

Section 1 - Background Information

Introductory Video Transcript

Hello. I don't know about you, but I can be an impulsive person. I remember as a kid, when my dad would buy a new device, I would want to just plug it in and use it right away. Or when I bought my first computer, the very first command I typed in was, "Self-destruct". I think I got that from Star Trek! My dad, however, would make us read the manual. As a kid, this was torture.

I feel the same way now. I would love to just dive into the text and start reading it. But instead, we need to take some time to look at some background information. Things such as: Who wrote the gospel? When? Where? Why? And how? Knowing this information is important. First of all, it is just basic culture. Any Christian should know these things about the gospels.

However, our answers will also affect the way we read and interpret the text. For example, take the passage where Jesus is sent to the desert. Mark tells us that he was with the wild beasts. Mark is the only one to include this detail. What could he mean by it? If you believe that he wrote his gospel in the 60s or 70s to encourage the Christians who were beginning to be persecuted under Nero, then you could understand the meaning of this passage. Christians were being thrown to the wild beasts, so Mark is telling them, "Do not fear for Jesus was also with the beasts." However, if you believe that the gospel was written in the 40s then you could not give this interpretation. Nero was just a child back then.

As we look through these questions you will notice that scholars give different answers. They don't always agree with each other. We could spend a whole year just looking at these questions but then you would never reach the text. So, I propose a more balanced solution. We will briefly go through these questions, and when there is disagreement, I will give you my opinion and the reasons why I think this is the correct answer. If you are interested, I provide resources in the bibliography for you to go deeper. But for the rest of you, I say just cover this material as quickly as possible so that we can then go to the text.