THE QUESTION

Which Gospel was written first?

Asked by a THF member on May 19, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 12 early Christian passages and 152 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

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

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

Early Christian writers say the Gospel of Matthew was written first. Origen received this by tradition and lists Mark second, Luke third and John last. Irenaeus gives the same order, and both say Matthew wrote in the Hebrew language for Jewish believers, opening with Christ's descent from David.

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 says Matthew was written first

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

Origen says he learned by tradition that Matthew's Gospel came first. Matthew had been a tax collector before he became an apostle, and he wrote in Hebrew for converts from Judaism.

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

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

POINT 2 OF 7

Then Mark, Luke, and John last

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

Origen gives the full order. Mark wrote second under Peter's instruction, Luke third for Gentile converts, and John 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 11, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
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POINT 3 OF 7

Irenaeus agrees on the order

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

Irenaeus says Matthew wrote while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome. Mark wrote down Peter's preaching after their departure, Luke recorded Paul's Gospel, and John published his Gospel later in Ephesus.

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

later in the same passage

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

POINT 4 OF 7

Matthew wrote first for Jewish believers

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

Irenaeus explains why Matthew opens with a family line. Jewish readers cared that the Christ should come from David, so Matthew took care to prove it. Origen also says Matthew wrote for the Hebrews.

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

5

"For Matthew, writing for the Hebrews who were looking for Him who was to come from the line of Abraham and of David, says in Matthew 1:1, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.""

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on John* 1 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 10, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 5 OF 7

Tertullian calls Matthew a companion of the Lord

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

Tertullian names Matthew first among the apostles who bear witness, because he walked with the Lord. He points to the genealogy at the start of Matthew as proof of Christ's real human body.

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

POINT 6 OF 7

Caius counts Luke third and John fourth

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

A fragment from Caius calls Luke's account the third book of the Gospel and John's the fourth. That fits the same order Origen and Irenaeus give.

7 “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) **Source 9, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

The four Gospels share one meaning

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

Clement says the wording of the accepted Gospels may vary a little, but they all agree in meaning. The order of writing does not change the one faith they teach.

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8 “These things are written in the Gospel according to Mark; and in all the other acknowledged Gospels as well, the wording perhaps varies a little here and there, but they all display the same harmony of meaning.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 5
(c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

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

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These writers report what they received by tradition; they do not give exact years for any Gospel.
- The passages do not describe what Matthew's Hebrew Gospel looked like or how it relates to the Greek text we read.
- 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 152 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 13–90, in Bible order), then 74 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 2) “Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them… [continues online] **read ›**

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

2 *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 ›**

3 *Against Heresies: Book III* these points, all who distort the shape of the Gospel are vain, ignorant, and also bold; those, I mean, who portray the aspects of the Gospel as being either more… [continues online] **read ›**

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4 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) **Quote 3, 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 ›**

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 ›**

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

6 *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 5 **Quote 8, page 5** “These things are written in the Gospel according to Mark… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 7–8*

7 *Against Marcion* 5 “the Romans give, so very near to the apostles, to whom Peter and Paul together bequeathed the gospel, sealed even with their own blood. We also have the foster churches… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *On the Flesh of Christ* 22 (1885 English) **Quote 6, 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 **Quote 7, page 4** “fourth Gospel is that of John, one of the disciples… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 10–12*

10 *Commentary on John* 1 **Quote 5, page 3** “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 ›**

11 *Commentary on Matthew* 1 (1885 English) **Quotes 1, 2, 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 ›**

12 *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 ›**

THE BIBLE *78 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

13 **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 ›**

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

15 **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 ›**

16 **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 ›**

17 **1 Chronicles 12:11** Jethi the sixth, Eliab the seventh, (Septuagint 1 Chronicles 12:12 (1 Chronicles 12:11 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

18 **1 Chronicles 25:16** the ninth, Mattaniah; his sons and his brothers, twelve; **read ›**

19 **1 Chronicles 25:21** the fourteenth, Mattithiah; his sons and his brothers, twelve; **read ›**

20 **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 ›**

21 **2 Chronicles 26:22** The rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, are written by Jessias the prophet. **read ›**

22 **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 ›**

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

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

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

26 **Proverbs 12:22** Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but he who deals faithfully is acceptable to him. **read ›**

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

28 **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 ›**

29 **Proverbs 16:24** Good words are honeycombs, and their sweetness is healing for the soul. **read ›**

30 **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 ›**

31 **1 Esdras 3:10** The first wrote, "Wine is strongest." **read ›**

32 **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 ›**

33 **1 Esdras 9:38** And the whole multitude gathered together in the open square before the gate of the temple toward the east, **read ›**

34 **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 ›**

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

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

39 **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 ›**

40 **1 Maccabees 2:27** Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying, "Let every one who is zealous for the law and upholds the covenant come out after me!" **read ›**

41 **1 Maccabees 3:9** His name became known to the end of the earth, and he gathered together those who were perishing. **read ›**

42 **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 ›**

43 **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 ›**

44 **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 ›**

45 **1 Maccabees 12:22** And now that we know this, you will do well to write to us about your welfare. **read ›**

46 **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 ›**

47 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

48 **1 Maccabees 15:24** And they wrote a copy of these to Simon the high priest. **read ›**

49 **1 Maccabees 16:24** behold, these are written in the book of the days of his high priesthood, from the time he became high priest after his father. **read ›**

50 **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 ›**

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

53 **2 Maccabees 12:37** Beginning the battle cry with hymns in the language of his fathers, he raised a shout, and rushing unexpectedly upon those with Gorgias, he put them to flight. **read ›**

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54 **2 Maccabees 13:12** When they had all done this together and had pleaded with the merciful Lord with weeping and fasting and lying facedown for three days without ceasing, Judas encouraged them and ordered them to stand ready. **read ›**

55 **2 Maccabees 13:20** And Judas sent in what they needed to those inside. **read ›**

56 **1 Enoch 2:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

57 **1 Enoch 38:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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

59 **1 Enoch 62:7** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

60 **1 Enoch 68:1** 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 90:42** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

64 **1 Enoch 92:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

65 **1 Enoch 93:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

66 **1 Enoch 104:11** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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

68 **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 ›**

69 **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 ›**

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

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

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

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

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

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

76 **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 ›**

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

78 **Mark 5:37** He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James. **read ›**

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

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

81 **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 ›**

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

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

84 **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 ›**

85 **John 20:1** Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went early, while it was still dark, to the tomb, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. **read ›**

86 **John 20:4** They both ran together. The other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. **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 1:1** The first account I wrote, Theophilus, concerned all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, **read ›**

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

90 **Galatians 1:11** But I make known to you, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not according to man. **read ›**

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ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *74 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 · 19:12

John 1:1 · 1:14 · 1:26 · 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 · 19:2

Romans 1:3 · 2:16

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

2 Corinthians 5:19 · 8:9

Galatians 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

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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