

# When Were the Gospels Written?

[Jessica Brodie](#) | Contributing Writer

2021 4 Sep

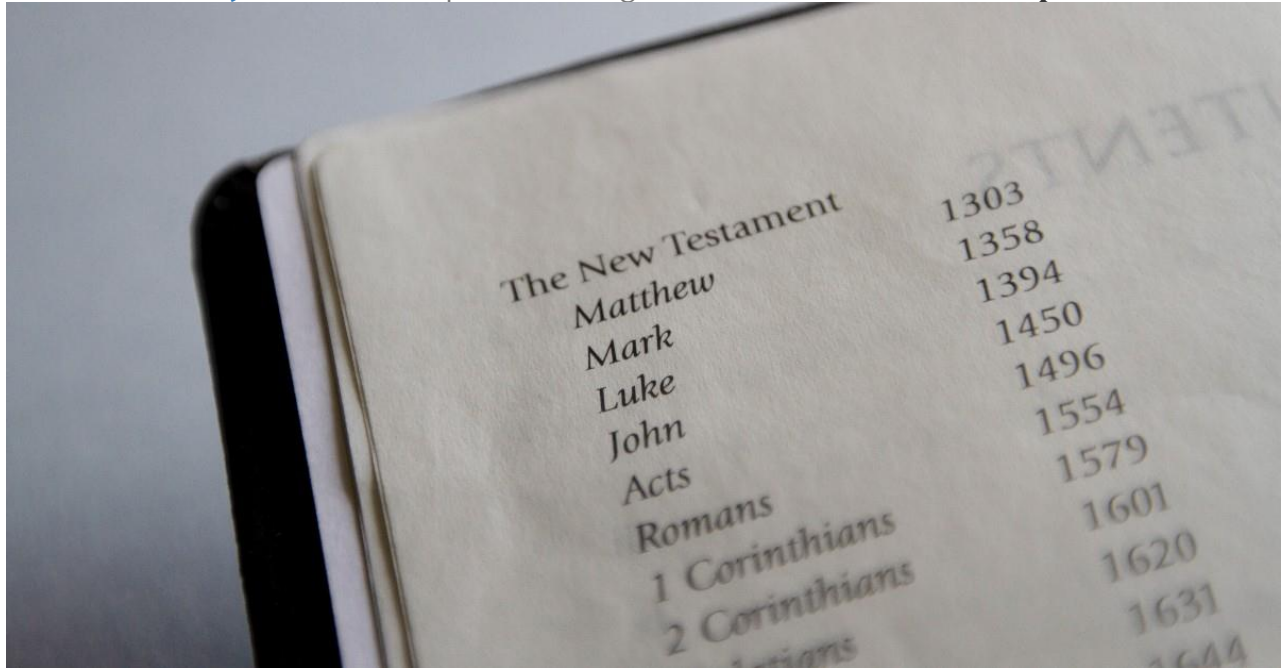


Photo credit: ©Getty Images/Khosrork

After Jesus rose from the dead, He lived among His disciples for many days, teaching and spending time with them. Just before His ascension to Heaven, they were all gathered at a mountain in Galilee. Jesus then told them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Go — tell others. Make disciples. Spread the Good News.

This is exactly what they were trying to do with the Gospel accounts, the first four books of the New Testament.

What are the Gospels, and when were the Gospels written? And can we trust them?

Yes, we can most certainly trust the Gospels. Here, then, is a look at who wrote the Gospels, why and when they did so, and how they can help us today.



Photo credit: ©[SparrowStock](#)

## What Are the Gospels, and Who Wrote Them?

The word “Gospel” is translated from the Greek *euaggelion* or *euangeliou*, which means “good news” or more specifically, “God’s good news.” In the Bible, the Gospels are the four accounts of the life, ministry, death, and [resurrection](#) of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, as written by His disciples.

They are considered to be historical, narrative, and theological literature and are considered to be the full truth about the miracles of the Christ and His teachings. The rest of the New Testament is based on these four Gospel accounts, either recounting what happened after the events of the Gospels and how the church spread, or specific teachings by several apostles on how we are to live as followers of Christ and how to better understand Christ’s teachings. They are meant to be entirely factual and to convey historically accurate information.

The Gospels comprise the books Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Traditionally, scholars believe the former tax collector Matthew, also known as Levi and one of Jesus’s apostles who traveled alongside him, wrote **the Gospel of Matthew**. The account is anonymous, but early church fathers unanimously agree Matthew was the author.

Scholars believe John Mark, a close friend of the apostle Peter, wrote **the Gospel of Mark**, a claim also unanimously supported by early church fathers. This is thought to be the same John Mark, or Mark, that Peter referred to as “my son Mark” in [1 Peter 5:13](#). They enjoyed a close working and personal relationship.

**The Gospel of Luke** is thought to have been written by Luke, a Gentile physician and missionary companion of Paul. The style of the book echoes that of the Book of Acts of the Apostles, also thought to have been written by Luke. Though not an eyewitness of Jesus, Luke heavily drew on eyewitness accounts in this exacting account of the life, ministry, death, and [resurrection of Jesus](#) Christ.

Finally, **the Gospel of John** is thought to have been written by the apostle John, a member of Jesus's inner circle and identified often as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." With a poetic, reflective, and often profound tone, the style of this Gospel is markedly different from the others, and many consider it to be a literary masterpiece.



Photo credit: ©Getty Images/gajus

## When Were the Gospels Written?

The Gospels were written after the death and [resurrection](#) of Jesus. They were written in Greek, though an early account of Matthew's Gospel was reportedly first written in Aramaic and circulated around Jerusalem before the later, official Gospel was prepared. Most scholars believe they were written between AD 50 and 90. Matthew seems intended for Greek-speaking

Jewish Christians. Mark's is directed to Gentile Christians, as some of it explains Jewish customs, as though for those who do not understand these traditions. Luke's Gospel, while addressed to a Theophilus, is intended for all believers in Jesus. These three are considered the "[synoptic Gospels](#)." They summarize, or synopsise, the life of Christ in a fact-oriented manner. They differ a little, but generally, all three can be lined up in parallel format, each in a column stacked one next to the other, and most of the accounts are strikingly similar.

John's Gospel, which has a primary audience of Gentile believers in Jesus and seeking, or receptive, unbelievers, focuses less on summarizing the life and ministry of Jesus and more on who He was as divinity: the Christ.

They are written much like journalistic pieces, in third-person point of view, but they all have a theological agenda with an emphasis on establishing Jesus as the Christ.

While some were eyewitnesses of what they wrote about, others were not. However, most seem to have taken pains to research, gather facts, and ensure credibility in their writing process. After all, they were writing to others who would have witnessed these happenings. They would have wanted to be accurate. Luke specifically notes he "carefully

investigated everything from the beginning” ([Luke 1:3](#)) in writing what he called his “orderly account.”



Photo credit: ©[SparrowStock](#)

### **Which of the Four Gospels Was Written First?**

Scholars widely believe the Gospel of John was written last, and most believe the Gospel of Luke was not written first. However, disagreement remains over whether Matthew or Mark’s Gospel account came first.

One theory is that Matthew penned his Aramaic account to help Jewish Christians before the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70. Mark crafted a Greek Gospel account, based largely on Peter’s preachings in Rome, to help spread the Good News among Gentile Christians, and Matthew’s account in Greek came after this.

Others believe Matthew wrote his Greek account first, then Luke, then Mark, then John. Still others think it was Mark first, then Matthew, then Luke, then John. Indeed, some of the accounts seem to refer to Mark’s Gospel.

The exact dating is difficult, but they all were published in a similar timeframe—some years after Christ’s death and [resurrection](#) but while eyewitnesses to His ministry on earth still lived.

### **Why Do the Gospels Cover Different Events?**

Each of the Gospels is written by a different person, and different people see things in a different perspective. Each summarizes in different ways what happened during Jesus’s life as a man.

At times, the Gospels are unusually similar, from the phrasing and miracles to the parables. The early church was close-knit—perhaps the writers studied and utilized each other’s research and tales to trigger their own memories.

But some differ widely. For instance, the circumstances surrounding the impregnation of Jesus' mother, Mary, by the [Holy Spirit](#) are not mentioned in Mark or John at all, and focus on different aspects in Matthew and Luke.

And all four seem to focus on a different aspect of Jesus: Jesus as the Jewish Messiah who fulfills the hope of the people. Jesus as suffering sacrifice for our sins. Jesus as savior of all. And Jesus as the Son of God and part of God the Father, light of the world.



Photo credit: Unsplash/Hannah Olinger

## Can We Trust the Gospel Accounts?

We can trust the Gospel accounts absolutely.

One, Jesus Himself promised God would send an advocate, the [Holy Spirit](#), to “teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” ([John 14:26](#)). They aren't falsely remembering things years later—these writers had divine help.

Two, we know the Bible is true. The apostle Paul assures us in [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#), “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

And we also have historical documentation and other sources that affirm the existence of these accounts with enough checks and balances to quell all suspicions.

There are other Gospel accounts beyond the four included in the Bible. These extrabiblical, or apocryphal accounts, were written by Philip, Judas, Thomas, Mary Magdalene, and others. Some of these may be true, but for a variety of reasons, the early church leaders elected not to include these in the New Testament. One reason could be that they felt four Gospels were plenty—too many could get confusing. Another reason is that some of these apocryphal accounts were highly spiritual, mysterious, gnostic in tone, and perhaps considered elitist. Other reasons include their date of writing. While some were penned in the First Century, others came later and were, therefore, considered less credible.

So while we don't know for certain these other accounts are—or are not—accurate, we do know the four Gospels included in the Holy Bible are trustworthy and correct.

Jesus gave His apostles a command: Go. Make disciples. Baptize. Teach.

While many of them accomplished this one-on-one, directly telling others the Good News and baptizing them, it is no question that the reading of the Bible is one significant way a host of other people across the world came to know the life-saving grace, mercy and wholeness of Jesus Christ our Lord.

These four Gospel accounts are concrete, explicit words intended by their writers to accurately convey what happened in the life of Christ on this earth and what happened after his death and [resurrection](#). They are valid, important, and helpful, and they deserve daily meditation and study.

### **Related articles**

[What Are the Synoptic Gospels and Are They Contradictory?](#)

[What Kind of Authority Does Jesus Show in Matthew's Gospel?](#)

[Is John's Gospel History or Theology?](#)