

The construction of the Early Christian Bible

Components:

1. **The Old Testament** (also known as the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Scriptures, or Tanakh). This is a collection of writings that was first compiled and preserved as the sacred books of the Jewish people. Except for a few passages in Aramaic, appearing mainly in the apocalyptic Book of Daniel, these scriptures were written originally in Hebrew during the period from 1200 to 100 BCE. The Hebrew Bible probably reached its current form about the 2nd century CE.¹

*Note, the books included in the biblical Old Testament differ depending on the denomination/expression of Christianity.

2. **The New Testament.** Comprised of the **Four Gospels** (Gospel of Matthew, Gospel of Mark, Gospel of Luke, and the Gospel of John) and a series of books that, added to the Old Testament, constitute the **Christian Bible**. The texts of the New Testament would have originally been composed in Greek – no original books of the bible survive.

*Note, the books included with the Four Gospels differ depending on the denomination/expression of Christianity.

Dates of the Gospels:

The Gospel of Mark	Approximately 70 CE (37 years +/- after the death of Jesus of Nazareth)	Synoptic Gospels
The Gospel of Matthew	Approximately 85 CE (52 years +/- after the death of Jesus of Nazareth)	
The Gospel of Luke	Approximately 85-95 CE (52-62 years +/- after the death of Jesus of Nazareth)	
The Gospel of John	Approximately 90-100 CE (57-67 years +/- after the death of Jesus of Nazareth)	

The authorship of the Four Gospels is unknown

¹ Direct quote. Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Hebrew Bible." Encyclopedia Britannica, May 17, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hebrew-Bible>.

Timeline of the Bible

312 CE	Roman Emperor Constantine converts to Christianity, beginning the Empire's path to Christianisation.
391 CE	Christianity becomes the state religion of the Empire.
395 CE	The [Roman] Empire is divided into west (centred on Rome) and east (centred on Constantinople)
397 CE	Council of Carthage establishes orthodox New Testament canon (27 books)
382-405 CE	Jerome of Stridon, at the request of Pope Damasus I, compiled and retranslated existing Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin, and Greek manuscripts to create a Latin Bible ("The Vulgate"). This version becomes official in 1590. ²
475 CE	The last Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, signals the "fall" or "transformation" of the western empire into new political entities. The eastern Empire will continue until 1453 CE (The Fall of Constantinople).



MAP 7.2 The Spread of Christianity, 300–600

Christians were distinctly a minority in the Roman Empire in 300, although congregations existed in many cities and towns, especially in the eastern provinces. The emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity in the early fourth century gave a boost to the new religion; it gained further strength during that century as the Christian emperors supported it financially and eliminated subsidies for the polytheist cults that had previously made up the religion of the state. By 600, the preaching of the church's missionaries and the money of the emperors had spread Christianity from end to end of the empire's huge expanse of territory. From Henry Chadwick and G. R. Evans, *Atlas of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Andromeda Oxford Ltd., 1987), 28. Reproduced by permission of Andromeda Oxford Limited.

Lynn Hunt, Thomas R. Martin et al. *The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures*. (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 256.

² In 1546, the Council of Trent had decreed that the Vulgate was authoritative and authentic, and ordered that it be printed as correctly as possible. The *Sistine Vulgate* was authorized in 1590, but was replaced by the *Sixto-Clementine Vulgate* in 1592. The *Sixto-Clementine Vulgate* was used officially in the Catholic Church until 1979, when the *Nova Vulgata* was promulgated by Pope John Paul II.