

BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ

Unit 2d John as Author

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In this segment, we're dealing with the chronological and historical setting for the Gospel of John. The fourth Gospel, like the other Gospels, formally anonymous. The title *Kata Ioannen*, "according to John," was probably put on there as soon as all the Gospels were compiled together as a fourfold work. So early in the transmission history of the Gospels, all of the Gospels were lumped together as a fourfold work, as a four-volume work. Theophilus of Antioch was the first one to ascribe authorship of the fourth Gospel to John. We also have oral testimony by Polycarp. Polycarp is interesting and important because he is a disciple of John. He actually knows John the apostle, studied under him. And then you had Papias. So oral tradition, like Polycarp and Papias, is strong. And this is preserved in the writings of Irenaeus "Against Heresies" and Eusebius' church history because they were eyewitnesses of the Lord. Corroboration is provided by Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian. Tatian composed a work called the *Diatessaron*, which means "through four," and it used the fourth Gospel as a framework, a chronological framework, a narrational framework of sorts. And so Tatian's composition of the *Diatessaron* is itself evidence that there was no doubt in the early church as to the authorship of the book.

Where was the fourth Gospel written? Well, four locations have been suggested: Alexandria, Antioch, Palestine, and Ephesus. The provenance for Ephesus and the provenance for Palestine are plausible. Both of those are plausible. With respect to the Ephesian provenance, we have external evidence, church historical tradition, of course, which states that John retired to Ephesus in his later years, that is, he moved to Ephesus and he wrote his Gospel from there. The latter option, Palestine, is on the basis of internal evidence because when you read the fourth Gospel, you have significant internal evidence that points to strong Jewish flavor, strong Jewish atmosphere, and understanding of Judaism, the mention of feasts and festivals, like Hanukkah, the Feast of Dedication. So there's a strong flavor there. So there are some scholars who tend to suggest that John wrote in Palestine, but they're doing that on the basis of internal evidence, whereas the external evidence suggests that John wrote in Ephesus. But taking all of that together, I would lean to the historical evidence, the external evidence, and say that John, in fact, did write from Ephesus and he did it somewhere between 85 and 95, possibly even 96.

With respect to the date, the main discussions for what I just said, some date the Gospel of John before 70. The majority holds from a date between 85 and 95. Two scholars come to mind: D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo. They ascribe a date between 80 to 85, and they do this because they want to allow for time for the disputes that would necessitate the apostle's writing of 1, 2, and 3 John, which in the case of the first two, 1 and 2 John deal with a proto form of Gnosticism, a proto Gnosticism, early Gnosticism. There is no argument that is totally dominant. Some arguments are more convincing than others. But to sort of put this in perspective, we must at least note that we don't need to assume that a significant amount of time was required for heresy to develop in the early church. There were already tendencies towards Neo-Platonism, towards Gnosticism in Gentile, freed Greek culture. So there didn't need to be decades' worth of development. The errors were already there.

Who was the audience? Well, the dominant viewpoint of the audience focuses on the postulation of a debate between the church and the synagogue, with this whole notion of church as an organized entity, church polity, and the synagogue, obviously well-developed from the context of Judaism. And so that tends to push, it drives the argument for dating. The audience is proposed to be of Johannine circle of school. But as I've said in the previous clips, we could talk about a Marcan school, a Marcan community, a Matthean school, a Matthean community, and Lucan, and so on and so forth. So the audience is proposed to be of Johannine circle of school. It may have been an actual organized group with shared belief or simply a sect. The audience may have been composed of Jews and/or Gentile proselytes. But

based on the historical information that we have, it seems best to suggest that John wrote from Ephesus. He wrote somewhere between 85 and 95. I personally lean to the 95 date. I would even push it to 96. There is a historical tradition suggesting that John wrote the fourth Gospel after he composed the Book of Revelation that bears his name. And of course, his audience would have been comprised of Hellenized or diaspora Jews, and of course, Gentile converts in his later years.