notes that the Holy Spirit is given. Since the Spirit is the consummate gift of God and also is a source of enablement and wisdom, the different is not that great." (Darrell Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture*, pg 146 sect. 63)

22c. Also, this is arguably usage of a common figure of speech called synecdoche. (see Blomberg, *The Historic Reliability of the Gospels*, pg 165)

One need not conclude that the Gospel authors were inventing their entire stories simply because they tried to speak to their audiences.

23. Dawson: *"If a variety of religions which preceded Christianity incorporated worship practices that involved, for instance, the consumption of bread and wine as symbols for the flesh and blood of a resurrected deity."*

David: *"Has someone provided an example of this?"*

Dawson: *Yes, see for instance Freke and Gandy, The Jesus Mysteries, Robert Price's many articles and several books on the matter, Wells, Doherty, and numerous other sources. I certainly don't have time to spoonfeed you here. But here's a little taste, from Price's review of NT Wright's The Resurrection of the Son of God (which I have, but have not fully read):*

The quote you provided does not address my question. Honestly I can stand Doherty but Price (in his debates) uses so much rhetorical bluster that I rarely want to sit and read him.

24. Dawson: *Okay, so long as it's understood that borrowing from pre-Christian religious models was taking place in the molding of the Christian product. There were many sources, including various Jewish sectarian sources, the Wisdom literature, mystery religions, etc.*

If you wish to assert borrowing from the mystery religions, go for it but give me an argument, not just assertions from Price.

25. Dawson: *The evidence is clearly the opposite as you have it, but by deeming the mystery cults as "irrelevant to [your] analysis" as you have, you cut yourself off from a vast area of knowledge and source of evidence. I suspect there's an apologetic reason why you have chosen to do this.*

The evidence has yet to be presented. I see no reason to accept mystery cult allegations on the grounds that we have no historical evidence of it. There is plenty of explanatory power within Judaism for Christian practices, why need I go seek explanations in places where evidence doesn't exist?

26. Dawson: *Now David, I did pose some questions on how revelation is supposed to work, but I do not see that you've addressed them. Instead, you seem to prefer trifling over a passing reference to James as "the brother of the Lord," which seems to be a very small matter in comparison to the claim to have received a revelation from a deity.*

As I recall you asked two questions:

1. How does Paul know he has received information from a supernatural source?
2. How do we know that Paul has received information from a supernatural source?

Doug Geivett delivered an excellent paper at the same Greer-Heard conference that I referenced earlier (Dom Crossan vs NT Wright) on the "Epistemology of Resurrection Belief." He also has a blog and is very responsive and polite, so I won't hesitate to refer you to him for a thoroughly more educated opinion. His [blog](#) here.

A few points:

1. As you've already pointed out, you will likely believe a personal experience or account if it comports with your expectations for that situation. I think you may have gone further and said you only believe reports that comport with the laws of nature, but a minor difference given the frequency of miracles.
2. If someone has an experience, and finds no reason to believe things aren't as they perceived, then they have good grounds for believing their experience to be authentic.
3. Reporting such an experience to others would follow similar criteria; namely, they would deem such testimony valid given they had no reason to believe the person was crazy, dishonest, or mistaken.

Conclusion: A person claiming to have experienced something miraculous is generally not going to convince me; especially if I haven't had personal experiences or reports from other, or most certainly not if I presuppose the impossibility of said events (which I do not). I do think in combination with other types of revelation (such as the Old

Testament for those Paul was writing to, remember how much he liked to argue using it?) and with examination: experiences and testimonies lend support to warranted belief. At minimum such things may press a person to further explore something.

Dawson: Also, I do have another question, which I've asked other Christians, but for which I have not received any satisfying responses. My question is this: Why doesn't Jesus just appear before all of us, as he allegedly did before Paul on the road to Damascus (according to Acts anyway), and settle all these conflicts which have raged for 2000 years? I asked a Christian this question once, and his response was "Jesus wants us to have faith" (which only confirms the disjunction between faith and reason). To which I asked another question in response: Are you then saying that Paul, the most prolific writer of the NT, did not have faith?

If you're heading where I think you are, I don't want to get into the problem of evil this weekend, maybe another time. :)

[August 16, 2008 12:48 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson,

On a less polemic note, I have enjoyed our discussion and I have actually been a subscriber to your blog for awhile. I think about a year ago I was searching for "The Great Debate" of Greg Bahnsen and stumbled across your site.

Needless to say you are extremely intelligent, and I wouldn't touch your philosophical arguments with a ten foot pole; however, this particular subject draws my attention as it is very foundational to my worldview. Thanks for sticking it out, and I promise no more ridiculously long responses :)

[August 16, 2008 12:56 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

I think we wrote a book here, even when you exclude the redundant quotes its still well over 50 pages. With quotes its in excess of 100 pages.

[August 16, 2008 12:58 PM](#)

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