

Chapter Seven

(From *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order*
A New English Translation
A Faithful Version with Commentary)

When Was the New Testament Written?

In Chapter Six it has been established—from Scripture and from history—who wrote the New Testament. (See Appendix D, “The New Testament Was Originally Written in Greek.”) But *when* were the books of the New Testament written? The opinions and hypotheses of scholars vary widely. On the one hand, some view the New Testament as a collection of fables and myths verbally passed on by storytellers for generations before any written documents were made. On the other hand, many scholars believe that most of the New Testament was written before the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

In his book, *Redating the New Testament*, John A. T. Robinson demonstrates that the books of the New Testament were written relatively early. Robinson summarizes chronology theories put forth by several scholars, noting that virtually every theory puts the writing of the New Testament far too *late* (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, 1976, pp. 4-5).

In spite of the late dates assigned by some scholars, it is possible to determine when the books of the New Testament were written. However, in order to establish more accurately when these books were written, it is essential to begin with known scriptural facts and verifiable historical dates.

The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew, a Levite and tax collector, was one of the first disciples that Jesus had called to be an apostle. From the internal evidence of his Gospel, it seems probable that he was taking notes of Jesus’ teachings from the beginning of His ministry in 26 AD. Later, the book of Acts describes how the apostles gave themselves to “the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4)—that is, they began to write and compile the teachings of Jesus within the first year after His crucifixion in 30 AD. Furthermore, because of the thousands of new believers (Acts 2-5), it was necessary for the apostles to write down Jesus’ words of the New Covenant before the Passover of 31 AD (Matt. 26:17-30; John 13-17). Otherwise, the thousands of new believers would not be able to properly observe their first New Covenant Passover. Robinson writes, “This first stage must have gone back to the earliest days of the Christian mission and the instruction of converts in the 30s and 40s, and was doubtless perpetuated after the demand for more complex formulations arose” (*Redating the New Testament*, p. 96).

Robinson further suggests that the apostle Paul must have had some version of “the words of the Lord” that he took with him on his first evangelistic mission: “Inasmuch as Paul went out in the first instance as the delegate of this church [at Antioch], we may suppose that this was primarily the tradition of the ‘words of the Lord’ which he took with him, and it would explain the otherwise rather unexpected affinity alike in doctrine and in discipline between Paul and Matthew, especially in early writings like the Thessalonian epistles.... If this is the case, it would go a long way to explain the external tradition that Matthew was the first gospel” (Ibid., p. 97).

The internal evidence gives a fairly good idea of when Matthew began writing his Gospel. However, there is no direct indication as to when he finished it or when it was in general use. Robinson concurs: “Matthew could therefore in a real sense turn out to be both the earliest and [because of later edits] the latest of the synoptists” (Ibid., p. 102). An attempt to determine when the writing of the Gospel of Matthew began and ended logically should begin with an examination of when the Epistle of James was written, because the apostle James’ Epistle was the first New Testament Epistle completed, and it is saturated with Jesus’ teachings as recorded in the

Gospel of Matthew. Thus, the Gospel of Matthew must have been written before James wrote his Epistle.

The Epistle of James

From the internal evidence of the Epistle as well as from historical writings, it can be determined that James wrote his Epistle very early. First, James addressed his Epistle to “the twelve tribes, which are in the dispersion” (1:1). This means that his Epistle was sent to the Jewish communities scattered in all the countries around the Mediterranean Sea, as well as to Babylon—and then to the ten tribes of Israel scattered in Persia, Media, Parthia, Scythia and Europe. Furthermore, this is clear evidence that the Jews during the time of the apostles knew where the ten tribes of Israel were located—they were not lost, as later Jewish historians have claimed.

Second, the saints that James wrote to were still a part of the synagogue system (James 2:2). Only Jewish and Israelite Christians in the Diaspora would be associated with synagogues—not unconverted Gentiles. Thus, James wrote very early, before Gentiles began to be called into the Church.

Third, when God later began to call the Gentiles, there was an influx of Gentiles into the churches, as in the case of the Church at Antioch, which was mostly Gentile. However, James makes no mention of any Gentiles in his Epistle. This shows that he wrote his Epistle before there were many Gentile converts in the churches, and before 49 AD when circumcision became an issue.

Hiebert, defending an early date for the Epistle of James, writes: “The fact that there is no mention of circumcision points to a time before this burning question arose in the Church. Before the admission of Gentiles into the Church, the obligation of the ceremonial Law [of circumcision] upon the believers was taken for granted by Jewish Christians, hence needed no discussion....

“The total absence of any reference to Gentiles and their relation to Christianity is strange indeed if Gentile Christians are already a prominent element in the Church. The epistle gives no hint of the existence of Gentile churches....

“We conclude that the evidence points to a date before the Jerusalem conference. The date may thus be suggested as about A.D. 46, at least before A.D. 49. This view makes James the earliest book in the New Testament” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 52-53).

Robinson as well favors an early date for the Epistle of James—about 47-48 AD (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, p. 138).

It is quite possible, however, that James wrote his Epistle in 40-41 AD—only ten to eleven years after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ—rather than in the mid-to-late 40s. Moreover, in 40 AD the only Gentile Church was in Antioch, and the question of circumcision had not yet become an issue there, so there would have been no need for James to write of it in his Epistle. However, that soon changed. During Paul and Barnabas’ first evangelistic tour in 44-46 AD, they established many Gentile churches on the island of Cyprus and in Asia Minor. At the same time, the number of Gentile believers undoubtedly increased in Antioch. Therefore, it can be further estimated—based on the evidence of the book of Acts as well as the internal evidence of the Epistle and James’ extensive use of the Gospel of Matthew—that he wrote his Epistle much earlier than Robinson’s date of 47-48 AD or Hiebert’s date of 46 AD. It is more probable that James wrote his Epistle in 40-41 AD—much earlier than most scholars have concluded.

Similarities Between the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew

Key to understanding when Matthew’s Gospel was written are the similarities between the Epistle of James and the Gospel of Matthew. These similarities suggest that Matthew’s Gospel was completed and used extensively to teach new converts long before James wrote his Epistle. Hiebert noted fourteen similarities between the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount as found in Matthew 5-7: “The epistle offers a larger number of similarities to the Sermon on the Mount than any other book in the New Testament. If the apostle Paul developed the significance of the death of Jesus, it may be said that James developed the teaching of Jesus. Scott asserts, ‘There is scarcely a thought in the Epistle which cannot be traced to Christ’s personal teaching’ ” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 57).

The fact that James' Epistle is saturated with the teachings of Jesus is even more significant because James was not a disciple during Jesus' ministry. He probably knew very little about Jesus' teachings. Neither he nor his brothers believed that Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:2-5). Following His resurrection, however, Jesus revealed Himself to James—after which James believed and became a part of the 120 original disciples (Acts 1:15). This means that James must have learned the teachings of Jesus from the other apostles. More importantly, it suggests that James also used and extensively studied the writings of Matthew, which became the Gospel of Matthew.

A more extensive analysis of James and Matthew reveals far more similarities than the fourteen noted by Hiebert. Indeed, there appears to be a total of 67 direct or indirect references to Jesus' teachings as recorded by Matthew in his Gospel that are incorporated by James into his Epistle. This indicates that James (and undoubtedly all the apostles) used and studied Matthew for a prolonged period of time before James wrote his epistle in 40-41 AD.

The evidence is overwhelming that the apostle James used the Gospel of Matthew as a basis for much of his Epistle. Thus, it can be concluded that Matthew was completed (perhaps with some later edits) and was in general use well before 40-41 AD. But it is also possible that Matthew had completed his Gospel as early as 33-35 AD. This theory would fully harmonize with the fact that the apostles gave themselves to "the ministry of the Word" in the first year after the crucifixion. As a Levite, Matthew undoubtedly was in charge of writing and compiling the teachings of Jesus, as described in Acts 6:4. That is why the Gospel of Matthew was the first Gospel account to be completed and why it is the first book of the New Testament.

From the chronology in the book of Acts (as well as from tradition), it is known that the apostles remained in Jerusalem from 30 to 42 AD. In 42 AD they began to preach the Gospel to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, scattered throughout the world. James must have written his Epistle to "the twelve tribes in the Diaspora" in 40-41 AD, about a year before most of the apostles left Jerusalem to preach to the house of Israel. He probably sent his Epistle to them shortly after it was written, to prepare the way for the other apostles who would preach the Gospel to them.

Assuming that the Gospel of Matthew was completed and in use by 35 AD, the apostles leaving Jerusalem in 42 AD would undoubtedly have taken copies of Matthew with them to use in teaching those in the Diaspora. Thus, when the apostles went to those in the Diaspora, they had the authority of Jerusalem, the place where God had placed His name; the authority of prophecy from the Old Testament; and the authority of Jesus' teachings, written by a Levite, the apostle Matthew. For the Jews and Israelites in the Diaspora, the authority of the apostles was additionally confirmed by God through the apostles' preaching of the Gospel and the miracles the apostles performed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark, written in the most elementary Greek, is the shortest of the four Gospels. While scholars are widely divided on the book's date, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls points to a relatively early date for Mark. In his book, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, McBirnie wrote: "Professor Jose O'Callaghan, a Spanish scholar of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, has identified 19 tiny scraps of papyrus, found in 1947 among the Dead Sea Scrolls as fragments of a copy of St. Mark's gospel written around 50 A.D.

"The date is what matters. Biblical scholars have long assumed that Mark's gospel, based on recollections of the Apostle Peter, was set down in writing shortly before Peter's death ... which would date it around 68 A.D....

"O'Callaghan's papyrus fragments, established by scientific methods as having been in a Palestinian library in 50 A.D., indicate that Mark's gospel may well have been in circulation within about a dozen years of the time of Jesus' death' (*Glendale News Press*, Saturday, April 15, 1972, UPI, Louis Cassels)" (McBirnie, p. 251).

It is astonishing that fragments of the Gospel of Mark were dated as having been in a library in 50 AD. Such a finding means that Mark—under Peter's supervision—must have written his Gospel as early as 42 AD. According to the chronology in the book of Acts, the apostle Peter returned to Jerusalem in 38 AD, and remained there until 44 AD. This means that Peter and Mark could have recorded their account of the Gospel between 38 and 44 AD. They were both in Jerusalem during those six years. Therefore, 42 AD is the most realistic date for the Gospel of

Mark to have been completed.

However, Mark did not write of his own accord. As Peter's secretary, Mark wrote his account under Peter's direct supervision. Of this, Ernest L. Martin wrote: "As for the Gospel of Mark, it has long been known that John Mark was recognized as the secretary, or amanuensis, of the apostle Peter.... The ancient testimony of Papias, in the early second century, that Mark was the secretary of the apostle Peter (and not the actual eyewitness himself) has such good credentials, and the internal evidence of the Gospel itself is so compatible to this view that it seems evident that the Gospel of Mark is really the Gospel of Peter" (Martin, *Restoring the Original Bible*, pp. 335-336).

Peter was one of the three special eyewitnesses of Jesus' transfiguration. When we combine this with the fact that Mark was a Levite, we see God's double stamp of approval on the Gospel of Mark. Peter, a leading apostle and special eyewitness, related the life and teachings of Jesus to Mark, a Levite, who wrote them down.

Because of all the evidence—from history, the chronology of the book of Acts, and the scientific dating of the fragments of the Gospel of Mark—one can confidently identify 42 AD as the most probable year of the book's completion.

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts

Contrary to the varied opinions of scholars, it is quite possible to determine when Luke wrote his Gospel from the chronology of the book of Acts. Luke traveled with the apostle Paul on his second and third evangelistic tours, or missionary journeys. In the summer of 58 AD, he was with Paul when the latter was arrested in Jerusalem and taken to Caesarea. Paul was held under house arrest for just over two years, until 60 AD. During Paul's Caesarean protective custody (58-60 AD), Luke had free access to Paul. It was during this time that Luke must have written his Gospel account and compiled nearly all of the information for the book of Acts. Jerusalem was not far from Caesarea, and it would have been easy for Luke to go to Jerusalem, where the eyewitness records of Jesus' ministry must have been kept.

Hiebert writes: "Apparently Luke remained in Palestine during Paul's two-year imprisonment in Caesarea (Ac 24:23-27). Luke must have used the time to travel extensively in Palestine in search of further information. He would not only talk with the leaders but would endeavor to gain additional information from any believers who remembered their personal contacts with Jesus some thirty years before. Various individuals would recall listening to the gracious teaching and parables of Jesus and recite the thrill of His healing ministries. Luke's reference to various women by name indicates that he visited women who were closely connected with the story of Jesus (Lk 8:1-3, 24:10). It is not improbable that Luke personally visited Mary the mother of Jesus, who apparently was living in the care of the apostle John.... He relates the nativity story from Mary's standpoint and includes numerous reminiscences, which only a loving mother would be able to supply. Luke indicates in the prologue that he had access to various written accounts of the story of Jesus (Lk 1:1-2)" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 134-135).

Because Luke was scribe and record-keeper for the apostle Paul, we can conclude that Luke wrote his Gospel account under Paul's supervision, during the latter's imprisonment in Caesarea. It is most likely that Luke completed his Gospel in 59 AD.

The Book of Acts: Luke must have begun writing the book of Acts while still at work on his Gospel, in 58-59 AD. In order to write chapters 1-13, Luke must have had access to records that were in Jerusalem, under the apostle James' care. These chapters contain information that was known only to the original 120 disciples as recorded in Acts 1:13-15. However, from Acts 13 to the end of the book, Luke has recorded the ministry of the apostle Paul. Luke accompanied Paul on many journeys and was an eyewitness of the events that he recorded in the latter portions of Acts.

Luke concludes the book of Acts very abruptly, giving no indication that Paul had been released from his two-year "house arrest" (Acts 28:30-31). This indicates that Acts was probably completed sometime after Paul's first Roman imprisonment ended in 63 AD, but prior to Paul's release from his second imprisonment in Rome. Based on historical evidence and clues from the book of Acts, Luke probably began to write the book in 58 AD and finished it in 63 AD.

The Gospel of John

The dating of the Gospel of John has presented scholars with many difficulties. John was one of the three special eyewitnesses who saw the vision of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. Also, in the first chapters of the book of Acts, John was described as one of the leading apostles, along with Peter. Moreover, there is little doubt that John helped to compile and write Jesus' teachings, along with the other apostles and eyewitnesses, after the crucifixion in 30 AD and before the Passover of 31 AD (Acts 6:4).

Hiebert comments on the divergence of opinion concerning the date of the Gospel of John: "No precise date for the writing of the fourth gospel can be established. The old view of the radical scholars that the gospel arose during the middle or end of the second century has been effectively silenced by the papyrus discoveries in Egypt. The latest possible date for the composition of the gospel is A.D. 98, for according to the testimony of Irenaeus, John continued to live at Ephesus until the time of [Emperor] Trajan (A.D. 98-117)...."

"In recent years there has been support for a date before A.D. 70. This is largely due to the recognition that the intellectual milieu behind the fourth gospel can be reconciled with the general atmosphere prevailing in Palestine before A.D. 70" (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1, pp. 222-223).

Although Hiebert brings out some very strong facts for an early dating of the Gospel of John, he himself holds to a later date: "While a date before A.D. 70 is appealing, it faces the difficulty of being forced to reject the established tradition of the church that the gospel of John was written sometime in the last quarter of the first century. We hold that the most satisfactory date falls between A.D. 80 and 95" (Ibid., p. 223).

Robinson, however, postulates a much earlier date, suggesting that John may have begun with a "proto-gospel" even before 50 AD and completed his Gospel by adding the prologue and epilogue in 65 AD or later (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, pp. 306-307). From the internal evidence, it appears that the main body of the Gospel of John was indeed written earlier than Hiebert suggests. If Matthew was completed in 35 AD and Mark in 42 AD, there is no reason to hold to the late date of 95 AD for the Gospel of John. Therefore, it can be concluded that John must have finished the *main body* of his Gospel and taken it with him when he and most of the other apostles left Jerusalem in 42 AD. The prologue and epilogue must have been added during John's final canonization of the New Testament, which probably took place sometime after 95 AD.

Dating the Epistles of the Apostle Paul

In the book of Acts, we have a very detailed account of the apostle Paul's life and ministry, which greatly helps in dating his Epistles. Using the chronology of the book of Acts as the basis for determining the approximate dates of Paul's Epistles is the approach used by Robinson. His dates for Paul's Epistles are more realistic than those set forth by other scholars, which typically indicate much *later* dates (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, pp. 352).

Robinson believed that once the dates for the Epistles of Paul were established, the other books of the New Testament could be dated more accurately. Robinson, like Martin (*Restoring the Original Bible*), understood that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD was a key event for establishing the approximate dates of nearly all of the New Testament books. No New Testament writer mentions the destruction of Jerusalem as a past event—only as an event that was yet to occur. Thus, Robinson rightly concluded that the New Testament was written *before* 70 AD, with the possible exception of parts of the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation.

In dating the Epistles of Paul based on the chronology of Acts, it must be remembered that the dates are at best approximate. Based on a careful study of the book of Acts, Paul apparently wrote his epistles as follows:

- 1) I Thessalonians written from Corinth in 50 AD
- 2) II Thessalonians written from Corinth in 51 AD
- 3) Galatians written from Antioch in spring 53 AD
- 4) I Corinthians written from Ephesus in late winter of 56 AD (before Passover of 57 AD)

- 5) II Corinthians written from Philippi in late summer 57 AD
- 6) Romans written from Corinth in winter 57 AD
- 7) (Gospel of Luke written by Luke in 59 AD under Paul's supervision)
- 8) Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, 61-63 AD
- 9) I Timothy and Titus written after Paul's release from house arrest in Rome in 63 AD
- 10) II Timothy written while in prison in Rome the second time in 67 AD

Robinson's dates, for the most part, are very similar. Substantial differences exist, however, for Galatians, Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, I and II Timothy and Titus. These are explained below.

Galatians: After the Feast of Tabernacles, in the autumn of 52 AD, Paul returned to Antioch, where he stayed until the early summer of 53 AD (Acts 18:23). In the spring of 53 AD—perhaps just before the Feast of Unleavened Bread—the apostle Peter visited Antioch as well. During the Feast, certain Jews of the “circumcision party” came from Jerusalem demanding that Gentile converts to Christianity must be circumcised as Judaism had mandated for all Gentile proselytes. These false teachers caused a great deal of trouble, because the church in Antioch consisted primarily of uncircumcised Gentiles.

Furthermore, the issue of Gentile circumcision had already been settled by the apostles in 49 AD at the conference in Jerusalem (Acts 15). But when Peter came to the Gentile church in Antioch in 53 AD, he played the hypocrite in reverting back to practicing the traditional laws of Judaism that the apostles in 49 AD had rejected. However, the pressure exerted by the “judaizers” was so intense that even the apostle Barnabas, who was a Levite, joined Peter in this hypocrisy.

Such behavior violated and perverted the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If Paul had not contested these practices and instead had allowed them to continue and take root, his entire ministry to the Gentiles—as well as the preaching of the Gospel to the world in the future—might have been jeopardized. This is why—in the presence of the entire congregation in Antioch—Paul publicly rebuked the apostle Peter, Barnabas and the rest of the Jews for attempting to “judaize” the Gentile believers.

The “circumcision party” was apparently active in Galatia at this time as well. Because of Paul's encounter with Peter and the Jews in Antioch—and as soon as Paul heard that “judaizers” were troubling the churches in Galatia—he must have written his Epistle to the Galatians from Antioch (Gal. 1:1-16; 5:12; 6:12-13). Paul warned the Galatians that mixing Judaism with Christianity would pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God even inspired Paul to preserve in his Epistle the entire episode of Peter's hypocrisy, so circumcision and the traditions of Judaism would never be mixed with the gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:11-21).

Thus, the events leading up to the writing of Galatians indicate that the letter must have been written in the late spring of 53 AD. Robinson suggests 56 AD, which is far too late. Paul was not typically so slow to act—and would have been derelict in his duty if he had allowed such false teachings to flourish three more years before confronting the problem. Therefore, when all these facts are considered, there can be little doubt that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians immediately after his confrontation with Peter.

Also, as the book of Acts records, Paul quickly followed up his Epistle to the Galatians with a third evangelistic tour beginning in the summer of 53 AD. He went first to the churches in Galatia to strengthen the brethren there—and then went on to Phrygia (Acts 18:23). After that he sojourned in Ephesus for more than three years.

Hebrews: There is no question that Paul wrote all the Epistles that bear his name. On the other hand, there has been a great deal of debate about the authorship of Hebrews. The style of writing in Hebrews is very close to Luke's style, thus some have concluded that Luke is the author. The internal evidence and chronology, however, reveal that the book of Hebrews originated with the apostle Paul—who undoubtedly used Luke as his scribe.

Robinson dates the Epistle to the Hebrews at 67 AD, during Paul's second Roman imprisonment. However, this is far too late, because by 67 AD nearly all Christians had fled Jerusalem and Judea because of the Jewish revolt against Rome, which began in 66 AD. Many Christian and non-Christian Jews escaped to Pella, but most Christian Jews of Judea and Galilee probably fled to Asia Minor and Ephesus, where there was a large number of believers. Thus, it is

likely that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews soon after he arrived in Rome in 61 AD.

Paul had already given a powerful witness to those in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-21) and to the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10). It was God's plan as well for Paul to bear witness of Christ to the Jewish religious leaders in Rome (Acts 23:11). When Paul arrived in Rome, he was again placed under house arrest. Only three days after his arrival, he witnessed to the chief Jewish religious leaders (Acts 28:23-31).

Paul must have written the book of Hebrews at this time—as an additional written witness and warning to underscore his spoken testimony. However, instead of writing this book in the usual epistolary form, Paul chose to style it as a homily or sermon. Paul had undoubtedly preached this sermon many times over—and had already written out much of the material that went into the composition of Hebrews (perhaps as something akin to sermon notes). As William Lane notes, “Hebrews contains the most refined Greek passages in the New Testament—‘far superior to the Pauline standard both in vocabulary and sentence building’ ” (Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47A, p. xlix).

Paul might well have refined his writing through frequent preaching. Indeed, the style in Hebrews shows a similarity with the style of Paul's preaching as found in Acts 13:15-41, as well as in Romans 10:15-21 and 15:9-12. Adding to this, the many similarities with the Gospel of Luke, the book of Acts, and II Corinthians, which Luke wrote for Paul, it seems likely that Paul dictated the text of Hebrews to Luke.

Another very important reason why Paul must have written the book of Hebrews in early spring 61 AD is that he does not mention the martyrdom of James, the half-brother of Jesus, which took place in the spring of 62 AD.

If Paul had written Hebrews in 67 AD, as Robinson suggests, James would have been dead five years, and only a small vestige of the church would have remained in Jerusalem and in Judea because most of the believers would have fled to Pella and Asia Minor before the Jewish rebellion in 66 AD.

The comment in Heb. 13:23-24 relate that Timothy had been “set free”, “Those from Italy send greetings to you.” Thus, indicating that Paul finished writing Hebrews during his first imprisonment in Rome.

Based on these facts, it can be concluded that Paul wrote to the Hebrews from Rome in the spring of 61 AD. He sent this vital book to the churches in Rome and in Jerusalem as a final written witness and warning before the martyrdom of James in 62 AD and the Jewish revolt against Rome, which began in 66 AD.

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon: In his chronology, Robinson has Paul writing these four Epistles, as well as the Epistle to Titus, during his Caesarean imprisonment in 58-60 AD. However, the internal evidence shows that these epistles were more likely written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome in 61-63 AD. Ephesians and Colossians must have been written in the early spring of 63. The city of Laodicea, which was nearly destroyed by an earthquake in 60 AD, is not mentioned by Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians. Furthermore, the notation at the end of each Epistle shows that they were written from Rome rather than Caesarea, and there is no internal evidence in these Epistles to indicate that the closing notations might be incorrect.

In the book of Acts, Luke recorded that during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome he was not *restricted* in receiving people or his preaching. “And Paul remained two whole years in his own hired house, welcoming all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:30-31). During Paul's two-year imprisonment in Rome he had communications with the ministers and churches that God had raised up through his ministry. Apparently, Tychicus—an elder from Colossae—delivered Paul's epistle to the Ephesians as well as to the Colossians. Onesimus accompanied him and delivered Paul's Epistle to Philemon. Epaphroditus, an elder from Philippi, visited Paul in Rome and delivered Paul's Epistle to the Philippians.

Paul made specific references in these epistles to being in prison, and indicated that his being in prison actually furthered the preaching of the Gospel (Eph. 3:1, 13; 4:1; 6:19-21; Phil. 1:12-14). Paul's closing comments in his Epistle to the Colossians reveal the relative freedom that he had in receiving people and in writing and preaching the Gospel while he was under “house arrest” in Rome (Col. 4:7-18). Philemon likewise shows that Paul freely received fellow saints during his imprisonment (Philemon 1, 23-24).

Clearly, these four Epistles were written while Paul was in prison—and each letter indicates that Paul experienced a relatively high level of freedom. Thus, it is most likely that these Epistles were written during Paul’s two-year “house arrest” in Rome in 61-63 AD—not his Caesarean imprisonment in 58-60 AD.

I Timothy: Robinson’s proposed date for the writing of I Timothy—autumn 55 AD—is far too early because Timothy was with Paul in Ephesus for three years, from late 54 to 57 AD. There would have been no need for Paul to write to Timothy in 55 AD. Rather, all the evidence points to a time shortly after Paul’s release from his imprisonment in Rome in 63 AD.

After his release, Paul probably went to Crete and visited Titus. When Paul left Crete, he instructed Titus to set things in order and ordain elders as he had appointed. Next, Paul probably went to Ephesus to visit Timothy. From Ephesus he journeyed to Nicopolis in Macedonia. From there, Paul probably wrote I Timothy and his Epistle to Titus in late 63 AD.

When I Timothy is examined, it is obvious that Paul wrote to Timothy because he was going to be traveling, perhaps to Spain and Britain. In this Epistle he gives Timothy instructions on how to administer a local congregation in his absence with regard to: 1) dealing with false teachers; 2) selecting elders; 3) discerning the doctrines of demons; 4) having personal godliness and being an exemplary overseer; 5) preaching; 6) handling assistance to widows; and 7) correcting elders who sin.

Titus: Robinson suggests that the Epistle to Titus was written in the spring of 58 AD, during Paul’s imprisonment in Caesarea. However, there is no record of Paul having traveled to the island of Crete before he was imprisoned in Caesarea. Rather, Paul probably went to Crete after his release from his first imprisonment in Rome, in 61-63 AD. He left Titus there to set things in order and ordain elders as he had appointed. Then Paul probably stopped in Ephesus to visit Timothy on his way to Nicopolis of Macedonia, from where Paul probably wrote his Epistle to Titus and his first Epistle to Timothy in late 63 AD before proceeding on to Spain and Britain.

II Timothy: Robinson holds that II Timothy was written in 58 AD, during Paul’s imprisonment in Caesarea. From the tone of this Epistle, it is obvious that Paul was in prison. However, at no time during his imprisonment in Caesarea or his first imprisonment in Rome was Paul facing sure death. In contrast, when he was imprisoned the second time in Rome in 67 AD, his situation was very different. At that time, Paul believed that his execution was imminent, and he feared that he might never see Timothy again. He writes, “For **I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.** I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith” (II Tim. 4:6-7).

When Paul wrote II Timothy, he sensed that his time was short. In view of this, it is more likely that Paul wrote II Timothy while in prison in Rome the second time, in 67-68 AD, rather than in Caesarea in 58 AD.

Although Catholic tradition has it that Paul was martyred in Rome, there is no historical record to support this theory. It is more likely that Paul was released from prison in 68 AD when Nero died and was martyred later in Britain.

I and II Peter

I Peter: Unlike the dating of other Epistles of the New Testament, the dating of I Peter has evoked little controversy. Hiebert writes: “The date of I Peter must be some time in the sixties of the first century. That it was written during the latter part of Peter’s life is obvious. It cannot have been written after A.D. 68, the year of the death of Nero, since tradition asserts Peter’s martyrdom under Nero. The exact date assigned to the epistle will be determined by the interpretation given to the state of affairs portrayed in the epistle. Many scholars, especially impressed with the statement in chapter 4 about the readers being made to ‘suffer as a Christian’ (4:16), hold that it was written after the outbreak of the Neronian persecution in the fall of A.D. 64....

“More probable to us seems the view that it was written shortly before the actual outbreak of the Neronian persecution. There is no evidence in the epistle that the persecutions have actually resulted in martyrdoms. The sufferings were rather such as were being experienced by Christians generally (5:9). They were being hated and maligned because of their stand for Christ (4:16).... They were being suspected of being enemies of the state, but there was the hope that by their good conduct such charges could be refuted (3:15-16). If Christianity had already

been officially charged with being an enemy of the state, this hope could not have been entertained. But the obvious trend of events made it clear that more ominous things were ahead (4:17-18).

“We conclude that the epistle was written on the eve of the outbreak of the Neronian persecution. The date then assigned to it must be in the summer of A.D. 64” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 120-121).

Some of the internal evidence in I Peter, as well as in Paul’s prison Epistles, helps confirm the time at which Peter wrote this First Epistle. Peter was then in Babylon, and wrote: “The church in Babylon, chosen together with you, greets you, as does Mark, my son” (I Pet. 5:13). Yet, in Paul’s closing remarks to the Colossians—written from prison in Rome in the early spring of 63 AD—he mentions that Mark was with him, and was apparently preparing to leave (Col. 4:10). Mark was probably on his way to be with Peter in Babylon—and Paul was apparently heading to Spain and Britain upon his release from prison. Thus, the book of I Peter must have been written sometime during Mark’s stay with Peter, about 64-65 AD.

II Peter: When Peter wrote his Second Epistle, probably around 65-66 AD, many events were transpiring in the Roman Empire—the Neronian fire in 64 AD, the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 66 AD, and the mass exodus of Christian and non-Christian Jews from Jerusalem and Judea into Asia Minor in 66-67 AD. Peter strongly warned against the rising tide of false teachers, apparently from Gnostic and Hellenistic Judaism. Although Peter does not indicate where he was when he wrote this Epistle, it is entirely possible that he wrote it from Babylon, not long before his own martyrdom.

In II Peter 1, Peter promised to leave behind a permanent record of the teachings of Jesus Christ. He could not have died before 67 AD, because—as will be brought out later concerning the canonization of the New Testament—he was finalizing his Epistles at that time to be placed alongside Paul’s Epistles. Both were to become part of the written remembrance that Peter promised to leave for the brethren (1:15). Thus, we can conclude that Peter must have written his Second Epistle in 65-66 AD, just as the leaders of the Jewish rebellion were beginning to stir up support for their cause against the Romans.

Was Peter Ever in Rome?: That Peter was ever in Rome is highly doubtful. No scriptural or historical records reveal that he was. As an apostle to the circumcision (Gal. 2:8), Peter served the Jews in Palestine and eastward into Babylon (I Pet. 5:13), where the largest population of the Diaspora Jews dwelt. Since Rome was in Paul’s territory, there is no reason to believe that Peter would have ever gone to Rome—especially after Paul’s rebuke of Peter and the “circumcision party” in 53 AD (Gal. 2:11-21). In Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, written in 57 AD, he mentions nothing about Peter. If Peter had been the first bishop of Rome, Paul would undoubtedly have mentioned it.

To further substantiate the fact that Peter was never in Rome, Luke’s account of Paul’s arrival in Rome as a prisoner shows that the Jews of Rome had not even heard the Gospel preached (Acts 28:17-22). Had Peter been the bishop of Rome, he would have preached the Gospel to them years before Paul’s arrival.

The only accounts of Peter being in Rome come from later, doubtful traditions promulgated by the Roman Catholic Church that claim Peter was the first “bishop of Rome” and was martyred there. Such traditions were only attempts to add credence to the myth that Peter was the first “pope.”

The Epistles of I, II and III John, and of Jude

The dates assigned to I, II and III John by scholars vary from the early 60s to the 90s AD—due largely to the fact that the main body of I John was apparently written at an earlier date than the letter’s epilogue and prologue.

Robinson believes that John’s Epistles were written just before II Peter and Jude. He states: “The epistles were, I believe, written to reassure Jewish Christian congregations in Asia Minor, who were ... in danger of being shaken from their faith and morals by false [Gnostic] teachers.... In other words, the situation is remarkably parallel to that which we postulated for Jude and II Peter....

“The teaching indeed has much in common with that combated in Jude and II Peter. It evidently involves a denial of Jesus as the Christ and Son of God (2.22f; 4.15; 5.1, 5; cf. Jude 4;

II Peter 2.1) and particularly of [H]is coming in the flesh (4:2; II John 7)” (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, pp. 285-286).

Since the teachings of I John are similar to those of II Peter and Jude, it is probable that I John was written shortly before II Peter and Jude. It was a time when the apostasy was gaining momentum, before the Jewish rebellion against Rome in 66 AD. Robinson favors the early 60s as the likely time of writing (Ibid., p. 287). The year 63-64 AD is the most probable time in which John wrote all three of his Epistles.

The internal evidence from the Epistle of Jude does not indicate a specific date of writing. It is evident, however, that the apostasy had intensified to the point where the churches in Judea were in danger of being spiritually destroyed. The apostates were not *leaving* the churches as the apostle John had written (I John 2:19)—they appeared to be wholly *taking over* the churches.

Hiebert comments: “If it is true, as we believe, that 2 Peter was written first, then the date for Jude cannot be earlier than A.D. 65. On the other hand, it seems highly improbable that the epistle should be dated later than the destruction of Jerusalem.... Some two or three years may have passed since the writing of 2 Peter, thus allowing sufficient time for the development of the conditions depicted in Jude. We may accordingly date the epistle around A.D. 67 or 68” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, pp. 174-175).

However, by 67-68 AD the Jewish rebellion was in full swing, and most of the Christian Jews had already fled to Pella or to Asia Minor near Ephesus. Thus, Jude’s Epistle was most likely written about a year earlier, in 66-67 AD—as the apostasy was intensifying and the Jewish revolt against the Romans was beginning.

The Book of Revelation

Many scholars believe that Revelation—also referred to as the *Apocalypse*—was written before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Robinson, for example, suggests late 68 to 70 AD (Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, p. 252). They have attempted to force the book of Revelation to fit the historical environment of the first century. But if Revelation is viewed as a historical fulfillment of events up to 70 AD, then the whole point of the book is lost. It becomes a book of history, rather than a book of prophecy.

The book of Revelation, however, is not a record of events of the first century up to 70 AD. Rather, it is a book of *future* prophecies for the end times. The true meaning of Revelation—like many of the prophecies in the book of Daniel—was not intended to be understood until the end times (Dan. 12:4, 8-10). In fact, Daniel and Revelation go hand-in-hand. Many of the prophecies of Daniel cannot be understood without the prophecies of Revelation—and, likewise, many prophecies of Revelation cannot be understood without the prophecies of Daniel. With the exception of a few historical passages, virtually all of Revelation has yet to be fulfilled.

The weight of evidence points to Revelation having been written in the last decade of the first century. Hiebert writes: “It was the testimony of the early Church that the Apocalypse was written during the latter part of the reign of Domitian, who was emperor from A.D. 81 to 96. The earliest known witness is Irenaeus who wrote that John saw his visions ‘...towards the end of Domitian’s reign.’...”

“The Domitian dating is consistent with the condition of the Asian churches, as reflected in the seven letters to the churches. That condition implies that these churches already had a fairly long history behind them.... The Domitian dating allows sufficient time for this development between the founding of these churches during Paul’s days and the writing of Revelation.

“[Also, the] message to the church at Laodicea (3:14-22) implies the prosperity of that city. An earthquake destroyed Laodicea in A.D. 62 [actually 60-61], during the reign of Nero. While the city was soon rebuilt, some time must be allowed for a full recovery” (Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 3, p. 253-256).

The book of Revelation is a series of visions which John received from Jesus during his exile on the island of Patmos. The first concerned John’s present time, 95-96 AD. Succeeding visions revealed the sequence of key world events yet to occur—things which must “come to pass” (Rev. 1:1)—from John’s time until Christ’s return, with the final visions revealing the completion of God’s plan. The pattern unfolds as one reads Revelation. In the first chapter, Jesus instructed John to write down what he saw—“the things that are, and the things that shall take place hereafter” (verse 19).

It can be concluded with utmost confidence that the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation while on the island of Patmos, around 95-96 AD. John was released from his exile upon the death of Domitian on September 18, 96 AD (Langer, *An Encyclopedia of World History*, p. 109). Apparently, John then returned to Ephesus, where he and the other apostles still living canonized the New Testament into its final form.

Verbatim copies of those original *Koiné* Greek autographs still exist—preserved in the Byzantine Greek text and known today as the *Textus Receptus*.