THE QUESTION

Was Mark or Matthew the first Gospel written?

Asked by a THF member on May 18, 2026 · published November 9, 2026, updated November 11, 2026 · 5 numbered quotations · the 14 early Christian passages and 169 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/was-mark-or-matthew-the-first-gospel-written

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Origen reports a handed-down tradition that Matthew was written first and Mark second. Irenaeus places Mark's writing after Peter and Paul's departure, which fits that order, and Tertullian speaks of the apostles' Gospels before those of their followers, though about authority rather than dates. No exact dates are given.

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IN THIS STUDY

1	Origen received that Matthew was written first	2
2	Irenaeus puts Mark after Peter and Paul's departure	2
3	Tertullian puts apostles before their followers	3
4	Mark wrote down what Peter preached	3
5	Matthew wrote for Jewish readers	4
	What these passages don't tell us	4
	The Sources: 14 early Christian passages and 169 Bible verses, with links	4

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POINT 1 OF 5

Origen received that Matthew was written first

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Origen says he learned by tradition the order in which the four Gospels were written. He names Matthew, the former tax collector, first, written in Hebrew for converts from Judaism. Mark comes second, written by Peter's instruction, then Luke, and John last. He presents this as handed-down teaching, not something he saw himself.

1

"About the four Gospels, which alone are undisputed in the Church of God under heaven, I learned by tradition that the Gospel according to Matthew was written first. Matthew had once been a tax collector and later became an apostle of Jesus Christ. He wrote it in the Hebrew language and published it for converts from Judaism. The second Gospel written was the one according to Mark. Mark wrote it according to Peter's instruction."

later in the same passage

"Third was the Gospel according to Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul, which Luke composed for converts from the Gentiles. Last of all was the Gospel according to John."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on Matthew* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 13, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 5

Irenaeus puts Mark after Peter and Paul's departure

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Irenaeus, writing in the 2nd century, says Matthew wrote a Gospel in Hebrew while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome. Only after their departure did Mark, Peter's disciple, write down what Peter had preached. Read in order, this places Matthew's writing before Mark's.

2

"Matthew also wrote a Gospel in the Hebrew language while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, wrote down what Peter had preached. Luke, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Later on, John, the disciple of the Lord, who had leaned upon His chest, published a Gospel during his time in Ephesus in Asia."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book III* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 2, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 5

Tertullian puts apostles before their followers

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Tertullian says the Gospel writers are apostles, with apostolic men coming with and after them. He names John and Matthew as apostles who first instill faith, and Luke and Mark as followers who renew it afterward. He is speaking of authority, not of the dates the Gospels were written.

3

"We lay down as our first position that the authors of the evangelical Testament are apostles, to whom the Lord Himself assigned this office of publishing the gospel. However, there are also apostolic men. Yet they are not alone, but appear with apostles and after apostles."

later in the same passage

"Of the apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instill faith into us. Of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterward."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 2 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 9, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 5

Mark wrote down what Peter preached

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Alexandria says Mark, Peter's follower, wrote his Gospel while Peter was preaching publicly at Rome, so the hearers could remember what had been spoken. Like Origen and Irenaeus, he ties Mark's Gospel to Peter's teaching.

4

"Mark, Peter's follower, wrote what is called the Gospel according to Mark while Peter was publicly preaching the Gospel at Rome before some of Caesar's equites and giving many testimonies about Christ. He did this so that they might be able to remember what had been spoken. Mark wrote down completely what Peter had spoken."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Fragments* 1 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 6, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
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POINT 5 OF 5

Matthew wrote for Jewish readers

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus says Matthew wrote for the Jews, who cared that Christ come from David's line. That is why Matthew opens with Christ's family tree. This fits Origen's report that Matthew wrote in Hebrew for converts from Judaism.

5

> "The Gospel according to Matthew was written for the Jews, as they placed special importance on the fact that Christ should be of the seed of David. Matthew, who had an even greater desire to establish this point, took special care to provide them convincing proof that Christ is of the seed of David; thus, he begins with an account of His genealogy."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 5, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not give a year for when Matthew or Mark was written.
- They do not discuss the modern view that Mark was written first, or whether one writer used the other's book, or how the Hebrew Matthew they describe relates to the Gospel of Matthew read today.
- Irenaeus and Clement differ on timing: Irenaeus says Mark wrote after Peter and Paul's departure, while Clement says Mark wrote while Peter was still preaching in Rome.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 14 early Christian passages and 169 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–14, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 15–108, in Bible order), then 75 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**,

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Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *14 passages from 7 writers*

Papias, *c. 95–130 AD · source 1*

1 *Fragments* (on point 4) “the extracts already made, we will add, as a matter of primary importance, a tradition regarding Mark, who wrote the Gospel, which Papias stated in these words: The presbyter said… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 2–5*

2 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** “also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Against Heresies: Book III* “faced, and their faces were images of the arrangement of the Son of God. As Scripture says, “The first living creature was like a lion,” symbolizing His powerful work, His… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English; on point 2) “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… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** “Gospel according to Matthew was written to the Jews… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *Fragments* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “my son, salutes you. Mark, the follower of Peter, while Peter publicly preached the Gospel at Rome before some of Cæsar's equites, and adduced many testimonies to Christ, in… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 5 (on point 4) “These things are written in the Gospel according to Mark… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 8–10*

8 *Against Marcion* 5 (on point 3) “it may well seem that the works which disciples publish belong to their masters… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Against Marcion* 2 **Quote 3, page 3** now have our answer to the Antitheses, briefly set out by us. I now pass on to give proof of the Gospel — not, to be sure, of Jewry, but of… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *On the Flesh of Christ* 22 (1885 English; on point 3) “is, first of all, Matthew, that most faithful chronicler of the Gospel, because the companion of the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

Caius, *c. 200–220 AD · source 11*

11 *Fragments* 1 I. He arranged the things he was present for in this way. The third book of the Gospel, the one according to Luke, was written by Luke, the well-known physician, … [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 12–13*

12 *Commentary on John* 1 there are four Gospels. These four are, so to speak, the basic elements of the Church's faith. From these elements, the whole world that is reconciled to God in… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Commentary on Matthew* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** “the four Gospels which alone are uncontroverted in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the Gospel according to Matthew, who was at one time… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 14*

14 *Apostolic Constitutions* “our sacred books, that is, those of the New Covenant, are these: the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John… [continues online] **read ›**

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THE BIBLE *94 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

15 **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. **read ›**

16 **Genesis 37:18** They saw him from far off, before he came near to them, and they plotted wickedly to kill him. **read ›**

17 **Genesis 43:33** They sat before him, the firstborn according to his seniority and the youngest according to his youth, and the men were amazed, each looking at his brother. **read ›**

18 **Numbers 10:13** They set out first by the voice of the Lord, by the hand of Moses. **read ›**

19 **Deuteronomy 6:5** And you shall love the Lord your God with all your mind, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. **read ›**

20 **Deuteronomy 19:15** One witness shall not stand to testify against a man for any unrighteousness, or for any offense, or for any sin that he commits. At the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses every word shall stand. **read ›**

21 **1 Chronicles 9:31** Mattithiah, of the Levites, the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, was in a position of trust over the work of the high priest's griddle sacrifice. **read ›**

22 **1 Chronicles 12:11** Jethi the sixth, Eliab the seventh, (Septuagint 1 Chronicles 12:12 (1 Chronicles 12:11 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

23 **1 Chronicles 25:21** the fourteenth, Mattithiah; his sons and his brothers, twelve; **read ›**

24 **2 Chronicles 16:11** And behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. **read ›**

25 **2 Chronicles 26:22** The rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, are written by Jessias the prophet. **read ›**

26 **Ezra 3:10** And they laid the foundation for building the house of the Lord; and the priests stood in their robes with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord by the direction of David king of Israel. **read ›**

27 **Proverbs 2:1** Son, if you receive the saying of my commandment and hide it with you, **read ›**

28 **Proverbs 2:4** and if you seek her like silver, and search her out like treasures, **read ›**

29 **Proverbs 2:14** who rejoice in evils and delight in evil perverseness, **read ›**

30 **Proverbs 3:9** Honor the Lord from your righteous labors, and give him firstfruits from your fruits of righteousness, **read ›**

31 **Proverbs 3:11** Son, do not make light of the discipline of the Lord, nor lose heart when you are rebuked by him; **read ›**

32 **Proverbs 5:14** I very nearly came into every kind of evil in the midst of the assembly and the congregation." **read ›**

33 **Proverbs 5:21** For the ways of a man are before the eyes of God, and he watches all his tracks. **read ›**

34 **Proverbs 14:19** The evil will fall before the good, and the ungodly will wait at the doors of the righteous. **read ›**

35 **Proverbs 15:24** The thoughts of the man of understanding are ways of life, that he may turn aside from Hades and be saved. **read ›**

36 **Ecclesiastes 10:19** They make bread for laughter, and wine and oil to make the living glad; and all things will humbly obey silver. **read ›**

37 **Daniel 3:9** "O king, live forever! **read ›**

38 **1 Esdras 3:10** The first wrote, "Wine is strongest." **read ›**

39 **1 Esdras 3:17** And they said to them, "Tell us about what is written." Then the first, who had spoken of the strength of wine, began, **read ›**

40 **1 Esdras 9:38** And the whole multitude gathered together in the open square before the gate of the temple toward the east, **read ›**

41 **Tobit 12:20** And now give thanks to God, because I am going up to him who sent me; and write all that has been accomplished in a book." **read ›**

42 **Tobit 12:22** And they acknowledged his great and wonderful works, and how the angel of the Lord had appeared to them. **read ›**

43 **Wisdom of Sirach 16:14** He will make room for every act of mercy; each one will find according to his works. **read ›**

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44 **Wisdom of Sirach 32:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

45 **Wisdom of Sirach 36:20** A crooked heart will give sorrow, but a man of much experience will repay him. (Septuagint Wisdom of Sirach 36:25 (Wisdom of Sirach 36:20 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

46 **Wisdom of Sirach 39:32** Therefore from the beginning I was resolved, and I thought it through, and I have left it in writing. **read ›**

47 **Wisdom of Sirach 50:27** Jesus the son of Sirach of Jerusalem has engraved in this book instruction in understanding and knowledge, he who poured forth wisdom from his heart. **read ›**

48 **1 Maccabees 2:1** In those days Mattathias son of John, son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib, arose from Jerusalem and settled in Modein. **read ›**

49 **1 Maccabees 2:4** Judas, called Maccabeus; **read ›**

50 **1 Maccabees 2:14** And Mattathias and his sons tore their garments and put on sackcloth and mourned greatly. **read ›**

51 **1 Maccabees 2:24** And Mattathias saw it and was filled with zeal, and his inward parts trembled; and he let his anger rise up in accordance with the judgment, and ran and slaughtered him on the pagan altar. **read ›**

52 **1 Maccabees 3:9** His name became known to the end of the earth, and he gathered together those who were perishing. **read ›**

53 **1 Maccabees 3:11** When Judas learned of it, he went out to meet him, and he struck him and killed him; and many fell slain, and the rest fled. **read ›**

54 **1 Maccabees 5:14** While the letters were still being read, behold, other messengers came from Galilee with their garments torn, reporting in these words, **read ›**

55 **1 Maccabees 5:21** So Simon went into Galilee and fought many battles with the nations, and the nations were crushed before him. **read ›**

56 **1 Maccabees 5:55** Now in the days when Judas and Jonathan were in Gilead, and Simon his brother was in Galilee opposite Ptolemais, **read ›**

57 **1 Maccabees 12:47** He kept three thousand men with him, of whom he left two thousand in Galilee, while a thousand went with him. **read ›**

58 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

59 **1 Maccabees 15:24** And they wrote a copy of these to Simon the high priest. **read ›**

60 **2 Maccabees 2:30** To enter into the matter, to discuss everything, and to be busy with each detail belongs to the original writer of the history; **read ›**

61 **2 Maccabees 3:36** And he bore witness to everyone about the works of the greatest God, which he had seen with his own eyes. **read ›**

62 **2 Maccabees 10:12** For Ptolemy, who was called Macron, had taken the lead in showing justice to the Jews because of the wrong that had been done to them, and had tried to deal with them peacefully. **read ›**

63 **2 Maccabees 10:19** Maccabeus left Simon and Joseph, and also Zacchaeus and those with him, a force sufficient to besiege them, and he himself went off to places where he was more urgently needed. **read ›**

64 **2 Maccabees 13:20** And Judas sent in what they needed to those inside. **read ›**

65 **2 Maccabees 14:24** He kept Judas always in his presence; he was warmly attached to the man. **read ›**

66 **2 Maccabees 14:38** For in the former times of separation he had been brought to trial for Judaism, and he had risked body and soul for Judaism with all earnestness. **read ›**

67 **4 Maccabees 12:17** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

68 **1 Enoch 38:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

69 **1 Enoch 62:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

70 **1 Enoch 62:7** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

71 **1 Enoch 69:26** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

72 **1 Enoch 89:77** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

73 **Matthew 4:12** Now when Jesus heard that John had been handed over, he withdrew into Galilee. **read ›**

74 **Matthew 8:4** Jesus said to him, “See that you tell nobody; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” **read ›**

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75 **Matthew 9:9** As Jesus passed by from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax collection office. He said to him, “Follow me.” He got up and followed him. **read ›**

76 **Matthew 10:18** And you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the nations. **read ›**

77 **Matthew 14:1** At that time, Herod the tetrarch heard the report concerning Jesus, **read ›**

78 **Matthew 14:2** and said to his servants, “This is John the Baptist. He has risen from the dead, and that is why these powers are at work in him.” **read ›**

79 **Matthew 14:33** Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him, saying, “You are truly the Son of God!” **read ›**

80 **Matthew 19:30** But many will be last who are first, and first who are last. **read ›**

81 **Matthew 23:6** and love the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, **read ›**

82 **Matthew 26:60** but they found none. Though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. **read ›**

83 **Mark 1:1** The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. **read ›**

84 **Mark 1:9** In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **read ›**

85 **Mark 1:14** Now after John was taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, **read ›**

86 **Mark 1:21** They went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught. **read ›**

87 **Mark 1:28** The report of him went out immediately throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. **read ›**

88 **Mark 1:29** Immediately, when they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. **read ›**

89 **Mark 1:36** Simon and those who were with him searched for him. **read ›**

90 **Mark 1:38** He said to them, “Let us go to the neighboring towns, so that I may preach there also, for this is why I came out.” **read ›**

91 **Mark 1:39** He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee and casting out demons. **read ›**

92 **Mark 2:2** Immediately many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even around the door; and he spoke the word to them. **read ›**

93 **Mark 2:8** Immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you reason these things in your hearts? **read ›**

94 **Mark 3:18** Andrew; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, the son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot; **read ›**

95 **Mark 6:1** He went out from there. He came into his own country, and his disciples followed him. **read ›**

96 **Mark 10:31** But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” **read ›**

97 **Mark 12:39** and to get the best seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts, **read ›**

98 **Mark 13:10** The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. **read ›**

99 **Mark 14:9** Amen, I say to you, wherever this gospel may be preached throughout the whole world, that which this woman has done will also be spoken of for a memorial of her.” **read ›**

100 **Mark 14:33** He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be greatly troubled and distressed. **read ›**

101 **Mark 16:2** Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. **read ›**

102 **Mark 16:9** Now when he had risen early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. **read ›**

103 **Luke 1:2** even as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word delivered them to us, **read ›**

104 **John 19:35** He who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, that you may believe. **read ›**

105 **John 20:4** They both ran together. The other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. **read ›**

106 **John 21:24** This is the disciple who testifies about these things, and wrote these things. We know that his witness is true. **read ›**

107 **Acts 8:23** For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of unrighteousness.” **read ›**

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108 **Romans 7:2** For the woman that has a husband is bound by law to the husband while he lives, but if the husband dies, she is discharged from the law of the husband. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *75 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 1:5

Psalms 24:7 · 46:10

Proverbs 1:11

Ecclesiastes 5:2

Song of Solomon 3:6

Isaiah 65:5

Jeremiah 23:20 · 23:30

Daniel 1:1 · 3:26 · 7:1 · 10:16 · 10:18 · 12:3

Matthew 1:1 · 1:18 · 3:13 · 3:15 · 3:16 · 5:10 · 5:13 · 5:18 · 5:42 · 6:1 · 10:23 · 10:29 · 13:8 · 16:23 · 17:1 · 22:10

Mark 2:17 · 9:2 · 14:62

Luke 1:35 · 17:19 · 19:12

John 1:1 · 1:14 · 1:29 · 2:1 · 2:4 · 3:6 · 4:16 · 4:24 · 14:2 · 18:28 · 19:13 · 19:26 · 19:31 · 20:30 · 21:22

Acts 10:37

Romans 1:3 · 2:16

1 Corinthians 2:9 · 2:12 · 5:7 · 11:3 · 15:20

2 Corinthians 5:19 · 8:9

Galatians 2:2 · 3:8

Philippians 3:10 · 4:3

Colossians 1:18

2 Thessalonians 2:1

2 Timothy 2:8

Hebrews 9:27

1 John 1:1 · 5:7

Revelation 1:9 · 11:3 · 22:7

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Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Was Mark or Matthew the first Gospel written?” on May 18, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY