THE QUESTION

Which of the four Gospels 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 135 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/which-of-the-four-gospels-was-written-first-2

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

The early writers in our library say Matthew wrote the first Gospel. Origen says this came to him by tradition and names Mark second, Luke third and John last. Irenaeus gives the same order. They also say Matthew first wrote in Hebrew for Jewish believers, though 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 6, 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 6, 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 1, 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 1, 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 6, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
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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 2, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 6 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.

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

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POINT 7 OF 7

Tertullian ranks Gospels by authority, not date

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

Tertullian names John and Matthew first because they were apostles, and Luke and Mark after them as apostolic men. He is ranking their authority, not giving a writing order. He also says small differences in the order of their stories do not matter when they agree on the faith.

8 “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)
THF's updated English

Source 3, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not give a year for any of the Gospels.
- They do not explain how Matthew's first Hebrew writing relates to the Greek Gospel we read today.
- 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 135 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 8–93, in Bible order), then 49 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 4 writers*

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *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 ›**

2 *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 ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 3–4*

3 *Against Marcion* 2 (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 5** “of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterwards… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *On the Flesh of Christ* 22 (1885 English; on point 7) “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 5*

5 *Fragments* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “marvel is it, then, that John brings forward these several things 1 John 1:1 so constantly in his epistles also, saying in his own person, What we have seen… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *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 ›**

7 *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 *86 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

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

9 **Genesis 1:5** God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening, and there was morning, one day. **read ›**

10 **Genesis 32:20** and you shall say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob is coming behind us.’” For he said, “I will appease him with the gifts that go ahead of him, and after this I will see his face; for perhaps he will accept me.” (Septuagint Genesis 32:21) **read ›**

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

12 **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 ›**

13 **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 ›**

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 **Deuteronomy 17:7** The hand of the witnesses shall be upon him first to put him to death, and afterward the hand of the people. So you shall remove the evil person from among yourselves. **read ›**

17 **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 ›**

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18 **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 ›**

19 **1 Chronicles 12:11** Jethi the sixth, Eliab the seventh, (Septuagint 1 Chronicles 12:12) **read ›**

20 **1 Chronicles 24:7** And the first lot came out for Jehoiarib, the second for Jedaiah, **read ›**

21 **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 ›**

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

23 **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 ›**

24 **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 ›**

25 **Proverbs 1:1** The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, who reigned in Israel, **read ›**

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

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

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

29 **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 ›**

30 **Proverbs 16:23** The heart of the wise will understand what comes from his own mouth, and on his lips he will carry good judgment. **read ›**

31 **Ecclesiastes 2:13** And I saw that wisdom has an advantage over foolishness, as light has an advantage over darkness. **read ›**

32 **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 ›**

33 **Isaiah 14:3** And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord will give you rest from your anguish and your anger, and from your hard slavery, in which you served them. **read ›**

34 **Jeremiah 23:1** Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of their pasture! **read ›**

35 **Obadiah 1:1** The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord God to Idumea: I have heard a report from the Lord, and he has sent out a summons to siege among the nations: "Arise, and let us rise up against her to war." **read ›**

36 **1 Esdras 3:10** The first wrote, "Wine is strongest." **read ›**

37 **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 ›**

38 **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 ›**

39 **1 Esdras 9:38** And the whole multitude gathered together in the open square before the gate of the temple toward the east, **read ›**

40 **1 Esdras 9:45** Then Ezra took up the book before the multitude and sat in the place of honor before them all. **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 ›**

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42 **Wisdom of Sirach 1:1** Since many great things have been given to us through the Law and the Prophets and the others who followed after them, for which Israel ought to be praised for its instruction and wisdom; and since not only must those who read become knowledgeable themselves, but lovers of learning must also be able to be of use to those outside, both by speaking and by writing: my grandfather Jesus, having given himself more and more to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our fathers, and having gained considerable skill in them, was himself also led to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom, so that lovers of learning, having become devoted to these things as well, might make still greater progress by living according to the law. You are urged, therefore, to read with goodwill and attention, and to be forgiving wherever, despite our diligent labor in translating, we may seem to fall short in some of the expressions; for what is said in Hebrew does not have the same force when it is brought over into another language. And not only these things, but the Law itself and the prophecies and the rest of the books differ not a little when they are spoken in their own language. For in the thirty-eighth year, in the reign of King Euergetes, having come into Egypt and stayed there some time, I found a copy of no small instruction; and I myself thought it most necessary to apply some diligence and labor to the translation of this book, bringing much watchfulness and skill to it in that space of time, in order to complete the book and publish it also for those living abroad who wish to love learning, preparing their character beforehand to live according to the law. All wisdom is from the Lord, and is with him forever. **read ›**

43 **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 ›**

44 **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 ›**

45 **1 Maccabees 1:1** After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came out of the land of Kittim, had struck down Darius king of the Persians and Medes, he reigned in his place, first over Greece. **read ›**

46 **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 ›**

47 **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 ›**

48 **1 Maccabees 12:22** And now that we know this, you will do well to write to us about your welfare. **read ›**

49 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

50 **1 Maccabees 15:24** And they wrote a copy of these to Simon the high priest. **read ›**

51 **1 Maccabees 16:23** The rest of the acts of John, and his wars, and the brave deeds that he did, and the building of the walls that he built, and his achievements, **read ›**

52 **2 Maccabees 2:13** The same things were also reported in the records and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and how he founded a library and collected the accounts of the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about dedicated gifts. **read ›**

53 **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 ›**

54 **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 ›**

55 **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 ›**

56 **2 Maccabees 13:20** And Judas sent in what they needed to those inside. **read ›**

57 **4 Maccabees 14:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

58 **1 Enoch 14:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

59 **1 Enoch 38:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

60 **1 Enoch 40:9** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

61 **1 Enoch 41:6** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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

63 **1 Enoch 82:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

64 **1 Enoch 88:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

65 **1 Enoch 89:68** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

66 **1 Enoch 89:77** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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67 **1 Enoch 90:22** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
68 **1 Enoch 92:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**
69 **1 Enoch 104:11** Open the verse to read it. **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 1:14** Now after John was taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, **read ›**
74 **Mark 10:31** But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” **read ›**
75 **Mark 13:10** The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. **read ›**
76 **Mark 16:2** Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. **read ›**
77 **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 ›**
78 **Luke 1:1** Since many have undertaken to set in order a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, **read ›**
79 **Luke 1:2** even as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word delivered them to us, **read ›**
80 **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 ›**
81 **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 ›**
82 **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 ›**
83 **John 20:4** They both ran together. The other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. **read ›**
84 **John 21:24** This is the disciple who testifies about these things, and wrote these things. We know that his witness is true. **read ›**
85 **Acts 1:1** The first account I wrote, Theophilus, concerned all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, **read ›**
86 **Acts 1:22** beginning with the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.” **read ›**
87 **Acts 8:23** For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of unrighteousness.” **read ›**
88 **1 Corinthians 15:1** Now I declare to you, brothers, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which you also stand, **read ›**
89 **1 Corinthians 15:23** But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who are Christ’s at his coming. **read ›**
90 **1 Timothy 5:19** Do not receive an accusation against an elder except at the word of two or three witnesses. **read ›**
91 **2 Peter 1:16** For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. **read ›**
92 **3 John 1:12** Demetrius has a good testimony from everyone and from the truth itself. We also testify, and you know that our testimony is true. **read ›**
93 **Revelation 1:2** who testified to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, to everything he saw. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *49 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.

Psalms 24:7

Proverbs 1:11

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

Matthew 1:1 · 5:10 · 13:8 · 17:1 · 22:10

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Mark 2:17 · 9:2 · 14:62
Luke 1:35 · 17:19 · 19:12
John 1:1 · 1:14 · 1:26 · 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
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

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Which of the four Gospels was written first?” 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