

Hidden History of John's Church

[MESSAGE](#)[STUDY GUIDE](#)[GROUP MATERIAL](#)[SONGS](#)

Community Group Material:

Bible Reading: John 9:18-34

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe...—that he was blind and received sight—until they summoned His] parents... ¹⁹ They asked them, “Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰ “We know this is our son and that he was born blind,” his parents answered. ²¹ “But we don’t know how he now sees, and we don’t know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he’s of age. He will speak for himself.” ²² His parents said these things because they were *afraid of the Jews, since the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed him as the Messiah, he would be banned from the synagogue.* ²³ ... ²⁴ So a second time they summoned the man who had been blind and told him, “Give glory to God.

We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He answered, “Whether or not he’s a sinner, I don’t know. One thing I do know: I was blind, and now I can see!” ²⁶ Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ “I already told you,” he said, “and you didn’t listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You don’t want to become his disciples too, do you?” ²⁸ They ridiculed him: “You’re that man’s disciple, but we’re Moses’ disciples. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses. But this man—we don’t know where he’s from.” ³⁰ “This is an amazing thing!” the man told them. “You don’t know where he is from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God doesn’t listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does his will, [God] listens to him. ³² Throughout history no one has ever heard of someone opening the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he wouldn’t be able to do anything.” ³⁴ “You were born entirely in sin,” they replied, “and are you trying to teach us?” Then *they threw him out.*”

SUMMARY:

The *Acts of the Apostles* and Paul's epistles document the Apostle Paul's mission to establish churches, but there's no detailed record for John's churches. However, from his writings we can construct the hidden history of John's communities. A key insight sees synagogue-expulsions in Jesus' lifetime (Jn. 9:22) referring also to the late 1st century exclusion of Christ-believers. They experienced three major traumas:

1. After thriving in Jewish Judea, John's community was uprooted by the Jewish Revolt (66-70 AD) and fled to Ephesus in Asia Minor (today's Turkey) as refugees.
2. Initially identifying as messianic Jews, they suffered *expulsion from the synagogues* in the 80s AD (as foreshadowed in John 9), forming the distinct Johannine church which grew and spread in Asia Minor.
3. Church Split: About a decade later, John's egalitarian community was divided by deviant doctrines propagated by 'progressives.' John's Letters seek to stabilize the traumatized congregation.

These crises had positive results: #1 brought John's community into the Gentile world. #2 was the catalyst for John's Gospel, #3 for John's Letters. This hidden history show a Christian journey marked by trauma. John's churches, operating outside the mainstream, demonstrate a different way of practicing the church-life. Johannine Christians bear scars from their trials, but win the approval of One who also bears scars.

Discussion:

1. Why was 1st John written? Was it to help people believe (be 'saved'/ 'born again')? Or was it to give them assurance? Read 1 John 5:13 "I've written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God *so that* you may know that you have eternal life." "*So that*"—implies purpose. Compare with the Gospel of John 20:31
2. Was 1 John motivated by a "church split" – the departure of a group of church-members from John's community?
 - Read 1 Jn. 2:19 "*They went out from us*, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, *they went out* so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us."
3. John's Letters suggest that churches linked to him had recently experienced as split (e.g. 1 Jn. 2:19). Have you experienced a "church split"? How did it impact you? What helped you survive as a Christian?
4. The message highlighted 3 major events impacting John's church community: [1.] the disruption of the Jewish Roman War (exile); [2.] Jewish Christ-believers' expulsion from the synagogue (Jn. 9:22; 16:2); & [3.] Church Split: John's church divided (1 Jn. 2:19). Which event was most traumatic? Discuss.
5. The Jewish authorities "threw the man-born-blind out [of their synagogue/community]" (Jn. 9:34).
 - a. Why then do Bible teachers find the statement of John 9:22 as a "puzzle" (enigma)?
 - b. If 'the Jews' ejection of the blind man was a 'one-time incident,' why is Jn. 9:22 puzzling?
6. Scholars suggest that John is writing in the AD 90s, looking back at the man-born-blind, and telling this story (~AD 30) from the later perspective of the AD 90s.
 - a. Does that help us understand the episode? If so, how?
 - b. If Christians with John had been expelled from the Jewish synagogue, how would the story in John 9 encourage them? What particular points might they focus on? How might they apply them?