THE QUESTION

Which Gospel did the early church say was written first?

Asked by a THF member on May 18, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 7 early Christian passages and 148 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/which-gospel-did-the-early-church-say-was-written-first

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

The early writers in our library say Matthew's Gospel was written first. Origen calls this the tradition he received, with Mark second, Luke third and John last, and Irenaeus gives the same order. These passages speak for the early church, not for modern scholars, and they give no exact years.

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.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 7

Origen received that Matthew came first

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

Origen does not present this as his own guess. He says he learned it by tradition, and he speaks of the four Gospels as the only ones undisputed in the Church. Matthew, the former tax collector who became an apostle, is named as the first to write.

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.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on Matthew* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 7, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Origen gives the full order of four

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

Origen goes on to list the rest in order. Mark is second and wrote under Peter's guidance. Luke is third and wrote for converts from the Gentiles. John's Gospel comes last of all.

2

> “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 7, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 3 OF 7

Irenaeus places Matthew during Peter and Paul's preaching

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

Irenaeus gives the same sequence. He ties Matthew's Gospel to the time when Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome, and says Mark wrote down Peter's preaching after their departure.

3

"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

"After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, wrote down what Peter had preached."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book III* (c. 175–202 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 2, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

POINT 4 OF 7

Irenaeus says John wrote later

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

Irenaeus then names Luke as Paul's companion who wrote down Paul's Gospel, and says John published his Gospel later, while living at Ephesus. This matches Origen's statement that John's Gospel came last.

4

"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)
THF's updated English

Source 2, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

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POINT 5 OF 7

Matthew wrote first for Jewish readers

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

Both Origen and a fragment of Irenaeus say Matthew's first readers were Jewish. Irenaeus explains that this is why Matthew begins with Christ's family line from David, a point his readers cared about.

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

6 “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 3, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Clement ties Mark's Gospel to Peter's preaching

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

Clement of Alexandria also links Mark's Gospel to Peter's preaching at Rome. He says Mark wrote while Peter was still preaching there, so that hearers could remember what was said. This differs slightly from Irenaeus, who places Mark's writing after Peter and Paul departed.

7 “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.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Fragments* 1 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 4, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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POINT 7 OF 7

Another early list counts Luke third, John fourth

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

An early fragment preserved under the name of Caius also counts Luke's Gospel as the third book and John's as the fourth. This fits the same order the other writers give.

8

"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

"The fourth Gospel is that of John, one of the disciples."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Caius,** *Fragments* 1 (c. 200–220 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 6, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don't tell us

- These passages give the early church's view only; they do not report what modern scholars think.
- They give no year for any Gospel, and Clement and Irenaeus differ on whether Mark wrote before or after Peter's departure.
- 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 7 early Christian passages and 148 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–7, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 8–90, in Bible order), then 65 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).

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EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *7 passages from 6 writers*

Papias, *c. 95–130 AD · source 1*

1 *Fragments* (on point 6) “unharmed, due to the grace of the Lord. Papias also notes other things as coming to him from unwritten tradition, including some unusual parables and teachings of the Saviour, and… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 2–3*

2 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) **Quotes 3, 4, page 3** “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 *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenæus* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** “Gospel according to Matthew was written to the Jews… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · source 4*

4 *Fragments* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “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 ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 5*

5 *On the Flesh of Christ* 22 (1885 English) “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 6*

6 *Fragments* 1 **Quote 8, page 5** “fourth Gospel is that of John, one of the disciples… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 7*

7 *Commentary on Matthew* 1 (1885 English) **Quotes 1, 2, 5, pages 2, 4** “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 ›**

THE BIBLE *83 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

8 **Genesis 38:28** As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand, and the midwife took it and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, “This one shall come out first.” **read ›**

9 **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 ›**

10 **Exodus 32:16** The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. **read ›**

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

12 **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 ›**

13 **1 Chronicles 12:11** Jethi the sixth, Eliab the seventh, (Septuagint 1 Chronicles 12:12) **read ›**

14 **1 Chronicles 25:21** the fourteenth, Mattithiah; his sons and his brothers, twelve; **read ›**

15 **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. (Septuagint 2 Esdras 3:10) **read ›**

16 **Ezra 6:12** And may the God whose name dwells there overthrow every king and people who shall stretch out his hand to alter or destroy the house of God in Jerusalem. I Darius have issued the decree; let it be done diligently. (Septuagint 2 Esdras 6:12) **read ›**

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17 **Esther 9:23** And the Jews accepted this, as Mordecai had written to them: **read ›**

18 **Proverbs 2:3** for if you call upon wisdom, and give your voice to understanding, **read ›**

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

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

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

22 **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 ›**

23 **Ecclesiastes 2:23** for all his days are days of pains, and his distraction is one of anger; even at night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. **read ›**

24 **Ecclesiastes 2:25** For who will eat, and who will drink, apart from him? **read ›**

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

26 **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 ›**

27 **Hosea 12:10** And I will speak to the prophets; and I have multiplied visions, and by the hands of the prophets I have been represented. (Septuagint Hosea 12:11) **read ›**

28 **1 Esdras 3:10** The first wrote, “Wine is strongest.” **read ›**

29 **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 ›**

30 **1 Esdras 6:12** We questioned them, therefore, in order to inform you and to write down for you the men who were in charge, and we asked them for the list of names of their chief men. **read ›**

31 **1 Esdras 8:64** And the whole weight of them was written down at that same hour. **read ›**

32 **1 Esdras 9:45** Then Ezra took up the book before the multitude and sat in the place of honor before them all. **read ›**

33 **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 ›**

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

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

36 **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) **read ›**

37 **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 ›**

38 **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 ›**

39 **1 Maccabees 2:3** Simon, called Thassi; **read ›**

40 **1 Maccabees 2:4** Judas, called Maccabeus; **read ›**

41 **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 ›**

42 **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 ›**

43 **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 ›**

44 **1 Maccabees 13:42** And the people of Israel began to write in their documents and contracts, “In the first year of Simon, the great high priest and general and leader of the Jews.” **read ›**

45 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

46 **1 Maccabees 15:24** And they wrote a copy of these to Simon the high priest. **read ›**

47 **2 Maccabees 2:23** all this, set forth by Jason of Cyrene in five books, we will attempt to condense into a single work. **read ›**

48 **2 Maccabees 2:25** we have aimed to give pleasure to those who wish to read, ease to those who are eager to commit things to memory, and profit to all who come upon it. **read ›**

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49 **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 ›**

50 **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 ›**

51 **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 ›**

52 **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 ›**

53 **2 Maccabees 14:24** He kept Judas always in his presence; he was warmly attached to the man. **read ›**

54 **2 Maccabees 14:31** When Nicanor realized that he had been thoroughly outmaneuvered by the man, he came to the very great and holy temple while the priests were offering the appointed sacrifices, and he ordered them to hand the man over. **read ›**

55 **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 ›**

56 **4 Maccabees 12:17** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

57 **1 Enoch 40:9** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

58 **1 Enoch 41:6** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

59 **1 Enoch 62:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

60 **1 Enoch 62:7** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

61 **1 Enoch 89:68** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

62 **1 Enoch 89:77** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

63 **1 Enoch 92:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

71 **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 ›**

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

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

74 **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 ›**

75 **Mark 3:12** He sternly warned them that they should not make him known. **read ›**

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

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

78 **Mark 11:1** When they came near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples **read ›**

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

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

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

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

83 **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 ›**

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

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

86 **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 ›**

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

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

89 **Philippians 4:2** I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. **read ›**

90 **2 Timothy 4:11** Only Luke is with me. Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *65 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 · 19:12

John 1:1 · 1:14 · 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

Romans 1:3

1 Corinthians 2:9 · 5:7 · 15:20

2 Corinthians 8:9

Galatians 3:8

Philippians 3:10

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

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How it was made. Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY