

BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ

Unit 2b Matthew as Author

Presented by the



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CAPITAL SEMINARY & GRADUATE SCHOOL

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In the last segment, we dealt with Mark with respect to authorship and chronological and historical setting for it. And we have established that Mark is composed probably in the late 50s to the early 60s. I personally lean towards a date in the late 50s due to internal considerations. But I'm just one person. There are other arguments that might sway you either way.

We turn now to Matthew, chronological and historical setting from the gospel of Matthew. Now, with respect to authorship for Matthew, scholars have a difficult time thinking about ascribing authorship to Matthew because they don't feel they have enough evidence for it. So any ascription of authorship to Matthew is basically a traditional identification in their view. But we have to go back to Papias again for consideration of Matthean authorship of the gospel that bears his name. So I quote again from the Papias tradition as recorded by Eusebius that says, "Now concerning Matthew, he said these things. Then Matthew indeed composed a history or a narrative of the words in the Aramaic tongue." Or Aramaic dialect. You can translate it either way. "Each one interpreted these things as he was able." And note that's the relevant text. There are other things that Papias says as he goes on to talk about First Epistle of John, First Epistle of Peter, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, which is a non-canonical work. So Papias says these things about Matthew, that Matthew composed a history, a narrative, although the word that's used there could be rendered history. And of course, Aramaic dialect. Not Hebrew but Aramaic. And then of course, what is one to make of the final statement, "Each one interpreted these things as he was able"? That's kind of an enigmatic statement.

But let's go on. The problem that we have, the reason that I'm raising these questions, is that Matthew and Luke clearly seemed to have used Greek Mark, that is, the Greek New Testament with respect to Mark. If Matthew wrote in Aramaic dialect, then how is it that when we examine Matthew and Luke with respect to their use of Mark, Matthew appears to have used Greek Mark? Why would he use Greek Mark if he indeed composed his gospel in the Aramaic dialect or the Hebrew dialect which is Aramaic? So for some scholars, Matthew's apparent use of the Greek text of Mark is decisive because there is no Aramaic original that we are aware of. All we have is Greek Matthew that has interpolated within its content Greek Mark because he used Greek Mark. But we have an additional problem. Citations from the Old Testament are sometimes from the Septuagint, the LXX, the Greek Old Testament. Other citations reflect seemingly a Semitic original. In other words, other Old Testament allusions or citations seem to point to an Aramaic original. They've got a mixture of Greek and Aramaic. Not to mention, as I said in Unit 1, that we have Semitisms or Hebraisms or Aramaisms in the gospels generally. The Gospels, particularly in Mark and Matthew, seem to reflect in the syntactical structure a Semitic original. But there is no Aramaic original that is extant. We have nothing. No evidence. No smoking gun, as we like to say. Other citations in the Old Testament are basically a mixture of text forms, neither Holy LXX, Septuagint, or Hebrew Old Testament or Aramaic, paraphrased Targum.

Detailed connections between Mark and Matthew tend to cause one to lean away from the idea of an Aramaic Matthew. So this issue of the Aramaic original, the question of whether Matthew wrote in Aramaic dialect remains an open one. There is no consensus on this. Some people lean one way. Some people lean the other. So all that's left in the context of the debate where people lean in one or the other direction is historical data. Where did Papias get the idea, the notion, the fact, factoid that Matthew wrote in the Aramaic dialect? That's a fair question.

One scholar by the name of Martin Hengel suggests that the titling of the gospel would have happened almost immediately. So from Martin Hengel's position, as soon as the Gospel was written, the title to

the Gospel would have been affixed not too long after the composition was complete, which fits what I said in the previous unit somewhat. There is the understanding amongst the audience, the community that the Gospel is addressed to, that “Oh, Mark wrote this. Matthew wrote this. John wrote that.” And so there would be no need to have a formal tête-à-tête saying “Hey, John wrote that,” or “Mark wrote that,” or what have you. It would simply be known that it was written. And then at some point, for historical posterity, someone would affix the preposition and the name Kata Markon or Kata Mattheon or Kata Lucan or Kata Ioannen, according to. So there was no formal anonymity with respect to the gospels.

Where was this Gospel written? Jerome suggests Judea as the place of origin. And that’s not a surprise in terms of a suggestion because the early fathers believed that the work was first written in Aramaic. There’s that fact again. The early church fathers, those who were closest to the events, believed that Matthew wrote in Aramaic. Here we are, two millennia later, and we have no evidence of an Aramaic original. And so we are at odds with the early tradition. It’s just the state of affairs. The place of writing, though, that has the greatest consensus in our day is Syria. One of the reasons is the statement in Matthew 17:24-27 that basically names didrachmas as a stater. That reference is unusual. And of course, the study of coinage leads to the notion of the province of Syria in the 1st century being the place where Matthew wrote his Gospel. So the reasoning goes.

B.F. Streeter argued for Antioch in Syria. So he nailed it down a bit more precisely because he notes that early on in the 1st century, there was a large Jewish population in Antioch of Syria. Antioch was also the first center of Gospel outreach to the Gentiles. And that is a subject of Acts 11. Ignatius, another church father, provides external corroboration with allusions to Matthew in his letters to the Ephesians, the Smyrnaeans, and Polycarp. So this church father, this 2nd century church father, writes letters to the Ephesians, to the Smyrnaeans, and writes it to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, and there are allusions to Matthew. But there is a challenge to the notion of Antioch of Syria as being the place of writing. The major challenge is the Trans-Jordan, which would be east of the Jordan, basically adjacent to the land boundary of ancient Palestine in the 1st century. Maybe even Pella, which is where the Christians fled once the Jewish war against Rome began in 66.