THE QUESTION

Was Matthew or Luke written first?

Asked by a THF member on May 19, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 12 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-matthew-or-luke-written-first

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

Matthew was written first, according to the early writers in these passages. Origen says he learned by tradition that Matthew's Gospel came first and Luke's third. Irenaeus lists Matthew, then Mark, then Luke, and Caius calls Luke's account the third book of the Gospel.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
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POINT 1 OF 6

Origen received a tradition of Matthew first

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

Origen says the order came to him by tradition. Matthew's Gospel was first, Mark's second, and Luke's third, with John's last of all.

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."

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."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on Matthew* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 10, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

Irenaeus names Matthew before Luke

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

Irenaeus says Matthew wrote while Peter and Paul were still preaching in Rome. He then names Mark, and after him Luke, who put Paul's preaching into a book.

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."

later in the same passage

"Luke, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book III* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 3, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 6

Caius calls Luke the third Gospel

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

Caius counts Luke's Gospel as the third book. He adds that Luke had not seen the Lord himself, but wrote after the ascension while traveling with Paul.

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3 “The third book of the Gospel, the one according to Luke, was written by Luke, the well-known physician, in his own name and in order after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken him with himself as one devoted to what is right.”

later in the same passage

“But Luke himself did not see the Lord in the flesh.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Caius,** *Fragments* 1 (c. 200–220 AD) **Source 9, page 5** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

Matthew wrote for Jewish believers, Luke for Gentiles

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

Irenaeus and Origen both say Matthew wrote for Jewish readers, in Hebrew. Origen says Luke wrote later, for converts from the Gentiles.

4 “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.”

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

5 “He wrote it in the Hebrew language and published it for converts from Judaism.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on Matthew* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 10, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 6

Tertullian puts apostles before apostolic men

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

Tertullian names Matthew, an apostle and companion of the Lord, before Luke, a follower of apostles. He seems to rank them by authority more than by date, but his order agrees with the others.

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6 “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 7, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

7 “First of all, there is Matthew, that most faithful writer of the Gospel, because he was a companion of the Lord.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Flesh of Christ* 22 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 8, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 6

Coming later did not lessen Luke's Gospel

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

Tertullian defends Luke's Gospel as kept in the churches from the start. He says small differences in the order of events do not matter where the Gospels agree in the faith.

8 “Therefore I say that in them, and not only in those founded by apostles, but in all those that are joined with them in the fellowship of the mystery of the gospel of Christ, that Gospel of Luke which we are defending with all our might has stood its ground from its very first publication.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 5 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 5** Read it in the library ›
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9 “Never mind if some variation does occur in the order of their narratives, provided there is agreement in the essential matter of the faith, in which there is disagreement with Marcion.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 2 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 7, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages give no years or dates for when Matthew or Luke was written.
- Luke's own opening words about earlier accounts are not among these passages, so they cannot be used here.

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- 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 12 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 1–12, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 13–110, in Bible order), then 71 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**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *12 passages from 6 writers*

Papias, *c. 95–130 AD · source 1*

1 *Fragments* (1885 English; on point 4) "with regard to Matthew he has made the following statements]: Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he… [continues online] **read ›**

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

2 *Against Heresies: Book III* "royal power; the second living creature was like a calf, signifying His sacrificial and priestly order; the third had, as it were, the face of a man—clearly describing His… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Against Heresies: Book III* (on point 3) course towards Samothrace." Luke then details their journey to Philippi, how they delivered their first address there—"for, sitting down," he says, "we spoke to the women who had gathered… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** "Gospel according to Matthew was written to the Jews… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 6–8*

6 *Against Marcion* 5 **Quote 8, page 4** "it may well seem that the works which disciples publish belong to their masters… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Against Marcion* 2 **Quotes 6, 9, page 4** "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… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *On the Flesh of Christ* 22 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** "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 9*

9 *Fragments* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 3, page 3** "third book of the Gospel, that according to Luke, the well-known physician Luke wrote in his own name in order after the ascension of Christ, and when Paul had… [continues online] **read ›**

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Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 10–11*

10 *Commentary on Matthew* 1 (1885 English) **Quotes 1, 5, pages 2, 3** "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 ›**

11 *Commentary on John* 6 (1885 English; on point 1) "we will begin with Matthew, who is reported by tradition to have published his Gospel before the others, to the Hebrews, those, namely, of the circumcision who believed… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · source 12*

12 *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 ›**

THE BIBLE *98 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

13 **Genesis 2:4** This is the book of the generation of heaven and earth, when they came to be, in the day that the Lord God made the heaven and the earth, **read ›**

14 **Genesis 25:24** When the days were fulfilled for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb. **read ›**

15 **Genesis 33:2** He put the two maidservants and their sons first, Leah and her children behind them, and Rachel and Joseph last. **read ›**

16 **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 ›**

17 **Genesis 48:18** And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." **read ›**

18 **Exodus 40:27** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

19 **Leviticus 23:5** In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, between the evenings, is the Lord's Passover. **read ›**

20 **Numbers 1:19** as the Lord had commanded Moses; and they were numbered in the wilderness of Sinai. **read ›**

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

22 **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 ›**

23 **Deuteronomy 21:15** If a man has two wives, one loved and the other hated, and both the loved and the hated have borne him children, and the firstborn son is the hated wife's, **read ›**

24 **Deuteronomy 21:17** But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the hated wife, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his children; the birthright belongs to him. **read ›**

25 **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 ›**

26 **1 Chronicles 12:11** Jethi the sixth, Eliab the seventh, (Septuagint 1 Chronicles 12:12 (1 Chronicles 12:11 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

27 **1 Chronicles 24:7** And the first lot came out for Jehoiarib, the second for Jedaiah, **read ›**

28 **1 Chronicles 25:16** the ninth, Mattaniah; his sons and his brothers, twelve; **read ›**

29 **1 Chronicles 25:21** the fourteenth, Mattithiah; his sons and his brothers, twelve; **read ›**

30 **2 Chronicles 26:22** The rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, are written by Jessias the prophet. **read ›**

31 **Ezra 1:10** and four hundred and ten double silver ones, and a thousand other vessels. **read ›**

32 **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 ›**

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

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

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

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

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

38 **Proverbs 5:23** Such a man dies with the untaught; he is cast out from the abundance of his own livelihood, and he has perished through foolishness. **read ›**

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

40 **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 ›**

41 **Ecclesiastes 10:12** The words of a wise man's mouth are grace, but the lips of a fool will swallow him up. **read ›**

42 **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 ›**

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

44 **1 Esdras 1:10** And when these things had been done, the priests and the Levites stood in good order, **read ›**

45 **1 Esdras 3:10** The first wrote, "Wine is strongest." **read ›**

46 **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 ›**

47 **1 Esdras 5:60** and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, singing hymns to the Lord and blessing him according to David king of Israel. **read ›**

48 **1 Esdras 8:64** And the whole weight of them was written down at that same hour. **read ›**

49 **1 Esdras 8:94** as has been decided by you and by all who obey the law of the Lord. **read ›**

50 **1 Esdras 9:45** Then Ezra took up the book before the multitude and sat in the place of honor before them all. **read ›**

51 **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 ›**

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

53 **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 ›**

54 **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 ›**

55 **1 Maccabees 2:4** Judas, called Maccabeus; **read ›**

56 **1 Maccabees 3:9** His name became known to the end of the earth, and he gathered together those who were perishing. **read ›**

57 **1 Maccabees 3:55** After this Judas appointed leaders of the people, commanders of thousands and of hundreds and of fifties and of tens. **read ›**

58 **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 ›**

59 **1 Maccabees 5:21** So Simon went into Galilee and fought many battles with the nations, and the nations were crushed before him. **read ›**

60 **1 Maccabees 5:23** Then he took those in Galilee and in Arbatta, with their wives and children and all that they had, and brought them into Judea with great gladness. **read ›**

61 **1 Maccabees 5:53** Judas kept gathering those who lagged behind and encouraging the people all along the way, until they came to the land of Judah. **read ›**

62 **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 ›**

63 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

64 **1 Maccabees 15:24** And they wrote a copy of these to Simon the high priest. **read ›**

65 **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 ›**

66 **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 ›**

67 **2 Maccabees 11:7** Maccabeus himself was the first to take up arms, and he urged the others to risk their lives together with him to help their brothers. Then they rushed out together eagerly. **read ›**

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68 **2 Maccabees 12:32** After the feast called Pentecost, they hurried against Gorgias, the governor of Idumea. **read ›**

69 **2 Maccabees 13:20** And Judas sent in what they needed to those inside. **read ›**

70 **2 Maccabees 14:13** giving orders to kill Judas himself, to scatter those with him, and to install Alcimus as high priest of the greatest temple. **read ›**

71 **1 Enoch 38:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

72 **1 Enoch 41:6** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

73 **1 Enoch 82:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

74 **Matthew 3:1** In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, **read ›**

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

76 **Matthew 4:23** Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. **read ›**

77 **Matthew 4:25** Great multitudes from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan followed him. **read ›**

78 **Matthew 5:1** Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. **read ›**

79 **Matthew 6:33** But seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well. **read ›**

80 **Matthew 10:2** Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter; Andrew, his brother; James the son of Zebedee; John, his brother; **read ›**

81 **Matthew 10:3** Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; Lebbaeus, who was also called Thaddaeus; **read ›**

82 **Matthew 11:1** When Jesus had finished directing his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. **read ›**

83 **Matthew 14:22** Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the crowds away. **read ›**

84 **Matthew 15:29** Jesus departed from there and came near to the sea of Galilee; and he went up on the mountain and sat there. **read ›**

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

86 **Matthew 20:16** So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen.” **read ›**

87 **Matthew 22:38** This is the first and great commandment. **read ›**

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

89 **Matthew 26:1** When Jesus had finished all these words, he said to his disciples, **read ›**

90 **Matthew 28:16** But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. **read ›**

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

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

93 **Mark 3:14** He appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach **read ›**

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

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

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

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

98 **Luke 1:1** Since many have undertaken to set in order a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, **read ›**

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

100 **Luke 1:3** it seemed good to me also, having followed all things carefully from the beginning, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, **read ›**

101 **Luke 2:2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **read ›**

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102 **Luke 4:44** He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee. **read ›**

103 **Luke 6:15** Matthew; Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus; Simon who was called the Zealot; **read ›**

104 **Luke 8:1** Soon afterward he went through cities and villages, proclaiming and preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, **read ›**

105 **Luke 9:6** They departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. **read ›**

106 **Luke 13:30** Behold, there are some who are last who will be first, and there are some who are first who will be last.” **read ›**

107 **Luke 14:7** He spoke a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the best seats, and said to them, **read ›**

108 **Acts 1:1** The first account I wrote, Theophilus, concerned all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, **read ›**

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

110 **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 *71 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

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

Acts 10:37 · 19:2

Romans 1:3

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

2 Corinthians 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 Matthew or Luke written first?” on May 19, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY