

Formation of the Gospels

How the four Gospels came to be

Scripture scholars in more recent times have come to recognise that the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were all written decades after the death of Jesus in approximately 30 CE. Scripture scholars assert that the Gospels as we now have them were the final text form of a long process of development. Scripture scholars divide this process of development into three overlapping stages.

(CE and BCE are used to represent the common era (CE) and the time before the common era (BCE). Write 'CE' and 'BCE' without full stops and with a space separating them from the year or century.)

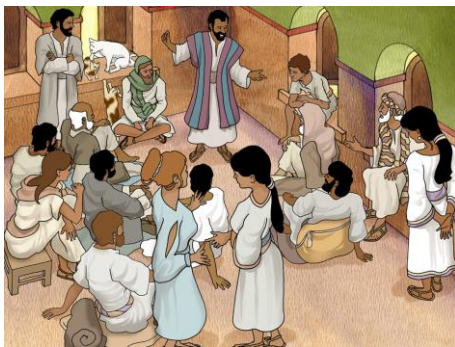
Three stages of Gospel formation



Stage 1: The Historical Jesus (4 BCE – 30 CE)

The first stage encompassed the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Scripture scholars date this first stage from approximately 4 BCE to 30 CE. This initial stage covers the period of approximately thirty-four years of the life of Jesus on earth. This stage includes the words and actions of Jesus during his earthly life.

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Stage 2: Oral History (30 CE – 50 CE)

The second stage includes the telling and re-telling of the events of Jesus' life and his teachings in the early Christian communities. Included in this telling and re-telling was the preaching and teaching of the apostles and the disciples of Jesus to the early Christian communities. Telling and re-telling the events of Jesus' life and his teaching also took place in the context of liturgy as groups of early Christians gathered to celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This second stage covers a period between the death of Jesus in approximately 30 CE to around 50 CE.

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Stage 3: Written Texts (50 CE – c 100 CE)

The third stage consisted of the writing of the Gospel texts themselves. This third stage occurred over a period of time in the second half of the first century CE. Scripture scholars are generally agreed that the first Gospel published was that of Mark. While there is no consensus among scholars about the publication date of Mark's Gospel, many scholars think that a date during or shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE is likely. Scholars assume that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were published before that of John. Many scholars date the Gospel of Matthew and Luke around 90 CE and John around 100 CE. The written Gospels were the end product of a long process of development.

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