

OVERVIEW

[The Evolution of the Word: The New Testament in the Order the Books Were Written](#)

QUESTIONS

Possible conversations with others as you read **The Evolution of the Word**.

- Marcus prints the 27 books of the New Testament in chronological order. The earliest book in the New Testament is 1 Thessalonians. An original letter of Paul's. The last book in the New Testament is 2nd Peter not Revelation. Who knew? Well, now we all do. The dating of some of the books may still be argued but for the most part the chronological order seen here is agreed upon by scholarly consensus.

Chronological means “contextual.” What we see is how the message about Jesus developed. Or “evolved.” Paul's letters to the early “Christ communities” were written some 20 years earlier than the first gospel. And some letters attributed to Paul were written after his death!

What do you make of the fact that the chronological ordering of the “books” first lays out the struggles and issues of these new communities and that stories about Jesus' birth and the parables come later? Does this surprise you? What does this suggest about how the development of early Christianity “evolved”?

- The gospel of Mark was written around 70 and the other gospels written later, Matthew in the 80's or early 90's. They are obviously not firsthand accounts. And their stories don't match. Does this surprise you? Why were the stories of Jesus were told this way? (I think this is a crucial question to be asked of Scripture: why is the story told this way?)
- Our New Testament is not chronological. But the order we have received has its own kind of logic, its own “chronology.” Why do you think the NT was ordered the way it was? Marc helps us out with all of this in his introductory chapters.
- Marcus reminds us that the New Testament is the product of the early “Christ-communities” that were scattered throughout the Roman Empire before anything was written. And when they were written they came from within those communities and for them. (They were not written for us.) The gospels are not the source of Christianity, says Marcus. *They are the product of early Christianity.* They reflect memory and testimony. What do you make of that? Does that change the way you understand the gospels or the letters?
- What do you make of the fact that our New Testament reflects a developing tradition, an “evolving” tradition? Changes in understanding the importance and meaning of Jesus is seen within our canon. Including the domestication of Jesus' message. What does this say about the early “Christ communities” comfort with Jesus'

radical teachings? What do you make of this? At the same time, New Testament stories about Jesus developed an emphasis on what we later claim is his “divinity.” How do you understand that? And what do you make of it?

- Is Christianity continuing to “evolve”? Does our understanding of the world and our universe and the cosmos require additional “lenses” through which to see the Christian tradition now? Do we need not only a new “hermeneutic” or interpretation but a new framework for understanding ourselves and our world?

How does this affect your understanding of Christianity for the living of our days?

- Marc’s introductions to the books of the New Testament are illuminating and helpful. Take time to read them.

FEEDBACK

We welcome your feedback. Give us suggestions, comments, what was helpful, what was not, so we can provide better study guides. No suggestion is too small. What other resources would be helpful for you? We appreciate your help. We would also like to know how you used these guides, for individual study or groups?

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