

Tim Bouter

Chronology of the writings of the New Testament

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The Gospels

**Matthew:
(before A.D. 60?)**

The first Gospel was written by the Apostle Matthew (sometimes called Levi). The Gospel of Matthew was written originally *for the Jews* and is rightfully placed at the beginning of the New Testament, for it is the connecting link between the prophets of old and the new dispensation of grace. We have no means of knowing just when this Gospel was written, although Luke in the opening of his Gospel says, **“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of these things which have been fulfilled among us...it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto you an orderly account”** (Luke 1:1, 3). It is probable that Matthew and Mark were both written before the Gospel of Luke.

The Book of Matthew begins with the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy concerning Immanuel¹ (chapter 1:23), and ends with the Lord’s promise that **“lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”** (chapter 28:20).

Theme:

Christ, the King of Israel. (The genealogy in Matthew outlines Jesus’ kingly heritage as the Son of David² through his earthly father Joseph, tracing the royal line through Solomon. This genealogy goes back to Abraham, the father of the Jews. Twice Jesus limits his ministry to Jews in Matthew’s gospel saying, **“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”** (Matthew 10:6; 15:24). Matthew is also the only gospel that refers to the Kingdom of Heaven, describing the rule of God over the earth which was promised to Israel as a literal kingdom with the Messiah as their sovereign King. The accusation they put up over Jesus’ head when they crucified Him said **THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**)

¹ Immanuel means, “God with us.”

² Christ is spoken of as the Son of David seven times in Matthew’s Gospel (chapter 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9; 22:42).

New Testament Chronology —

The Gospels

**Mark:
(before A.D. 60?)**

The second Gospel was written by John Mark, the son of Mary of Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) and the nephew of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). John was his Jewish name and Mark was his Roman name. Mark's Gospel *was aimed at the Romans*; his Jewish terminology is translated and the geography of Israel is explained. In fact, Mark twice gives a Latin explanation for a Greek word (Mark 12:42; 15:16). The Gospels of Mark and John are both written in chronological order, while Matthew and Luke follow a moral order that is consistent with their themes. Mark was a companion of Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and tradition says that Mark's Gospel is essentially Peter's reminiscences. Most Bible scholars teach that Mark was the first Gospel to be written.

Mark's Gospel begins with the heavens opening upon the Lord Jesus at His baptism (chapter 1:10), and closes with heaven receiving Him (chapter 16:19). Between the two is His life of service and self-sacrifice.

Theme:

Christ, the Servant. (Mark is a book of deeds³ more than words, evidenced by the fact that he records nineteen miracles, but only four parables. Since Christ is presented as the humble servant in the Book of Mark, no genealogy is given. This Gospel is summed up by chapter 10:45 — **For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**)

**Luke:
(~A.D. 60)**

The third Gospel was written by Luke, the beloved physician (Colossians 4:14). Luke was a Greek citizen and the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. Luke is the Gospel *for the Greeks*. The Gospel of Luke must have been written before Acts, since his **former account of all that Jesus began both to do and teach** is mentioned in Acts 1:1.

Luke opens with people praying at the temple (chapter 1:10), and closes with people praising God at the temple (chapter 24:53). The intervening chapters tell us how their prayers were answered in the person and work of the perfect Man.

Theme:

Christ, the Man. (Luke presents the genealogy of the Lord through his mother Mary, and therefore traces His ancestry through David's son Nathan. Luke's genealogy goes all the way back to the first man, Adam. In Luke's Gospel we see the Son of Man among men, reaching their need, touching their hearts and bringing them to the knowledge of God and Himself. This Gospel emphasises Jesus' *humanity*; His birth, development and human attributes are described in great detail. Jesus' prayer life⁴ as the dependant Man is referred to more in Luke than in any of the other Gospels.)

³ The Greek word *eutheōs*, translated most often as "immediately" or "at once," occurs often in Mark, showing the continuous activities of the Servant.

⁴ Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; 22:41-45.

New Testament Chronology — The Gospels

- John:** (A.D. 85-95) The fourth Gospel was written by the Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved⁵, and is also the last of the four Gospels to be written chronologically. John is *the universal Gospel*. The Gospel of John begins with Christ presented as the Word⁶ (chapter 1:1), and ends with the thought that the entire world could not contain the books describing Him (chapter 21:25)!
- Theme:** *Christ, the Son of God.* (John presents Jesus as the eternal Son of God⁷ who was sent from heaven by His Father to reveal God to mankind, and to offer eternal life to those who believe on Him. As the only begotten of the Father, Jesus had no beginning and therefore there is no genealogy given in the Book of John. In John's Gospel Jesus' *deity* is prominent. In John 19:7, when Pilate could not find any fault with Jesus, **the Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."** John's purpose for writing the fourth Gospel was **that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name** — John 20:31.)

Fourfold Motifs

There are many fourfold motifs in the Bible that harmonise beautifully with the emphases of the four Gospels:

Authors of the Gospels:

- **Matthew:** The Gospel of the kingdom was written by Matthew, a Jew who was employed as a tax collector for the Roman Empire, to whom Israel was in bondage.
- **Mark:** This record of the perfect Servant was entrusted to the one who so conspicuously failed in service, but who later was profitable for the ministry: **Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry** — 2 Timothy 4:11.
- **Luke:** The Gospel focussing on the humanity of the Lord Jesus was written by Luke, who was a physician; Luke carefully describes the perfect Man in the third Gospel.
- **John:** John was the closest disciple to the Lord Jesus (John 13:23), and could therefore write about the special relationship between the Father and the Son. This Gospel emphasises the Godhead glory of the Lord Jesus; John (a fisherman by trade) never refers to himself by name, but only as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

⁵ John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2, 7; 21:20.

⁶ Christ is God's living Word to man, the expression of God's thoughts.

⁷ This title occurs more than ten times in John's Gospel.

New Testament Chronology — The Gospels

Four readerships of the Gospels:

- Matthew: written for the Jews — nation waiting for the Messiah.
- Mark: written for the Romans — nation respecting action, power, and orderliness.
- Luke: written for the Greeks — nation of culture who tried to perfect humanity.
- John: written for the world — **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

Four symbols of Ezekiel and Revelation:

- Matthew: lion — royal animal; pictures Christ as the Lion of the tribe of Judah.
- Mark: ox/calf — beast of burden; symbolizes Christ as the servant.
- Luke: man — Luke is the Gospel of the Son of Man.
- John: eagle — heavenly creature; describes Christ as the Son of God.

Four colours of materials in the Tabernacle:

- Matthew: scarlet — colour of luxury and earthly grandeur (2 Samuel 1:24; Jeremiah 4:30), usually spoken of in Scriptures in connection with Israel. Only in Matthew’s Gospel is the colour of the robe put on the Lord Jesus by the soldiers described as scarlet.
- Mark: white — white speaks of purity and righteousness in service (Revelation 19:8).
- Luke: purple — colour of royalty and universal dominion, usually connected in the Scriptures with lands outside of Israel. Psalm 8 describes that as Son of Man the Lord Jesus will have dominion over the world, and all things will be put under his feet.
- John: blue — blue is the heavenly colour, and pictures the Lord Jesus as the One **“who came down from heaven”** (John 3:13).

Note: The garments worn by the high priest (who was a picture of the Lord Jesus) were made of fine woven linen with blue, purple and scarlet thread. However, golden threads were woven into all the other colours, symbolizing the deity of Christ which shined through all His other attributes.

New Testament Chronology — The Gospels

The themes of the four Gospels are also summarised by four Old Testament descriptions of the Lord Jesus as the “Branch,” and four Old Testament verses introducing the Lord Jesus with the exclamation “Behold”:

The Branch:

Matthew: **“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper...” (Jeremiah 23:5)**

Mark: **For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH.** (Zechariah 3:8)

Luke: **“Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH!”** (Zechariah 6:12)

John: **In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious...** (Isaiah 4:2)

Behold:

Matthew: **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you...”** (Zechariah 9:9)

Mark: **“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!”** (Isaiah 42:1)

Luke: **“Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH!”** (Zechariah 6:12)

John: **Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”** (Isaiah 40:9)

Paul's Travels

- Paul was converted in A.D. 32., on his journey to Damascus (Acts 9:9).
- After his conversion, Paul went to Arabia for an unspecified time and then returned to Damascus. Paul's first visit to Jerusalem as a believer was three years after his conversion, after he was let down through the wall in a large basket (Acts 9:23-28; Galatians 1:17-19).
- This initial visit lasted only 15 days (Galatians 1:18). The brethren sent Paul to Tarsus for his safety (Acts 9:29-30).
- After some time Barnabas recruited Paul from Tarsus to Antioch, to help teach and establish the believers there (Acts 11:25).
- Paul and Barnabas made a trip to Jerusalem around A.D. 46 to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). This trip was 14 years after his conversion (Galatians 2:1).
- Paul's first Missionary Journey took place from approximately A.D. 46-48 (Acts 13-14).
- In A.D. 49, Paul travelled to Jerusalem to attend the Jerusalem Council, a conference resolving the dispute over circumcision (Acts 15).
- Paul returned to Antioch and from there he went on his second Missionary Journey, from approximately A.D. 50-52 (Acts 15:36 to Acts 18:22).
- Paul's third Missionary Journey took place from approximately A.D. 53-57 (Acts 18:23 to Acts 21:14).
- Paul was taken into custody in Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 57. He was held as a prisoner for two years in Caesarea until a new governor (Festus) reopened his case in A.D. 59.
- Paul appealed his case to Caesar, and arrived in Rome in A.D. 60.
- He was placed under house arrest for two years (Acts 28:30).

It is generally believed that after his two years in Rome, Paul's case came before Nero and the verdict was acquittal. He then embarked on what has come to be known as his fourth missionary journey.⁸ Places which he probably visited on this trip are:

- Crete (Titus 1:5)
- Colosse (Philemon 22)
- Troas (2 Timothy 4:13)
- Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3)
- Philippi (Philippians 1:25; 2:24)
- Nicopolis (Titus 3:12)
- Corinth (2 Timothy 4:20)
- Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20)

⁸ 2 Tim 4:20 is one proof that Paul had an interval of ministry and travel after his first imprisonment. Paul could not have left Trophimus sick during his last journey to Jerusalem, because Trophimus was not left in Miletus at that time (Acts 20:4; 21:29). Neither could he have been on his journey to Rome to appear before Caesar, for then he did not touch at Miletus. To make this incident possible, Paul must have been released from his first imprisonment whereupon he embarked on another ministry voyage.

New Testament Chronology — Paul's Travels

Paul may have also visited Spain, since his initial plan was to visit Rome on his way to Spain (Romans 15:24, 28).

Paul's Epistles

Galatians:
(~A.D. 46-49)

Galatians is likely Paul's earliest Epistle, but it is the most difficult to date. Many scholars believe that Galatians 2:1-10 refers to the Jerusalem Council to resolve the dispute over circumcision, which is discussed in detail in Acts 15. According to this view, Galatians would have been written after A.D. 49.

Another, more likely view is that Galatians 2:1-10 refers to the visit of Acts 11:30. This theory implies that the Epistle was written before the Council convened, making it the earliest of Paul's Epistles. The events mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10 fit perfectly to this part of Acts:

- The revelation mentioned (2:2) corresponds with the prophecy of Agabus (Acts 11:27-28).
- The private speaking about the gospel shared among the Gentiles precludes the Acts 15 visit, but fits perfectly with Acts 11.
- The continuing to remember the poor fits with the purpose of the Acts 11 visit (but not Acts 15).

In addition, the exclusion of any mention of the letter of Acts 15 strongly indicates that such a letter did not yet exist, for Paul would have surely used it as one of his arguments against the legalism confronted in Galatians. Also, the incident mentioned in Galatians chapter 2, for which Paul rebuked Peter publicly, was not as likely to happen after such a large apostolic consensus of Acts 15. After the Jerusalem Council everybody was agreed that circumcision of the Gentiles was unnecessary, including Peter.

Theme:

Salvation is by grace, apart from law-keeping. (It is striking that the believers had so quickly departed from this fundamental truth, and added their own works as a requirement for salvation.)

Paul's 2nd Missionary Trip

1 Thessalonians: 1st Thessalonians was written from Corinth during Paul's second Missionary Journey. When the opposing Jews from Thessalonica followed Paul to Berea (where he was preaching the word), the brethren sent him over sea to Athens for his protection. Timothy and Silas remained in Macedonia, with directions from Paul to return to Thessalonica to establish and encourage the believers, and then to come to him with all speed. From Athens Paul travelled to Corinth, and there Timothy and Silas reunited with him. Timothy brought Paul good news back from Thessalonica, as well as some questions they had, which prompted Paul to write them his 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians.

Theme: *Christ's return.*

The circumstances surrounding this Epistle are described in Acts 17:13-15, 18:5 and 1st Thessalonians 3:1-6:

But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there. So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed. (Acts 17:13-15)

When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 18:5)

Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. (1 Thessalonians 3:1-7)

2 Thessalonians: 2nd Thessalonians was also written from Corinth during Paul's second Missionary Journey, in response to further problems and also the misunderstanding of parts of 1st Thessalonians. A few months or weeks are all that are needed to pass between the writing of the two letters. 2nd Thessalonians 1:1 tells us that Paul, Silvanus and Timothy were still together (compare with 1 Thessalonians 1:1).

New Testament Chronology —

Paul's Epistles

Theme: Explanation of events that must precede *the Day of the Lord*, and a warning against disorderly behaviour.

Paul's 3rd Missionary Trip

1 Corinthians: (A.D. 56) 1st Corinthians was written from Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8) during Paul's third Missionary Journey, after he had sent Timothy to Corinth. He wrote this Epistle in response to questions the Corinthians had written to him (1 Corinthians 7:1) as well as concerns that were brought to him directly by visitors from Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:17).

Theme: *Assembly discipline* and proper Christian conduct.

Acts 19:21-22, 1st Corinthians 4:17 & 16:8-11 provide the backdrop to this Epistle:

When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in [his] spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time. (Acts 19:21-22)

For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. (1 Corinthians 4:17)

But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do. Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren. (1 Corinthians 16:8-11)

After the 1st Epistle had been written and delivered to the Corinthians, Paul seemed to have been greatly troubled in his mind about how the Church in Corinth would receive and treat his inspired communication. The 1st Epistle had been written with many tears and deep soul-exercise (2 Corinthians 2:4). He knew it would make them sorry, yet he was in doubt and unrest about it all. Therefore, Titus was evidently sent by the apostle to Corinth to ascertain the truth about this matter and to find out what effect the 1st Epistle had upon the Corinthians.⁹

⁹ The exact travel sequence of Timothy and Titus to Corinth during this time period is difficult to piece together, but may have transpired as follows:

- After hearing about the assembly problems in Corinth, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus there via Macedonia (Acts 19:22).
- Shortly afterwards, Paul sent his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, which he expected to reach them before Timothy did. (In 1st Corinthians 4:17 Paul writes that he had already sent Timothy, but in 1st Corinthians 16:10-11 he instructs the Corinthians how to treat Timothy upon his arrival.)

New Testament Chronology — Paul's Epistles

Paul *made plans* to visit Corinth three times in total (2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1), although he only visited them in person *twice* before his first imprisonment. His first visit was during his second Missionary Journey (Acts 18). While Paul was in Ephesus during his third Missionary Journey, he made plans to visit Corinth after he heard of all the problems there. This initial plan, which is alluded to in 2nd Corinthians 1:15-16, was to travel to Corinth before he went into Macedonia, and then again on the return from Macedonia (the second benefit). Paul altered his travel plans, and instead he sent Timothy to Corinth and wrote the Corinthians a letter (his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians). 1st Corinthians 16:5 indicates that his original plans had already been changed at the time that he wrote his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, because he told them that he would visit Corinth *after* passing through Macedonia (see also Acts 19:21-22).

In 2nd Corinthians 1:23-2:2 Paul gives the actual reason for his change in plans. He did not want his second visit to Corinth to be sorrowful, so he spared the Corinthians by postponing his visit. Instead of coming to them immediately with a rod (1 Corinthians 4:21) he exercised patience and waited for the gracious effect of the 1st Epistle he had sent to them.

2 Corinthians: 2nd Corinthians was written from Macedonia during Paul's third Missionary Journey, as he was travelling to Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:6).
(A.D. 57)

Theme: *Defence of Paul's apostolic authority* and further instruction to the Assembly in Corinth. (In the 1st Epistle, Paul is seen primarily as a *teacher*, but in the 2nd he occupies the role of a *pastor*.)

Romans: Romans was written from the city of Corinth (Romans 16:1). From the context of Romans 15:22-33 we can deduce that it was during Paul's third Missionary Journey. In these verses, Paul describes that he was ready to minister to the saints in Jerusalem, having already collected the contribution of the saints from Macedonia and Achaia. Paul took this collection during his third Missionary Journey.

Theme: *The Gospel of grace.*

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- At the close of his 1st Epistle, Paul asked the Corinthians to help Timothy on his journey back to him in peace, since he was waiting for him along with the brethren (1 Corinthians 16:11). Timothy must have reunited with Paul before 2nd Corinthians was written, because Paul mentions Timothy as a co-author.
 - Titus was evidently sent to Corinth following Timothy's return, since Paul was anxious to discover how the Corinthians had reacted to his letter after Timothy departed from them.
 - Titus reunited with Paul in Macedonia (2 Corinthians 7:5-6). After updating Paul about the assembly situation, Titus delivered the 2nd Epistle of the Corinthians to them ahead of Paul's arrival in Corinth.

Paul's 1st Imprisonment

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon are called Paul's Prison Epistles, which were written during his first imprisonment in Rome:

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him. (Acts 28:30-31)

Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon were each written in **A.D. 60** and were carried to their destination by Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21-22; Colossians 4:7-9). Their respective themes are:

Ephesians: *The Church, Christ's Body.*¹⁰

Colossians: *The pre-eminence and glory of Christ the risen Head.* (This Epistle counteracts the errors of the Gnostic heresy¹¹ by displaying the glories of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.)

Philemon: *Love exemplified through the story of a runaway slave.*

Philippians: *Philippians was written from Rome, likely near the end of Paul's first imprisonment. Philippians 1:12-18 would imply a certain length of time for preaching in Rome since Paul arrived. He seems to have known that his case was about to be decided in a positive way (compare with Philippians 1:19, 23-26), indicating that he was nearing the end of his first imprisonment.*

Theme: *Christ is all:*

1. Christ my life – chapter 1
2. Christ my example – chapter 2
3. Christ my object – chapter 3
4. Christ my resource – chapter 4

¹⁰ See End Note #1 for a comparison of the different aspects in which the Church is presented between Ephesians and Colossians.

¹¹ See End Note #2 for an excursion on Gnosticism.

Between Paul's Imprisonments

Paul's 1st Epistle to Timothy and his Epistle to Titus were written after he was released from his first imprisonment. The book of Hebrews was also likely written by Paul during this time:

**Hebrews:
(A.D. 62-64)**

Hebrews was almost certainly written by the Apostle Paul, shortly after he was released from his first imprisonment. The believers had not yet resisted to bloodshed (Hebrews 12:4), indicating that the Epistle was written before Nero's bloody persecution in A.D. 64. Hebrews was written from Italy (Hebrews 13:24) and the writer was waiting for Timothy to reunite with him before he visited the Hebrew brethren (Hebrews 13:19, 23). The writer had been in prison (Hebrews 10:34) and made special mention for the believers to remember the prisoners as if chained with them (Hebrews 13:3). In addition to the writing style and the connection to Timothy, some other clues that Paul was the writer of this book include:

1. The book ends with grace to the audience, which was Paul's signature in every Epistle (compare with 2nd Thessalonians 3:17).
2. Peter indicated that Paul had written to the Hebrew brethren (2 Peter 3:15). All of Paul's other Epistles were written to Gentile assemblies or individuals.

Theme: *The superiority of Christ.*

**1 Timothy:
(A.D. 64-66)**

1st Timothy was written in-between Paul's two imprisonments, after he went to Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3).

Theme: *Assembly order in the face of individual departure.* (Compare with the theme of 2nd Timothy.)

**Titus:
(A.D. 64-66)**

Titus was written from Nicopolis, in-between Paul's two imprisonments (Titus 3:12).

Theme: *Assembly order.* (The Epistles to Timothy emphasise *the doctrine* which accords with godliness — 1 Timothy 6:3; a godly walk must be based on the teaching of the Word. Titus emphasises the other side of things: truth which accords with *godliness* — Titus 1:1; the truth must be accompanied by a consistent, godly walk. To Timothy the apostle stresses the importance of *sound doctrine*, whereas to Titus he dwells on *sound behaviour*.)

Paul's 2nd Imprisonment

**2 Timothy:
(A.D. 67)**

Paul wrote 2nd Timothy from Rome around A.D. 67 during his second imprisonment, just before he was martyred. Paul's second imprisonment in Rome was much harsher than the first (2 Timothy 2:9). He was deserted by most of his friends (2 Timothy 4:9-11) and knew that the time of his death was at hand (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Tradition says he was beheaded outside Rome in A.D. 67 or 68.

Theme:

Individual faithfulness in a time of *collective failure*. (Compare with the theme of 1st Timothy.)

Other New Testament Books

Acts:
(~A.D. 62)

The book of Acts was written by Luke, the author of the third Gospel. Luke was a physician and companion of Paul. Luke mentions his “former account” (the Gospel of Luke) in the first chapter of Acts, so it must have been written after his third Gospel. The book of Acts ends with Paul’s two year imprisonment, which indicates that it was written around A.D. 62.

Theme: *Church history.* (Acts is the transitional link between Judaism and Christianity.)

James:
(A.D. 45-48)

James was written by the half brother of the Lord Jesus to the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad (James 1:1), that is, the Christian Jews dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. None of the decisions of the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 49 (over which James presided) are mentioned, making it possible that James was one of the earliest Epistles.

Theme: Exhortation to a *practical walk that proves the reality of our faith.*

1 Peter:
(A.D. 64-65)

1st Peter was written by the Apostle Peter from Babylon (1 Peter 5:13), to the [Jewish] pilgrims of the Dispersion (1 Peter 1:1).

Theme: *Suffering and glory.* (This Epistle was written during the time of Nero’s fierce persecution. Through this Epistle, which addresses suffering in the Christian life, Peter fulfilled the request of the Lord in Luke 22:32 that **when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.**)

2 Peter:
(A.D. 67)

The Apostle Peter wrote 2nd Peter to the same audience as his 1st Epistle (2 Peter 3:1). This letter was written after all of Paul’s Epistles were in circulation (2 Peter 3:15-16) and can therefore be dated around A.D. 67, shortly before he was martyred in A.D. 67 or 68.

Theme: *Faithfulness according to the prophetic word in a day of apostasy.* (2nd Peter, like all 2nd Epistles, is corrective.)

New Testament Chronology — Other New Testament Books

John's Epistles:

The great theme of the Gospel and the Epistles of John is *life*. There is, however, this difference: in the Gospel we see the *perfect manifestation of eternal life in Christ*, while the Epistles present the *fruits and the proofs of this life in believers*. The three Epistles of John were written by the Apostle John from approximately **A.D. 80-95**. Their respective themes are:

1 John: *Christian fellowship.* (This Epistle was written to refute the false teaching of the Gnostics¹², who did not have the characteristics of true children of God.)

2 John: *Loving in truth.* (John wrote this Epistle to encourage believers to walk according to Christ's commandments and warn them against deceivers.)

3 John: *Expressing the truth in love.* (2nd John was written to warn the faithful against those who denied the truth as to Christ; 3rd John encourages us to receive and help those who do teach the truth.)

Jude:
(A.D. 67-70) The Epistle of Jude was written by the brother of James (Jude 1) and half brother of the Lord Jesus. There are many similarities between Jude and 2nd Peter. Jude was likely the later writer: Peter wrote in his 2nd Epistle that there "*will be*" false teachers and scoffers (2 Peter 2:1; 3:3); Jude says that such men "*have crept in*" (verse 4).

Theme: *Contending earnestly for the faith in the midst of apostasy.*

Revelation:
(A.D. 95) The Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation from the Island of Patmos, where he was being held as a prisoner.

Theme: *Prophetic events.*

¹² See End Note #2 for an excursion on Gnosticism.

End Notes

1 Ephesians and Colossians

Although Ephesians and Colossians are similar, they present the “mystery” (the union of the Church with Christ) from different perspectives, perfectly complementing each other:

Ephesians: The Church’s relation to Christ (the privileges of the body)

Colossians: Christ’s relation to the Church (the glories of the Head)

Ephesians: **I in Christ** — the Church as represented in Christ *in heaven*.

God’s purpose that there should be a company of saints in heaven (the body of Christ) who share the exaltation and acceptance of Christ (the Head).

Colossians: **Christ in me** — Christ as represented in the Church *on earth*.

God’s purpose that the character and moral beauty of Christ (the Head) should be displayed in the church (His body) now on earth, as well as in the coming glory.

2 Gnosticism

The Gnostic heresy concerned itself primarily with the origin of the universe and the existence of evil. Their philosophy was based on the notion that evil was inherent in matter, and they postulated a series of emanations, aeons, spirits and angels that came between God and matter. The Gnostics watered down the gospel to a mere philosophy. Their main goal was to acquire knowledge. On that they put their emphasis, rather than on faith.

The word *Gnostic* comes from the Greek word *gnōsis*,¹ which simply means “to know.” The Gnostics claimed to have special knowledge superior to that of the apostles, which could be revealed only to those who were initiated into their secrets. The common people could think whatever they wished; only those who had been initiated could find the real truth. In the book of Colossians and in the Epistles of John, the apostles masterfully refute the Gnostic heresy which was in its beginning stages. It did not come to full flower and fruit until the second century, when it was professed in every part of the civilized world.

The Gnostics were divided when it came to the person of Christ. Some of them embraced a philosophy known as *Docetism*. The name is derived from the Greek word meaning, “to seem.” The teaching was that because matter was evil, Christ could not possibly be associated with a human body — despite the clear teaching of the New Testament. The man, Jesus, only *seemed* to have a human body. He was not born, He did not die; His body was an illusion. This form of Gnosticism denied the **humanity** of Jesus.

There was another form of Gnosticism known as *Cerentianism*.² These Gnostics taught that “the Christ” came upon the human body of Jesus in the form of a dove at His baptism and that it left Him at the beginning of His suffering at Calvary. According to them, this explains why Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” This form of Gnosticism denied the **deity** of Jesus.

Gnostic ideas regarding the evil nature of matter gave rise to divergent forms of Gnostic teaching regarding the human body. One school of Gnostic thought advocate *asceticism*. The thing to do was stringently deny the body its desires. The body needed to be starved and scourged and made to suffer. Getting married was forbidden. Eating meat was forbidden.

A different school of Gnostic thought went off in the opposite direction. This Gnostic brand embraced what came to be known as *antinomianism*. Those who followed this path believed that the best thing to do with the body was to indulge its appetites to the point where they were filled to the point of exhaustion.

¹ This use of the word *gnōsis* inspired T.H. Huxley to coin the word *agnostic*. A Gnostic is a man who says that he knows; an agnostic is a man who says that he doesn't know.

² The first view was addressed by the apostle John in his three Epistles. The second view seems to have been on the mind of the apostle Paul as he wrote Colossians.