

Here is an important question that I have recently received. It's a tricky one! But completely fundamental to the study of the New Testament.

### **QUESTION:**

I now have your book "The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings". Great book/text! Something I haven't figured out is how do scholars know when the original Gospels (not copies) were written since apparently none survived?

### **RESPONSE:**

This is a great question, and one that I get asked a lot. How do we actually know when the Gospels were written? It is actually a difficult question to answer, but I'll start at the beginning, with some basics that I think everyone can agree on. (Well, OK, there is *\*nothing\** that absolutely everyone agrees on, as I've learned with some chagrin over the years...)

First, Jesus died around the year 30, so the Gospels were written after that. The first really convincing quotations of the Gospels (there are probable allusions earlier than this, but these are the most certain ones) come in the writings of Justin Martyr, around the year 150. Justin does not name the Gospels as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but he does call certain books "The Memoirs of the Apostles," he quotes them explicitly, and his quotations line up with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (it is debated whether he quotes John; but there are two quotations that certainly make it appear that he knows John).

This means, for starters, that the Gospels must have been written sometime between 30 and 150 CE. And the question is how to narrow down the dates further.

If it is true that the Gospels are ...

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