

## Timeline: The Development of the Biblical Canon

Date	Event	Background Notes
4 B.C.E.	Birth of Jesus	
29 C.E.	Crucifixion of Jesus	
45 C.E.	<b>James</b> written	Some consider this the first New Testament book. Other scholars date is quite late. <sup>1</sup>
48-50 C.E.	<b>Galatians</b> written	Date depends on whether written to North or South Galatia. If this date is correct, it is earliest surviving letter from Paul. Thematically closer to letter to Romans, which would date it 54-55 C.E.
~50 C.E.	Q Gospel	Speculation that this lost gospel was the basis for the sayings of Jesus in Mark, Matthew and Luke. The Q Document was a Gospel of Sayings only.
50-60 C.E.	Gospel of Thomas written <sup>2</sup>	
Around 51 C.E.	<b>1 and 2 Thessalonians</b> written	If Galatians was written later, these may be first surviving letters of Paul.
53-55 C.E.	<b>1 Corinthians</b> written	Written by Apostle Paul
55-56 C.E.	<b>2 Corinthians</b> written	Written by Apostle Paul
56-57 C.E.	Letter to the <b>Romans</b>	Written by Paul no later than 59 C.E.
Early 60s C.E.	<b>Ephesians</b> written <b>Colossians</b> written <b>Philemon</b> written	
Early 60 C.E.	Final events from Acts of the Apostles occur	
61-63 C.E.	<b>Philippians</b> written	Written by Paul a dozen years after establishing the first church (Philippi) in Europe.
63 C.E.	<b>1 Timothy</b> written <b>Titus</b> written	Both 1 Timothy and Titus are questioned by some scholars as not Pauline epistles.
64 C.E. <sup>3</sup> Mid 60s <sup>4</sup> 70 C.E. <sup>5</sup>	Gospel of <b>Mark</b> written	During time of the great persecution in Rome. Authorship dates range from 50-70 C.E.
64 C.E.	<b>2 Timothy</b> written	Questioned by some scholars as not a Pauline epistle
65 C.E.	<b>Jude</b> written	Fifteen of Jude's twenty-five verses are found in 2 Peter. Therefore Jude may be dated as late as 80 C.E. or both books may draw from an earlier common source.
Between 64-68 C.E.	<b>1 Peter</b> written	Assumed to be written between great fire in Rome (C.E. 64) and Peter's death (C.E. 68)
68 C.E.	<b>2 Peter</b> written	Probably written near time of Peter's death.
50-70 C.E. <sup>6</sup>	Gospel of <b>Matthew</b>	Maybe written as late as 80 C.E.

<sup>1</sup> Many of the dates in this document for New Testament books are drawn from the *Serendipity Bible for Groups, Second Edition* (Serendipity House, CO, 1989). This reference appears on page 1578.

<sup>2</sup> *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus really Say?* By Funk, Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, (Harper Collins, San Francisco, CA, 1997) page 548.

<sup>3</sup> Many of the dates for the New Testament books are drawn from *The InterVarsity Press Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* by Craig S. Keener (InterVarsity Press, IL, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Serendipity, page 1291.

<sup>5</sup> *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* by Marcus J. Borg, page 18 n6.

<sup>6</sup> *Serendipity Bible*, page 1239.

70-80 C.E. <sup>7</sup> 90 C.E. <sup>8</sup>	written	
Pre 70 C.E.??	<b>Hebrews</b> written	Impossible to date but occurred prior to the destruction of the temple, since it is referred to in the present tense.
70 C.E.	Fall of Jerusalem and destruction of temple	
Late 70s C.E. <b>Luke: 90 C.E.</b> <sup>9</sup>	Gospel of <b>Luke</b> and <b>The Acts of the Apostles</b> written	Because Luke and Acts do not mention Paul's death, so some scholars assume written before 64 C.E. However, much of the two volume set (Luke-Acts) derived from Mark, which places authorship after 64 C.E. unless date for Mark is incorrect. The late 70s C.E. date assumes the book was written after fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. <sup>10</sup>
Late 90s C.E.	Gospel of <b>John</b>	Some scholars propose dates as early as 60s or 70s C.E.
90s C.E.	<b>1 John</b> written <b>2 John</b> written <b>3 John</b> written	Probably written when the heresy of <i>Gnosticism</i> <sup>11</sup> (rebuked in the letters) began to flourish.
95-96 C.E.	<b>Book of Revelation</b> written	During reign of Emperor Domitian (51-96). He ruled from 81-96 C.E. Some dispute the date of authorship and claim the book was written earlier in the 60s. Domitian completed the conquest of Britain. After 89 C.E. his government became dictatorial, leading to a reign of terror. He was assassinated by a freedman in collusion with his empress and officers of the court. <sup>12</sup>
100-200 C.E.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Century	"...second century Christendom witnessed a wide variety of theological viewpoints. Gnosticism existed in this milieu as an alternative to what was later recognized as the orthodox position." <sup>13</sup>
140-170 C.E. <sup>14</sup>	<b>Gospel of Thomas</b>	Classical dating of this Gnostic Gospel found at Nag Hammadi. Includes 114 "secret" sayings of Jesus. Some date authorship in 1 <sup>st</sup> Century. <sup>15</sup>
170 C.E.	The Muratorian Fragment	Oldest known list of New Testament books, discovered in <b>1740</b> by Ludovico Antonio Muratori in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, in a seventh century manuscript. Called a fragment because the beginning

<sup>7</sup> Keener, pages 43-44.

<sup>8</sup> Borg, page 18 n6.

<sup>9</sup> Borg, page 18 n6.

<sup>10</sup> Keener, pages 185-186.

<sup>11</sup> "The doctrines of certain pre-Christian pagan, Jewish, and early Christian sects that valued the revealed knowledge of God and of the origin and end of the human race as a means to attain redemption for the spiritual element in human beings and that distinguished the Demiurge from the unknowable Divine Being," from *American Heritage Talking Dictionary*.

<sup>12</sup> Excerpted from *American Heritage Talking Dictionary*. Copyright © 1997 The Learning Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Bauer from 1934 volume *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* according to *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, by Gary R. Habermas, (College Press Publishing Company, Joplin, MO, 1996, 2003), page 104.

<sup>14</sup> Habermas, page 104.

<sup>15</sup> Habermas, page 104.

		is missing. The list is dated about 170 because author refers to the episcopate of Pius I of Rome (died 157) as recent. He mentions only two epistles of John, without describing them. The Apocalypse of Peter is mentioned as a book which "some of us will not allow to be read in church." <sup>16</sup>  Greek listing of the scriptures, dated based on reference to Pope Pius, only a single copy surviving in poor latin, discovered by Muratori. Some date it in the late 4 <sup>th</sup> Century. <sup>17</sup>
200-300 C.E.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Century	"Orthodoxy triumphed." <sup>18</sup>
200 C.E.	Greek version of The Gospel of Thomas transcribed.	Three fragments of this version found around 1900 C.E.
200 C.E.	Christianity reaches France & Spain	
303 C.E.	Edict of Diocletian	Diocletian was originally Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus. <sup>19</sup> Declared all Christian books must be destroyed. Forced the Church to determine which books were of value and which would be cast into the fire.
306-337 C.E.	Reign of Constantine I	Adopted Christian religion, ceased the persecution of Christians.
311 C.E.	Death of Galerius	After a ruthless reign as emperor (including persecution of Christians) from 305-311 C.E., he issued an edict of religious tolerance before his death.
324 C.E.	Eusebius of Caesarea (Jerome) <sup>20</sup> Translated Bible from Greek & Hebrew into Latin (Vulgate edition—early 5 <sup>th</sup> Century) <sup>21</sup>	Early church historian lists in his <i>Church History</i> the following controversial books: Hebrews, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation; plus other books no longer considered part of the canon such as The Shepherd, Acts of Paul, Apocalypse of Peter, Barnabas, and Teachings of the Apostles.

<sup>16</sup> From <http://www.bible-researcher.com/muratorian.html>. See entire manuscript translation at end of this document.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/muratorian.html>

<sup>18</sup> Habermas, page 103.

<sup>19</sup> Excerpted from *American Heritage Talking Dictionary*. Copyright © 1997 The Learning Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

<sup>20</sup> *Circa 260-circa 339* theologian & church historian; wrote a history of the church to 324, an epitome of universal history to 303, etc. from Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online (<http://www.m-w.com>).

Also from "Eusebius of Caesarea." *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*. 2004. Encyclopedia Britannica Premium Service. 6 June 2004 <<http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article?eu=389331>>: Bishop and historian of early Christianity. Baptized and ordained at **Caesarea** in Palestine, he may have been imprisoned during the Roman persecutions. His fame rests on his *Ecclesiastical History* (312–324), which preserves portions of works no longer extant. He became bishop of **Caesarea** c. 313. Accused of **Arianism**, he was excommunicated in 325 but was soon exonerated by the Council of **Nicaea**. He was a staunch supporter of **Constantine I**'s attempts to unify and standardize Christian doctrine, and his writings include the *Life of Constantine*.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Vulgate>

325 C.E.	<b>Council of Nicea</b>	Decisively ruled that that Jesus was both human and divine, and that he was equivalent to (literally, "of the same substance as") God the Father. Resulted in making <i>Arianism</i> a heresy. The Nicene Creed encapsulated this theological doctrine.
350 C.E.	Cyril of Jerusalem	Lists acceptable books to read. Includes four gospels, "Acts of the twelve apostles; and in addition to these the seven catholic epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude; and as a seal upon them all, and the latest work of disciples, the fourteen epistles of Paul. But let all the rest be put aside in a secondary rank."
363 C.E.	<b>Synod (Council) of Laodicea</b> , first official church-wide body to define books in New Testament canon	Some say this list no longer exists, but Metzger lists them. <sup>22</sup>
367 C.E.	Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, compiled a list including all 27 books of the New Testament canon.	Athanasius, chief defender of the Nicene Creed. Known as "the Great". 293?-373 C.E. The Greek patriarch of Alexandria and leading defender of Christian orthodoxy against Arianism. <sup>23</sup>
382 C.E.	Council of Rome	Produces list of Old and New Testament books (Galasian Decree) as know today. Prompted by Pope Damasus' (366-384 C.E.) Decree. Same list as later adopted by the Council of Trent (1545-1563 C.E.).
393 C.E.	Council of Hippo <sup>24</sup>	Local North Africa Council of Bishops created the list of Old and New Testament books which forms the Roman Catholic Bible today.
397 C.E.	List compiled by Athanasius was	The Third Council of Carthage <sup>25</sup> was a regional conference of African Bishops, operating under the

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<sup>22</sup> Canon 59. Let no private psalms nor any uncanonical books be read in church, but only the canonical ones of the New and Old Testament.

Canon 60. It is proper to recognize as many books as these: of the Old Testament, 1. the Genesis of the world; 2. the Exodus from Egypt; 3. Leviticus; 4. Numbers; 5. Deuteronomy; 6. Joshua the son of Nun; 7. Judges and Ruth; 8. Esther; 9. First and Second Kings; 10. Third and Fourth Kings; 11. First and Second Chronicles; 12. First and Second Ezra; 13. the book of one hundred and fifty Psalms; 14. the Proverbs of Solomon; 15. Ecclesiastes; 16. Song of Songs; 17. Job; 18. the Twelve [minor] Prophets; 19. Isaiah; 20. Jeremiah and Baruch, Lamentations and the Epistle [of Jeremiah]; 21. Ezekiel; 22. Daniel. And the books of the New Testament: 4 Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles; seven catholic epistles, namely, 1 of James, 2 of Peter, 3 of John, 1 of Jude; fourteen epistles of Paul, 1 to the Romans, 2 to the Corinthians, 1 to the Galatians, 1 to the Ephesians, 1 to the Philippians, 1 to the Colossians, 2 to the Thessalonians, 1 to the Hebrews, 2 to Timothy, 1 to Titus, and 1 to Philemon.

<sup>23</sup> Based on the doctrines of Arius, who denied that Jesus was of the same substance as God and instead believed that he was only the highest of created beings. Excerpted from *American Heritage Talking Dictionary*. Copyright © 1997 The Learning Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

<sup>24</sup> From [www.catholicapologetics.org/ap030700.htm](http://www.catholicapologetics.org/ap030700.htm)

	ratified by the <b>Council of Carthage</b> .	influence of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo from 396-430 C.E. Same list as later adopted by the Council of Trent (1545-1563 C.E.).
1740	Muratorian Fragment found	Earliest known listing of books of the New Testament. Considered a fragment because the manuscript is incomplete.
1896	Gospel of Mary Magdalene	Discovered in Egypt. <sup>26</sup>
1900 C.E.	Fragments of The Gospel of Thomas found	Three Greek fragments of The Gospel of Thomas were found at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt.
1833-1844	Inspired Version of the Bible	“an inspired revision of the authorized version” by Joseph Smith Jr. Based on the King James Version.
1867	Inspired Version of the Bible	First publication.
1945	Gospel of Thomas discovered.	Found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt; as part of the Coptic Gnostic Library. Three Greek fragments of the same gospel were found at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt about 1900 C.E. The Greek version matches writing styles from 200 C.E. Gospel includes 114 sayings of Jesus.

### Text of the Muratorian Fragment<sup>27</sup>

Alternative translated phrases are in square brackets—taken from the translation at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/muratorian-latin.html>

...at which nevertheless he was present [but he was among them], and so he placed them in his narrative [so he put the facts down in his gospel]. The third book of the Gospel is that according to **Luke**. Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, whom Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law, composed it in his own name, according to the general belief. Yet he himself had not seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events, so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John. The fourth of the Gospels is that of **John**, one of the disciples. To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him to write, he said, Fast with me from today to three days, and what will be revealed to each one let us tell it to one another. In the same night it was revealed to Andrew, one of the apostles, that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. And so, though various elements may be taught in the individual books of the

<sup>25</sup> Canon 24. Besides the canonical Scriptures, nothing shall be read in church under the name of divine Scriptures. Moreover, the canonical Scriptures are these: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua the son of Nun, Judges, Ruth, the four books of the Kings, the two books of Chronicles, Job, the Psalms of David, five books of Solomon, the book of the Twelve [minor] Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Tobias, Judith, Esther, the two books of Ezra, and the two books of the Maccabees. The books of the New Testament: the Gospels, four books; the Acts of the Apostles, one book; the epistles of the apostle Paul, thirteen; of the same to the Hebrews, one epistle; of Peter, two; of John the apostle, three; of James, one; of Jude, one; the Revelation of John. Concerning the confirmation of this canon, the Church across the sea shall be consulted. On the anniversaries of martyrs, their acts shall also be read.

<sup>26</sup> *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, by Elaine Pagels (Vintage Books, NY, 2003), page 51.

<sup>27</sup> Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). The Latin text, which is believed by most scholars to be a translation from Greek, is given in Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (London, 1870). For a critical edition see S.P. Tregelles, *Canon Muratorianus: The Earliest Catalogue of the Books of the New Testament* (Oxford, 1867).

Gospels, nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things have been declared in all the Gospels: concerning the nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, concerning life with his disciples, and concerning his twofold coming; the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, the second glorious in royal power, which is still in the future. What marvel is it then, if John so consistently mentions these particular points also in his epistles, saying about himself, What we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears and our hands have handled, these things we have written to you? For in this way he professes himself to be not only an eye-witness and hearer, but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order. Moreover, the **acts of all the apostles** were written in one book. For "Most excellent Theophilus" Luke compiled the individual events that took place in his presence, as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter as well as the departure of Paul from the city<sup>28</sup> when he journeyed to Spain. As for the epistles of Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones they are, from what place, or for what reason they were sent. First of all, to the **Corinthians**, prohibiting their heretical schisms; next, to the **Galatians**, against circumcision; then to the **Romans** he wrote at length, explaining the plan of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle. It is necessary for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: To the **Corinthians** first, to the **Ephesians** second, to the **Philippians** third, to the **Colossians** fourth, to the **Galatians** fifth, to the **Thessalonians** sixth, to the **Romans** seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the **Corinthians** and to the **Thessalonians** for the sake of admonition, yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the **Apocalypse**, though he writes to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to all. Paul also wrote out of affection and love one to **Philemon**, one to **Titus**, and two to **Timothy**; and these are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is current also an epistle to the *Laodiceans*, and another to the *Alexandrians*, both forged in Paul's name to further the heresy of Marcion,<sup>29</sup> and several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church. For it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey. Moreover, the epistle of **Jude** and two bearing the name of **John** are counted in the catholic Church; and the **book of Wisdom**, written by the friends<sup>30</sup> of **Solomon** in his honour. We receive only the **apocalypses of John and Peter**,<sup>31</sup> though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church. But Hermas wrote "**The Shepherd**" very recently,<sup>32</sup> in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the chair of the church of the city of Rome.<sup>33</sup> And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after their time. But we accept nothing whatever of *Arsinous* or *Valentinus* or *Miltiades*, who also composed a *new book of psalms* for Marcion, together with *Basilides*, the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians [of asia]...

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<sup>28</sup> That is, the city of Rome. The lack of specificity is taken as an indication that the author was a Roman.

<sup>29</sup> According to <http://www.bible-researcher.com/muratorian.html>, "Marcion revised Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians and called it the Epistle to the Laodiceans. Nothing is known of the Epistle to the Alexandrians mentioned here."

<sup>30</sup> According to <http://www.bible-researcher.com/muratorian.html>, "Tregelles suggests that the Latin translator of this document mistook the Greek *Philonos* 'Philo' for *philon* 'friends.' Many in ancient times thought that the so-called *Wisdom of Solomon* was really written by Philo of Alexandria."

<sup>31</sup> The *Apocalypse of Peter* uses imaginative detail to describe the torments of hell and the blessings of heaven. It was read as an admonition to the saints in the early churches.

<sup>32</sup> *The Shepherd of Hermas* was widely read in early Christian times and was a moral allegory, similar to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, however, unlike Bunyan's work it purported to convey a series of divine revelations.

<sup>33</sup> Pius I, bishop of Rome, ca. 142 to 157.