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 12 early Christian passages and 147 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

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 says he learned this by tradition, and both he and Irenaeus give the order as Matthew, Mark, Luke, then John. They tie Mark to Peter's preaching, Luke to Paul, and place John's Gospel last.

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 by tradition 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 accepted without dispute in the whole Church.

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

POINT 2 OF 7

Origen lists Mark second, Luke third, John last

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

Origen goes on to give a full order. Mark is second and is linked to Peter's teaching. Luke is third and is linked to Paul and to Gentile converts. 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 10, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 7

Irenaeus describes the same order of writing

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

Irenaeus tells the story in time order. Matthew writes while Peter and Paul are preaching in Rome. Mark writes down Peter's preaching after their departure, Luke records Paul's Gospel, and John publishes his Gospel later, in Ephesus.

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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.”

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 1, page 5** 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

Both writers say Matthew wrote for Jewish readers. Irenaeus explains that this is why Matthew begins with Christ's family line from David. Origen adds that Matthew wrote in Hebrew for converts from Judaism.

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 4, 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 7

Mark's Gospel rests on Peter's preaching

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

Clement of Alexandria also ties Mark's Gospel to Peter's public preaching in Rome. Mark wrote it down so hearers could remember what Peter had said about Christ.

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

POINT 6 OF 7

Another early fragment counts Luke third, John fourth

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

A fragment preserved under the name of Caius also calls Luke's account the third Gospel and John's the fourth. It notes that Luke had not seen the Lord in the flesh and wrote after the ascension.

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

Tertullian ranks the Gospels by authority, not date

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

Tertullian puts John and Matthew first because they were apostles, and Luke and Mark after because they were companions of apostles. This seems to be an order of authority rather than a claim about which was written first.

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) **Source 8, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages pass on church tradition about the order; they do not give a year for any Gospel.
- They do not weigh other possible orders of the Gospels or argue the question in detail.
- 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 147 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 13–113, in Bible order), then 46 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*

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 1–4*

1. *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 ›**
2. *Against Heresies: Book III* passage demonstrates that Luke was inseparable from Paul and worked with him on spreading the Gospel, not out of pride, but because it was true. Luke describes how, when Barnabas… [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 ›**
4. *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 · sources 5–6*

5. *Fragments* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 6, 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 ›**
6. *Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?* 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 (on point 5) “it may well seem that the works which disciples publish belong to their masters… [continues online] **read ›**

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8 *Against Marcion* 2 (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** "lay it down as our first position, that the evangelical Testament has apostles for its authors, to whom was assigned by the Lord Himself this office of publishing the gospel… [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 10–11*

10 *Commentary on Matthew* 1 (1885 English) **Quotes 1, 2, 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 *101 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

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

14 **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 ›**

15 **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 ›**

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

17 **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 ›**

18 **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 ›**

19 **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 ›**

20 **1 Chronicles 12:11** Jethi the sixth, Eliab the seventh, (Septuagint 1 Chronicles 12:12) **read ›**

21 **1 Chronicles 25:16** the ninth, Mattaniah; his sons and his brothers, twelve; **read ›**

22 **1 Chronicles 25:21** the fourteenth, Mattithiah; his sons and his brothers, twelve; **read ›**

23 **2 Chronicles 26:22** The rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, are written by Jessias the prophet. **read ›**

24 **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 ›**

25 **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 ›**

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

27 **Proverbs 2:2** your ear will listen to wisdom, and you will apply your heart to understanding, and apply it to the instruction of your son; **read ›**

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

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

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

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31 **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 ›**

32 **Proverbs 16:21** The wise and understanding they call worthless, but those who are sweet in speech will hear more. **read ›**

33 **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 ›**

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

35 **Ecclesiastes 1:10** Who is he who will speak and say, “See, this is new”? It has already been in the ages that were before us. **read ›**

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

37 **Isaiah 17:12** Woe to the multitude of many nations! Like the surging sea, so you will be troubled; and the back of many nations will roar like water. **read ›**

38 **Daniel 3:9** “O king, live forever! **read ›**

39 **1 Esdras 3:10** The first wrote, “Wine is strongest.” **read ›**

40 **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 ›**

41 **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 ›**

42 **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 ›**

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

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

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

46 **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 ›**

47 **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 ›**

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

49 **1 Maccabees 2:2** He had five sons: John, called Kaddis; **read ›**

50 **1 Maccabees 2:3** Simon, called Thassi; **read ›**

51 **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 ›**

52 **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 ›**

53 **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 ›**

54 **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 ›**

55 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

56 **1 Maccabees 15:24** And they wrote a copy of these to Simon the high priest. **read ›**

57 **1 Maccabees 16:21** But someone ran ahead and reported to John at Gazara that his father and his brothers had perished, and that “he has sent to kill you also.” **read ›**

58 **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 ›**

59 **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 ›**

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60 **2 Maccabees 1:10** In the one hundred and eighty-eighth year, those in Jerusalem and those in Judea, and the council of elders, and Judas, to Aristobulus, teacher of King Ptolemy, who is of the family of the anointed priests, and to the Jews in Egypt: greeting and good health. **read ›**

61 **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 ›**

62 **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 ›**

63 **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 ›**

64 **3 Maccabees 6:29** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

65 **4 Maccabees 17:12** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

66 **1 Enoch 37:5** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

67 **1 Enoch 41:6** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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

69 **1 Enoch 89:77** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

70 **1 Enoch 90:42** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

71 **1 Enoch 93:1** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

72 **1 Enoch 93:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

73 **1 Enoch 104:11** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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

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

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

77 **Matthew 24:14** This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end shall come. **read ›**

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

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

80 **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 ›**

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

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

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

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

85 **Mark 9:12** He said to them, “Elijah indeed comes first, and restores all things. How is it written about the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be despised? **read ›**

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

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

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

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

90 **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 ›**

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

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

93 **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 ›**

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94 **John 1:30** This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me, for he was before me.’ **read ›**

95 **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 ›**

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

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

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

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

100 **Acts 20:21** testifying to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faithfulness toward our Lord Jesus. **read ›**

101 **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 ›**

102 **1 Corinthians 1:6** just as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, **read ›**

103 **1 Corinthians 11:2** Now I praise you, brothers, that you remember me in all things, and hold firm the traditions, even as I delivered them to you. **read ›**

104 **Ephesians 1:12** so that we who first hoped in Christ would be to the praise of his glory. **read ›**

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

106 **1 Thessalonians 1:5** because our gospel did not come to you in word alone, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, just as you know what sort of men we were among you for your sake. **read ›**

107 **2 Thessalonians 2:15** So then, brothers, stand firm and hold the traditions which you were taught by us, whether by word or by letter. **read ›**

108 **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 ›**

109 **1 John 1:1** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and our hands touched, concerning the Word of life— **read ›**

110 **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 ›**

111 **Revelation 1:2** who testified to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, to everything he saw. **read ›**

112 **Revelation 2:8** To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the first and the last, who was dead and came to life: **read ›**

113 **Revelation 14:6** I saw an angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *46 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

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

Matthew 5:10 · 13:8 · 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 · 4:16 · 4:24 · 14:2 · 18:28 · 19:13 · 19:31 · 20:30 · 21:22

Acts 10:37 · 19:2

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

2 Corinthians 8:9

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Galatians 2:2
Philippians 3:10 · 4:3
Colossians 1:18
2 Thessalonians 2:1
Hebrews 9:27
1 John 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.

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 above, 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.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY