

Hebrew Heritage Bible Society

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God's Love

Love is of supreme value in this Gospel's message, "For God so loved the people of the world that He gave His only Son..." (3:16). Craig Keener noted, "Although love appears as the supreme commandment, the Fourth Gospel emphasizes faith in Jesus, perhaps because faith is what the believers' current trials are testing most" (*John*, vol. 1, p. 325). Faith's experience with God's love provides strength for hardship, adversity, and persecution. How will the Jesus movement face opposition and tribulation without the physical presence of Yeshua? The Holy Spirit will come alongside to help and give insight into the struggle for holy living. Early tradition has ascribed authorship of the Gospel to the disciple whom Jesus loved, who was none other than John, the son of Zebedee [Zavdi], the brother of James [Yaakov]. Jerome shared this witness: "When he [John] remained at Ephesus until an extreme old age, and could only with difficulty be carried to the congregation in the arms of his disciples, and was unable to give utterance to many words, he used to say no more at their several meetings than this, 'Little children, love one another.'" The call to action, "love God," and the commandment to "love one another," form the rock solid foundation for John's sphere of influence. Moreover, Irenaeus taught, "John the disciple of the Lord who reclined on his chest and himself published the Gospel at Ephesus." While the Gospel in its present form may have undergone revision by later followers of John, the core material of the text is connected to the son of Zebedee and was likely published and circulated first from Ephesus. The oldest fragment of the New Testament is a papyrus of John's Gospel, 18:31-35 on one side and 18:37-38 on the other. This John Rylands Library papyrus (p⁵²), less than 3.5 inches (9 cm) from the top of the fragment to the bottom, was discovered in Egypt and is dated to

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115 to 125 C.E. If the Gospel itself was compiled in 90 C.E., this means that it was widely circulated from Ephesus to Egypt within a relatively short period of time. Since the Gospel explains Jewish holidays and customs, the intended audience must have included non-Jewish disciples, as well as other believers who were blessed with a biblical faith tradition from their mothers' milk.