

# Dates for the New Testament

All of Saul's fourteen epistles were written before his death during the latter part of the reign of Nero (died in 68 C.E.). Keph (Peter) died with Saul,<sup>1</sup> therefore his two books (called Peter) were also composed before that date. Saul is recorded as oftentimes quoting the book of Luke,<sup>2</sup> indicating that Luke was written before Saul's death. This also must be true of the book of Acts, also written by Luke, for in it Luke makes no mention of Saul's death but does discuss Saul living at Rome. The optimistic note on which Acts ends, showing Saul proclaiming Yahweh in Rome without hindrance, suggests a date before the outbreak of persecution there (64 C.E.).

The apostle Jacob (James) died shortly before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the book of James was composed before that momentous event. Irenaeus<sup>4</sup> notes that Mark wrote his book after the departure of Peter and Paul. As William Smith<sup>5</sup> notes, "Again we may as certainly conclude that it was not written after the destruction of Jerusalem (70 C.E.), for it is not likely that he would have omitted to record so remarkable a fulfillment of our Lord's predictions." The book of Jude was published about 65 C.E.<sup>6</sup> Matthew wrote his work "while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome",<sup>7</sup> and therefore before the death of the latter in about 67 C.E. Its primacy is also testified to by its position as the first of the books of the New Testament.

The only New Testament documents that might be later than 70 C.E. are those of the apostle John, the books of John, and 1–3 John. The book of Revelation, written by another John (by some called *Ψεολογου* [theo-logou], or "deity speaking," i.e. "the divine" or "prophesier"), was definitely composed later. That Revelation was composed by a different John

than the apostle of that same name was well-known in the early centuries and has been suspected by scholars in recent years. For example, Eusebius records the statements of Papias (about 140 C.E.), a man who personally knew John, the author of Revelation. Eusebius states:

It is here worth noting that he (Papias) twice counts the name of John, and reckons the first John with Peter and James and Matthew and the other apostles, clearly meaning the evangelist, but by changing his statement places the second with the others outside that number of the apostles, putting Aristion before him and clearly calling him a presbyter. This confirms the truth of the story of those who have said that there were two of the same name in Asia, and there are two tombs at Ephesus both still called John's. This calls for attention: for it is probable that the second (unless anyone prefer the former) saw the revelation which passes under the name of John. The Papias whom we are now treating confesses that he had received the words of the apostles from their followers, but says that he had actually heard Aristion and the presbyter John. He often quotes them and gives their traditions in his writings.<sup>8</sup>

Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria (c. 247–265 C.E.), held the same opinion. While analyzing the different texts and records he concludes, "I think, therefore, that it was some other one of those who were in Asia (who wrote Revelation); for it is said that there were

1 Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 2:25:5–7.

2 Ibid, 3:4:7.

3 Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 2:23:10–25, 3:11:1; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:9:1

4 Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3:1:1.

5 A Dictionary of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, 1948, p. 381.

6 Ibid, p. 329.

7 Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3:1:1.

8 Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3:39:5ff.

two monuments in Ephesus, and that each of these bears the name of John”.<sup>9</sup> According to the Apostolic Constitutions, this particular John the presbyter was ordained by the apostle John.<sup>10</sup> The ancients, therefore, knew that it was John the Elder (presbyter) who wrote Revelation not John the apostle.

Present-day scholars have also recognized the separate origin for Revelation and the works of the apostle John through textual differences. I. H. Marshall of the University of Aberdeen, for example, comments that after close examination by various scholars, “it is certain that one author is responsible for the three Epistles (1–3 John)” and that “it is reasonably certain that John’s Gospel and 1 John are by the same author”.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Revelation shows clear signs of being composed by another’s hand. Marshall continues that on textual differences the “theory of common authorship” of Revelation with the other four books of the apostle John “is very difficult to maintain”.<sup>12</sup> He adds, “Further, the Greek of Revelation is unlike that of any other book in the New Testament; despite suggestions that it was originally written in Aramaic, and so possibly by the same person who wrote John and 1–3 John in Greek, the theory of common authorship must remain doubtful”.<sup>13</sup> He then presents as one of the major theories advanced by scholars to explain these differences “the possibility that John’s Gospel and 1–3 John are by John the apostle and Revelation by another John who is otherwise unknown to us”.<sup>14</sup>

The time factor between the two Johns further points to a separate origin for Revelation. The apostle John was very probably about thirty years old—the age of maturity, the age when a man could enter the priesthood<sup>15</sup>—or older at the time he began to follow the messiah, whose ministry lasted from 27–30 C.E. According to

ancient testimony, the John who wrote Revelation did so in the fifteenth year of Domitian, i.e. 96 C.E.<sup>16</sup> He is said to have died in the reign of Trajan,<sup>17</sup> who ruled from 98 to 117 C.E. This detail would bring the age of the apostle John to about 100 years of age at the time Revelation was composed and places his death at well over 100.

It seems much more reasonable to conclude that the John who wrote Revelation was a student of the apostle John. This point is indicated when Papias states that he had learned the words of the apostles from their followers, and that one of those he had heard it from was John the presbyter (Elder). It is also understood by the fact that as late as the beginning of the fourth century C.E., when Eusebius wrote, there persisted the story “that there were two of the same name in Asia” and there remained two tombs at Ephesus, where the apostle John lived and died, both retaining the name John. The close association of the younger John with the older, and the fact that both held the same personal name and resided in the same city, all served as a source of confusion for those who lived in later times and in other parts of the world. The two Johns were apparently merged into one identity by later Christians because many simply did not know the specifics.

Once the separate authorship for Revelation is established, the dates for John and 1–3 John are more readily attainable. John the presbyter was younger than the apostle John and the date for his writing of Revelation while on the island of Patmos (though he is often confused with John the apostle) is placed around 96 C.E.<sup>18</sup> Further, the book of John was placed last among the four synoptic texts, the suggestion by its position is that it was produced last. Nevertheless, as with the book of Mark, John’s synoptic text and letters lack any reference to

<sup>9</sup> Fragment 1:5.

<sup>10</sup> *Constitutiones Apostolicae* 7:46 (*Patrologiae Cursus Completus, series graeca; Sources Chretiennes*).

<sup>11</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971, p. 644.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 645.

<sup>14</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971, p. 644. Also see *New Testament Introduction*, Alfred Wienerhauser, Herder and Herder, New York, 1958, pp. 547–553.

<sup>15</sup> Num., 4:1–3, 23–39.

<sup>16</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3:18:1–3:23:4.

<sup>17</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3:23:4; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 2:22:5.

<sup>18</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 3:18, 20, 23, compare with 3:39.

the fall of Jerusalem. This absence would indicate a composition before that date (70 C.E.). I. H. Marshall notes that the writings of John could have begun as early as “the sixties”.<sup>19</sup> W. Smith, as well as others, would date the book of John to about 78 C.E.,<sup>20</sup> but this is based upon identifying the apostle John with the author of Revelation. If the reference in 2 John, 1:1, “to the elect lady,” is to Mariam (Mary) the mother of Yahushua, which is most likely based upon the statement in John, 19:25–27, then it would appear that at least one of these epistles was written quite early, for Mariam would have already been 50 to 60 years old at the death of Yahushua in 30 C.E.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, a

date of 50 to 55 C.E. for these letters would be most probable.

The evidence, as a result, shows that every book of the New Testament, except for Revelation, was either written before 70 C.E. or, as in the case of the works of the apostle John, possibly very shortly thereafter—though even in John’s case the indications are that it was before. The weight of the evidence makes it highly probable that almost all of the apostles had died prior to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. It also indicates that every book of the New Testament, except for Revelation, had been written prior to that date as well

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<sup>19</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971, p. 645.

<sup>20</sup> *A Dictionary of the Bible*. Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, 1948, p. 316.

<sup>21</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1:13, 3:7.