

Hidden History of John's Church

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

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.*” (John 9:18-34 CSB)

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 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 churchlife. Johannine Christians bear scars from their trials, but win the approval of One who also bears scars.

- "A history for Paul's churches has been helped...by Luke...giving us a chronological framework in which to place Paul & his Letters... The *Johannine literature owns no such chronology.*" – Gary Burge

I. John begins in Jerusalem/Judea (30 -66 AD)

- "The journey begins in or around Jerusalem... We know from the *Acts of the Apostles* that Jerusalem is where the Church began... It's possible that, *while Peter & Paul went on their travels*, & James, the brother of Jesus, assumed overall leadership of the Church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:7, 11; Acts 15:13, 19) *John continued to lead a Christian group of his own* ...Over the next half-century, John & his community...treasured their memories of Jesus... [&] reflected on them in the light of their own experiences.... They engaged in *controversy &... sharp conflict with their Jewish contemporaries* ... [So, John's] Gospel ...[is] refracted through the lens of his & his community's experience... So... [in] 'Stage 1' of the journey *geographically [John] travelled little*, but spiritually he travelled far..." [Neil Richardson, *John for Today*, 56-7]
- "John's Gospel...contains *many traditions that are Palestinian & pre-AD 70*...The mission of John probably remained *centered in southern Palestine into the early 60s*..." [EE. Ellis, *Making of the NT*, 221, 266]

II. John's Journey from Judea to Ephesus (66–70 AD)

- "'Stage 2' of this disciple's journey. We fast forward from the year 55 to the year 85. [In the interim,] a cataclysm has occurred: the *Jewish-Roman war of 66-70, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem & its Temple* [70 CE]. Where did John & his community go? We have no hard evidence, but...Jesus had warned his disciples to flee when trouble came (e.g., Mark 13:14). Did they leave Palestine altogether and settle in Asia Minor? This may be the journey... remembered by Irenaeus." [Neil Richardson, *cit.*, p. 58]
- "The most probable chronology makes (*John's*) *withdrawal from Palestine to Asia Minor coincide very nearly with the martyrdom of [the] two Apostles (Peter & Paul in AD 65-68)* ...This epoch divides [John's] life into two distinct periods..." [JB. Lightfoot, *Paul & the Three*, p. 360 #15]
- "The later 60s of the first century...saw a revitalization of the gospel testimony in [Asia Minor]. This was due to *the immigration of a number of Christians from Judaea* shortly before the Jewish revolt of AD These were... princip[ally] *not the more conservative members of the Jerusalem church* (many of whom ... migrated east of the Jordon [to Pella]), *but outward-looking members of the church* of Caesaria & other churches in the [*likeness*] of those

Hellenistic [Greek-speaking] believers who, forced to quit Jerusalem in the persecution that broke out after Stephen's death, launched the Gentile mission in adjoining areas [Acts 8:1; 11:19]." [FF. Bruce, *Peter, Stephen, James, & John*, p. 121]

- "The author of John's Gospel...has reliable knowledge of Galilee & Jerusalem. Thus, it seems likely that *John lived in Palestine for quite some time & later travelled to Ephesus*. One suggestion... is that *he moved to Ephesus around the time of the Jewish War (66-70 AD)*, perhaps with a group of other Christians... [This] seems...reasonable... [There's] evidence that Philip ['the evangelist'] ...who was still living [in Caesarea in Acts 21:8-10] emigrated at some point to Hierapolis with his daughters... *John may well have similarly emigrated to Western Asia Minor, specifically Ephesus, at this time [~AD 70] & subsequently written the 4th Gospel there*. 1-3 John are written in the same location as the Gospel, & so are also connected to Ephesus and give evidence for a *'Johannine movement' in & around the city, perhaps around 100 AD.*" [Paul Trebilco, "Christians in the Lycus Valley," in AH. Cadwallader (ed.) *Colossae in Space & Time*, pp. 190-1]
- "Those who migrated to [the Roman province of] Asia included some very eminent Christians – *Philip the evangelist & his daughters* [Acts 21:8-9], for e.g., whose tombs were [in] Hierapolis... and 'John the *disciple of the Lord*,' whom tradition associates mainly with Ephesus ...Although [John] was... not the founder of the Ephesian church *he soon came to enjoy in the church the kind of prestige that Peter & Paul enjoyed in Roman tradition* [i.e., in 'the Church in Rome']." [FF. Bruce, *Peter, Stephen..., & John*, 121]

III. Johannine Communities in & around Ephesus (66/70 AD →)

1. John's Church(es) in/around Ephesus

- Raymond Brown suggests the author of 1 John "lived in the central locale of Johannine Christianity [Ephesus?] with *many house-churches & numerous adherents...*" [Raymond E. Brown, *Epistles of John*, 32]
- "It's most likely that...the *Johannine community... existed in & around Ephesus*. This would include people who travelled from Palestine with John, other Ephesian Christians who joined the group, and new Ephesian converts. It seems likely that this community existed *from at least 70 AD, &... was a distinct & separate community from the Pauline community in Ephesus.*" [Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, p. 271]

2. Planted close to the Jewish Community?

- "The [*Johannine*] *community is thought to have flourished in an urban center* [Ephesus?] *within the Jewish Diaspora, in close proximity to a Jewish community ... This... would fulfill an important criterion for successful Jewish missionary activity to the Jews...* [since] the Johannine community would have encountered a sizeable number of Jews among whom to recruit new adherents." [Adele Reinhartz, "Rodney Stark & 'the Mission to the Jews'," in LE. Vaage (ed.) *Religious Rivalries...*, pp. 199-200]

3. Growing, Planting, & Spreading

- "Would the Johannine group, once established in Ephesus around 70 AD, have had influence in other areas of Western Asia Minor? Would the *Johannine movement have 'spread out' & planted 'daughter churches'* in Western Asia Minor? ...Would their impact have extended over time, to the Lycus Valley [Hierapolis, Colossae, etc.]?... *Two points argue for the wider impact of Johannine Christianity...* [1.] Firstly ...the networking and mobility in earliest Christianity argues for this; Johannine Christians would travel. [2.] Secondly, the evidence for travel by emissaries of the groups... in 2-3 John... argues for this... *Johannine Christianity could well have travelled to the Lycus Valley* [Hierapolis, Colossae, etc.]." [Paul Trebilco, "Christians in the Lycus Valley," AH. Cadwallader (ed.) *Colossae in Space & Time*, p. 191]

4. John's Churches coexisted with Paul's Churches

- "We have indicated the on-going 'presence' & strength of both the Pauline tradition..., & the Johannine tradition in Western Asia Minor through to the 120s & probably later... I am suggesting that in the Lycus Valley [Colossae, Laodicea, etc.], well into the 2nd century, both Pauline & Johannine influences are very significant & perhaps determinative for the nature of Christianity in this area." [Paul Trebilco, "Christians in the Lycus Valley," Cadwallader (ed.) *Colossae in Space & Time*, p. 200]
- "In the period from around AD 65 to 135... there were *strong & influential voices that stood for what later became 'orthodoxy,' notably voices in both the Pauline & Johannine traditions.*" [P. Trebilco, *cit.*, p. 44]

IV. The Enigma of Synagogue Expulsion (John 9)

- "The 4th Gospel relates *events in Jesus' life* before the Jewish Revolt from the perspective of a post- 70 CE composition. The 4th Gospel belongs to the generation after the Jewish Revolt." – Travis Trost

1. The Puzzle of Synagogue Exclusion (Jn. 9:22)

- "A *strange feature of the [4th] Gospel* is the claim that during Jesus' lifetime, his followers feared being 'put out of the synagogues' by the Pharisees if they identified with [Jesus] (Jn. 9:22; 12:42). In the Farewell Discourse, Jesus predicts that his disciples will not simply be cast out of the synagogues but they will also face death (Jn. 16:2, see Mk. 13:12)." [Richard Cooke, *SCM Core Text: NT*, p. 372]
- The blind man "thrown out" (9:34) is a "one off" incident; but Jn. 9:22 implies an official systematic policy.
- "There is no indication of expulsions of believers-in-Jesus from synagogues in pre-70 Palestine." – Dunn
- "Being *thrown out of the synagogue* was not a reality during the life of Jesus, [so,] why does John include...[it] as part of the Gospel story?" –Gail O'Day

2. The References (Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2)

- The blind man's "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.*" (9:22)
- "Nevertheless, many did believe in [Jesus] even among the rulers, but *because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, so that they would not be banned from the synagogue.*" (12:42)
- Jesus warned his disciples: "*They will ban you from the synagogues.* In fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering service to God." (16:2)

3. Key Term: *aposynagogos*

- "The Greek term *aposynagogos*... occurs 3 times (Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). *Apo* indicates separation here & can be translated 'move away from, ...move something away' ...*Synagogos* has its origins in the term synagogue ... Many authors emphasize that... *aposynagogos* means *the entire Jewish community in terms of a nation & religion*. The term *aposynagogos* can thus be translated as 'excommunication from the synagogue' or 'expulsion from the Jewish community.' Apart from the 4th Gospel, this term is not found in any NT scripture or the Septuagint [Gk. OT] ... The subjects of the *aposynagogue* sanction were Judeo-Christians who believed in Jesus as the Messiah & Son of God. Thus, for rabbinical Judaism, they were apostates from the true faith." [MS. Wróbel, *Anti-Judaism & the Gospel of John*, pp. 157-8]
- "The language [of Jn. 9:22] is technical & the verb '*agree*' means to reach a formal decision or make a decree. Literally, a person...would become an 'ex-communicant' (*aposynagogos*) from the synagogue, [&] would be completely dismissed. We are dealing here not with spontaneous acts of temporary removal, but with a definite agreement reached by some authoritative Jewish

group.” [Melvyn R. Hillmer, “*They Believed in Him*,” in RN. Longenecker (ed.) *Patterns of Discipleship in the NT*, p. 81]

4. Expulsion in Jesus' lifetime or late 1st-Century?

- “John’s Gospel assumes an *expulsion from a synagogue that is difficult to explain* sufficiently if it were to take place *during the life and times of Jesus* (~30 AD) ... John 9:22, [etc.] *reflect a process...that took place many years after the events they record... in the late 1st-century* [AD 80-90s] when the Jewish Christian community was... at odds with a local Jewish synagogue... Paul Anderson... points out, ‘It cannot be claimed that there were *no pressures against the Jesus movement* within *middle-to-late 1st-century Judaism*. We may find glimpses in Jn. 9:22, 12:42, & 16:2.” [B. J. Oropeza, *In the Footsteps of Judas...*, p. 161]
- “The *traumatic experience of expulsion as the catalyst* for Johannine theological development.” – DM. Smith
- “Being *thrown out of the synagogue was not a reality during the life of Jesus*, [so,] why does John include... [it] as part of the Gospel story? The most likely reason is... *John incorporates aspects of the later community’s experience into the stories of Jesus*.” [Gail R. O’Day, Susan Hulen, *John*, p. 6]
- “Being cast out of the synagogue was understood to *describe the experience of the Johannine community toward the end of the 1st-century & not the experience of Jesus’ followers during...his lifetime*” — Jo-Ann Brant > “These threats of being removed from the synagogue likely reflect a *specific [later] situation in the life of the Johannine community*. Expulsion from the synagogue created a crisis for this community of believers because of their deep roots in the synagogue & Jewish tradition.” [Craig A. Evans, *Handbook on...Jewish Roots*, p. 224]
- John “9:22 & 12:42 say that any who accept Jesus as Christ will be made *aposynagogos* [expelled from the synagogue]. It is argued that *this makes no sense in Jesus’ own day*, but fits perfectly into the [later] increasing separation of church & synagogue... Perhaps...the occasion that caused the [4th] Gospel to be written was the crisis of confidence which this separation from the synagogue caused the Johannine community: they needed to be reassured that they were the real people of God, persecuted by ‘the Jews’ as Jesus himself was.” [Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?* 235]

V. Synagogue Expulsion: a ‘two-level drama’ in John’s Gospel (Jn. 9)

1. The Interpretive Key

- “Forty [60] years ago J. Louis Martyn found the magic key to open & unlock the door to historical, situational understanding of the 4th Gospel. He found the *key hidden in chapter 9, lying under the single Greek word aposynagogos*, ‘out of the synagogue.’ This *one word... unlatched the portal of interpretation*. ‘The lock turns surprisingly well in the socket wherever you insert it’ (Ashton).” [Robert A. Hill, *Courageous Gospel*, p. 160]
- Raymond “Brown’s & [J. Louis] Martyn’s ...proposals [1966 & 1968] of an *expulsion from the synagogue...laid the foundation for making the experience* of the Johannine community the *key to interpreting the 4th Gospel... [as] a community on trauma*, struggling to redefine itself over against Judaism.” [Robert Kysar, “...*Johannine Community*,” in JR. Donahue (ed.) *Life in Abundance*, pp. 69-70]

2. ‘Two-Level Drama’ in John’s Gospel

- “Martyn argued that John could be read as a ‘two-level drama.’ On its face (the 1st level), the Gospel was an historical account of Jesus’ ministry, but it was simultaneously (the 2nd level) a symbolic reflection of the Johannine community...The key text...was John 9.” [T. Smith, “*Theology & History*,” JTS, Vol. 71, #2, p. 856]
- “*Ancient Hellenistic biographers & historians also wrote on two levels*, combining ideas from their own time with events from the past... History and biography focused on the past as a source of lessons for the future. Hellenistic history & biography, no less than the Gospels, tended to *merge*

the past with the present...Functionally the differences are minimal." [David E. Aune, *NT in Its Literary Environment*, p. 62]

- **Limitations:** "The two-level reading, [was] made famous by [JL] Martyn...Our acceptance of a two-level reading does not mean that we believe every...[episode] in the 4th Gospel addresses a [life-situation] of a specific local [Johannine] community, or that each character or event in the 4th Gospel has an allegorical counterpart in the Johannine community [we're not allegorizing], or that a detailed historical development of such a community can be reconstructed [from the data]." [Jerry D. Truex, *Problem of Blasphemy*, 200-1]

3. Reading the John 9 Episode on Two Levels

a. Jesus' 'absent' during the Episode

- "Jesus heals the man [born blind], but unusually *Jesus himself is not the focus of the story (he is 'off-stage' for more than half the episode, Jn. 9:8-34)* ... The story lends itself, especially because of Jesus' absence for most of it, to being seen as the means by which the later [*Johannine*] *community came to terms with opposition in the synagogue* ... The onus of this interpretation is that the community of Christians from which John's Gospel came were *victims of Jewish persecution*, &...the *antagonism towards the Jews* in the Gospel itself *is a howl of pain* against the spiritual homelessness which the community experienced at the end of the 1st century." [Richard Cooke, *SCM Core Text: NT.*, p. 373]

b. Reflects the era of John's Community better than Jesus' lifetime

- The blind man's "parents...were afraid of the Jews, since the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed [Jesus] as the Messiah, he would be banned from the synagogue" (Jn. 9:22).
- Martyn argues that this passage can be *read on 2 levels*: [1.] an episode from the life of Jesus, and [2.] as a reflection of the later experiences of the Johannine community. Read on the level of Jesus' life... there is no clear evidence that discipleship [to Jesus] was antithetical to participation in the synagogue during Jesus' lifetime. Yet John 9 is 'easily understood [in the later period when] the synagogue has begun to view the rival Christian movement as a... rival' (Martyn), suggesting that *the story... [reflects] the later experiences of Johannine Christians*... According to Martyn...John's portrait of the Jews ...is a *reflection of the Johannine community's real-world experiences of persecution & excommunication*." [Tom Thatcher, "John & the Jews," in RA. Culpepper (ed.) *John & Judaism*, p. 14]
- Some expositors "find in John 9 not only [1.] a story about Jesus the healer, but also [2.] a story about the Jewish Christian Johannine community & its exclusion from fellowship with other Jews in the late 1st-century. The term *aposynagogos* found in Jn. 9:22 appears elsewhere in the NT only twice, both times in John's Gospel ...The threat (or even the reality) of expulsion from the synagogue seems to have been an *important feature in the life of the Johannine community* addressed in the late 1st-" [Daniel J. Harrington, *Church according to the NT.*, p. 117]

4. The Blind Man's Experience resonates

- "The experience of the man-born-blind in Jn. 9 would have resonated with [Johannine Christians'] own [experience]. They appreciated what it meant to be interrogated or tried (9:13-34a), to be driven out or expelled, & to know that Jesus comes to those who are driven out. They would've found reassurance in [Jesus'] earlier promise 'anyone who comes to me I'll never drive away' (6:37). They might even in retrospect have... seen Jesus as the one ...behind their being driven out (10:4) ..." [Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, p. 279]

5. The Blind Man depicts the Johannine Christians

- "*The blind man...symbolizes the Johannine Christians*. They have received their sight, as he does, for the one who is 'the Light of the world,' & they have suffered, as he does, from their confession of it. His conduct...stands ...for what should be done [by Johannine Christians] under such circumstances. ...*The blind man... represents what is... necessary, for the individual & for the community, when facing the synagogue authorities*." [David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith*, 42]
- Louis Martyn "sees the Johannine community as [initially] a *Jewish-Christian group which had been a messianic sect of Christian Jews* until sometime before the writing of the Gospel. Martyn takes John 9 as his point of departure; He reads John 9 as a [two-level] drama of the Johannine community ... Because of their missionary success among the Jews, Christ-believers were expelled from the synagogue & even subjected to persecution & death at the hands of the Jews [Jn. 16:2]." [Esther Kobel, *Dining with John*, p. 28]

6. The Consensus View

- “Most scholars believe Johannine Christianity began as, & among, certain circles of Jewish Christians who initially *continued to conduct themselves as part of the larger Jewish community* where they were living. Then as some point prior to the composition of John's Gospel, they were expelled from, or... severely marginalized by...that Jewish community.” [Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 352]
- “Scholars are...well aware of several references in the Gospel of John about Jewish Christians being excluded from the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:1-3) ...These statements in John, which are set in the narratives of Jesus' activities, are *now commonly taken by scholars* as actually reflecting the experiences of the Jewish Christians whose traditions are preserved in John. That is, the sharp conflicts & punitive actions against Jewish followers of Jesus...referred to in... John *actually took place in the period after Jesus' execution*, & probably should be dated anywhere *from a few years to a few decades [before] the composition of the Gospel of John... 85-90 CE.*” [Larry W. Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? 70*]
- “The Gospel of John gives us evidence of sharp conflict in the late 1st-century between Johannine Christians & Jewish authorities over Christological claims. Although *this conflict appears in John's narrative as one between 'the Jews' and Jesus* over claims he [Jesus] makes for himself... *scholars today commonly see* John's Gospel as *reflecting a bitter polemic between Jewish synagogues & Johannine Jewish Christians that led* (at some point) *to the expulsion of Johannine Jewish Christians from these synagogues* (which... mean[s] expulsion...from their communities).” [Larry W. Hurtado, *cit.*, pp. 152-3]

7. Depicting the Johannine Community's History ~80s AD

- “The determinative factor...[for] the Johannine Christian community was its *conflict with the synagogue.*” – David Rensberger
- “The [Johannine] *community is thought to have flourished in an urban center* [Ephesus?] *within the Jewish Diaspora*, in close proximity to a Jewish community ... This... would fulfill an important criterion for *successful Jewish missionary activity to the Jews*... [since] the Johannine community would have encountered a sizeable number of Jews among whom to recruit new adherents.” [Adele Reinhartz, “Rodney Stark & ‘the Mission to the Jews’,” LE. Vaage (ed.) *Religious Rivalries...*, pp. 199-200]
- “*Because of their missionary success among the Jews, Christ-believers were expelled from the synagogue* & even subjected to persecution & death at the hands of the Jews.” [Esther Kobel, *Dining with John*, p. 28]

8. Pressure from Rabbinic Judaism post-70 AD

- “Evidently the Pharisees had come to power... after the First Revolt in 70 AD & they now undertook an effort to *suppress dissident elements* within the [Jewish] community. In this process, Jewish Christians were especially subject to pressure, & for the Johannine group the result was expulsion from the synagogue altogether... It seems *incontrovertible* from the thrice-repeated reference in Jn. 9:22; 12:42; & 16:2 *that the Johannine community experienced such an expulsion*, &...the Pharisees were...behind it... This experience [plays] a central role in understanding the background of the 4th Gospel. [David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith*, 25-6]
- “*Before* the Jewish revolt [against Rome, AD 66-70] & the destruction of the Temple, the Palestinian Jews who believed & confessed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah were often harassed, & occasionally persecuted, but *as a rule were left unpunished. But after the war* [post-AD 70], *they were expelled from the synagogue for confessing Jesus to be Christ.*” [Veselin Kesich, *Formation & Struggles: Church*, p. 111]
- “It is likely that Jewish believers-in-Jesus were early regarded as *minim* [heretics] by... rabbinic Judaism [after AD 70] ... [We should] acknowledge *the testimony of Jn. 9:22 that some synagogue authorities* (in Syria/Palestine) were already, *before the end of the 1st-century, acting to expel Jewish believers from the synagogues* which they controlled... Jn. 9:22... indicat[es]... *the early pressures towards the parting of the ways came primarily from the side of the*

Jewish/rabbinic authorities... John's Gospel indicates that this reaction was already underway *before the end of the 1st-century.*" [J. Dunn, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, pp. 642-3]

- "John's Gospel ...reflects a crisis between the Christian group and *newly-redefined Judaism* under the leadership of the Pharisees [post-AD 70]. The account of the healing of the blind man in Jn. 9 illustrates the dispute...*By the time John's Gospel was written, those who confessed Jesus as Messiah were treated as... 'heretics' &... were expelled from the synagogue.*" [Veselin Kesich, *Op. cit.*, p. 111]

9. Jewish Christians 'put on trial' & condemned

- "It appears...that some of the Johannine community's Jewish members had found themselves *examined, tried, & then excommunicated by the synagogue for the apostasy & blasphemy* of their confession about Jesus (Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 16:1-4). They had discovered painfully that testifying [for Jesus had] ...public... consequences... Both unofficially & officially, *these Jewish Christians had been put on trial*, & they needed to remain faithful to Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God..." [Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, p. 278]

10. Other Jewish Christians became 'Secret Christ-Believers' (12:42)

- "Virtually all scholars see in Jn. 12:42-43 an indication that there were *Christian Jews who believed in Jesus but did not openly profess their faith* lest they be expelled from the synagogue. If...John 9 is a story of the Johannine community, as seems likely, we may guess that there was little tolerance in the [Johannine] community for those... 'crypto- Christians'." [Frederick J. Cwiekowski, *Beginnings of the Church*, 167]
- The Johannine "community is in uneasy relationship with... [those] who remain [as secret-] crypto-Christians out of fear of expulsion from the synagogue & Judaism (12:42-3)." [D. Bergan, *Collegeville Bib. Comm.*, p. 520]
- These "'Crypto-Christians' who stayed in the synagogue (while maintaining secret identity 'for fear of the Jews') were courted by Johannine Christians [to make a public stand]." [Paul N. Anderson, *Sitz im Leben*, 33]

11. Ephesian Situation 'fits' the Depiction of the Jews in John's Gospel

- "*All that's said about 'the Jews' in John's Gospel does indeed 'fit'* with what we know of the *actual Jewish community in Ephesus*... 'The Jews' in the [4th] Gospel are presented as a strong community, opposed to the Christian group, & able to act forcibly against them. (They can cast them out of the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2) & may even be able to put some Christians to death (16:2, etc.)) [This] is *compatible with our evidence for the actual Jewish community in the city of Ephesus*, which is a sizeable & significant group. Clearly there is antagonism between 'the Jews' & the followers of Jesus in the [4th] Gospel." [Paul Trebilco, "Parting of the Ways," in Schröter (ed.) *Jews & Christians – Parting Ways*, p. 286 & #49]
- "I find it likely...a city the size of Ephesus, with approx. 200,000 citizens, includ[ed] 500-2,000 Christ-believers [0.25% – 1.00% of pop.] at the end of the 1st-century." [Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus*, p. 47]
- "The Jewish population in Asia Minor is generally estimated to...[be] between 5-15% of the total population, which would mean that there were between 10,000 & 25,000 Jews in Ephesus in the 1st-century AD (based on an estimate of 200,000 citizens) ... This means... there was quite a substantial & significant Jewish community in Ephesus in the 1st-century AD." [Mikael Tellbe, *cit.*, p. 75] [This suggests that Christ-believers relative to Jews were perhaps 5% to 8% — *Christ-believers a small minority relative to Jews.*]

12. Better than Alternative Theories

- "The idea of a Johannine community expelled from the synagogue is *admittedly a historical reconstruction*, but *this theory explains the tensions within John's Gospel better than alternative hypotheses* –which are themselves historical reconstructions –*are able to do*... The expulsion theory has its weaknesses, but *it makes sense of the data of the Gospel as a whole better than* [e.g., Adele] Reinhartz's [alternative] rhetorical theory." [Lori A. Baron, *Shema in John's Gospel*, pp. 151-2]

VI. The Significance of Synagogue Expulsion

- “The greatest puzzle [in] the earliest history of Christianity...the moment [when] a *group of practicing Jews, having been just expelled from the synagogue became from that moment no longer Jews...but Christians.*” [John Ashton, *Discovering John*, 11]

1. John's Church Emerges from Judaism's 'Womb'

a. Thrust out of Judaism's 'Womb'

- JL. Martyn says ‘*In this trauma the members [of the Johannine community] suffered not only social dislocation but also great alienation, for the synagogue/world, which had been their social and theological ‘womb,’ affording nurture and security, was not only removed, but even became the enemy who persecutes.*’ [Richard Cooke, *SCM Core Text: NT.*, p. 373]

b. Reflected in the 4th Gospel's Antagonism towards 'the Jews'

- JL “Martyn argues that John's Gospel is a ‘two-level drama’ [in which] the events of Jesus' life... reflect...the contemporary experience of a *community grappling with the traumatic effects of expulsion from the synagogue*... [On] this interpretation... the community of *Christians from which John's Gospel came were victims of Jewish persecution, & ...the antagonism towards the Jews in the [4th] Gospel itself is a howl of pain* against the spiritual homelessness which [the Johannine] community experienced at the end of the first century.” [Richard Cooke, *Op. cit.*, p. 373]

2. “Johannine Church was *slow in coming out of ‘the womb’ of Judaism!*” –Robert Kysar

- “The earliest Christians were all Jewish Christians... But very soon the Christians stood independent of Judaism. Already in the writings of...Paul that split was well under way... It was advanced by the (so-called) Jerusalem Council in 49 CE. *The independence of Christianity from Judaism was surely completed by the early 60s & certainly by the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.*” [Robert Kysar, *Maverick Gospel*, p. 129]
- “However, *in... John...the split from the synagogue is...later [80s CE?] ...Everything we have encountered points to... the 4th Evangelist...dealing with a community recently expelled from the synagogue & engaged in a serious dispute with the Jewish leaders...The Johannine Church was slow in coming out of ‘the womb’ of Judaism!* It had lived there...years longer than other Christian communities... But [that] doesn't seem to have retarded its development... [Now,] however, the *Johannine community finds itself cast out of the synagogue.* The result... is a serious...social dislocation... The Johannine community is in...an identity crisis... made worse by the continuing conflict with the Jewish synagogue.” [Robert Kysar, *Maverick Gospel*, pp. 129-30]

3. The Trauma of Expulsion

- “*The trauma of the ultimate rupture from the synagogue left an indelible mark* [on] the group.” – Meeks
- “The Christians who were expelled [from the synagogue] would have been cut off from much that had given identity & structure to their lives. Expulsion would have meant social ostracism & thus the loss of relationship with family & friends, & perhaps economic dislocation as well. It... certainly... meant religious dislocation. The synagogue meetings, the public liturgy, the festivals & observances were all now denied them... What was threatened was... the entire universe of shared perceptions, assumptions, beliefs, ideals, & hopes that had given meaning to their world within Judaism.” [David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith*, p. 27]

4. The Catalyst for John's Gospel

- *John's Gospel* “was so influential...It's a puzzle how [it] could remain hidden for so long.” — Walter Schmithals
- John's Gospel was written “probably in the 80s. Slightly later 1-3 John were written to a community in and around Ephesus, & bear witness to the *on-going impact of Johannine thought in the area.*” [Paul Trebilco, “*Christians in the Lycus Valley*,” AH. Cadwallader (ed.) *Colossae in Space & Time*, p. 200]

- “The Gospel [of] John [portrays Jesus] as one rejected by ‘the Jews,’ which indicates a date *later than the synagogue’s expulsion of its Christian members.*” [Edward Machle, *Philosopher Looks at Jesus*, p. 200]
- “In order to survive this crisis, [John’s community’s] separation had to be legitimated... to... justify the new position *outside of the Jewish community* to the group’s members ... John’s Christology [in the 4th Gospel] legitimized the very existence of the community itself over against the community’s opponents who... denied their existence as members of Israel, the people of YAHWEH.” [John A. Dennis, *Jesus’ Death &... Israel*, p. 19]
- In the wake of expulsion “the Johannine community [was] *forming its own theology & its own identity* not only vis-à-vis the parent synagogue, but also *in relation to other Christian groups in its setting.*” –JL. Martyn
- The 4th Gospel wasn’t “written solely for a single community. [But,] this does not mean that the Evangelists did not have particular types of readers in mind, ‘but, they would have a category to be *found throughout the churches*, not a specific [Christian] community’ (Bauckham)... This includes, for e.g., [those experiencing] the *expulsion of Jewish [Christian] communities from synagogues, which must have been a fairly general phenomenon across a range of Christian communities*” [P Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, p 239 & #10]
- “Passages like Jn.9:22 & 16:2 in my view... *reflect... [the] widespread experiences of Christian communities* in the period that the Gospel was written – expulsion from synagogues.” [Paul Trebilco, *cit.*, p. 240]
- “Many of the Gospel’s stories of conflict [Jesus vs ‘the Jews’] reflect responses to the Johannine community’s struggle... [which] both *radicalized the Johannine Christians’ interpretation* & led to their being ostracized. The process of separation has also produced fear, which [leads] this Gospel [to] *stigmatize [secret Christians] who dare not speak openly about Jesus...* The answer Meeks [proposes] is that... *profound social trauma calls forth a literary [work, (John’s [Gospel]) & its enigmatic hero (Jesus). Many interpreters... [agree that] social trauma is the root context for the 4th Gospel.*” [Wayne Meeks, “*Ethics in the 4th Gospel,*” 321-2]

5. Social Trauma the interpretive key to John’s Gospel

a. Explains John’s harsh Polemic against ‘the Jews’

- “The real difficulty... is the 4th Evangelist’s *antagonism towards [‘the Jews’]* ... What needs to be explained is the *extraordinary polemical thrust of the Gospel [against ‘the Jews’]*.” [John Ashton, *Studying John*, p. 68] > “John’s harsh rhetoric ... expresses the outcry of a persecuted and powerless sect [i.e., John’s community]... unmoored from its parent community, & fighting for its existence” [L Baron, *Shema in John’s Gospel*, p. 212]
- “The intensity of the polemic may be a reaction to Jewish measures, & particularly the expulsion from the synagogue ... [by] those who had become believers in Jesus, who could no longer be simply called ‘Jews.’ *John’s particularly sharp polemic against the Jews reflects this situation.*” [Joel B. Green, *to the NT*, p. 202]

b. Catalyst producing the 4th Gospel

- Martyn argues that the Johannine community’s “*expulsion from the synagogue was the catalyst* for the redaction of *the community’s traditions/texts [about Jesus] into what we know as the Gospel of John...* [implying] *expulsion/social trauma [is] the primary historical context for the Gospel*” [Blumhofer, *Op. cit.*, 221]
- Wayne “Meeks ... consistently turns to the *experiences of social trauma* to explain Johannine material... It is easy to see how a generation of scholars could *infer* the primacy of a social trauma for Johannine theology... [They’ve made] *social trauma the [interpretive] key to the Gospel of John...* [Using] social trauma to explain the Gospel as a *whole* as a text that emerges from... social trauma.” [Chris. M. Blumhofer, *cit.*, p. 223]

VII. Trauma upon Trauma: Split within John’s Church (1 John 2:19)

1. Church Split: Departure of a Dissident Group (1 Jn. 2:19)

- “*They went out from us*, but they didn’t belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would’ve remained with us. However, *they went out* so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us.” (1 Jn. 2:19)
- In 1 John 2 “we hear of people leaving the community (2:19) & of people who...adhere to faulty Christology...who want to spread this false teaching to others (2:26) ... [There’s] *trauma ... in the community’s separation ...* [Plus the] community [that’s] experiencing *anguish as it is torn apart... first experienced trauma as it was knit together*. When people joined the Johannine community, they severed ties with their [Jewish] past. A respected line of interpretation...sees certain sayings & episodes in the 4th Gospel...providing insight into the problems the Johannine community faced in its devotion to Jesus (Martyn). John 15-16 tells us that *believers were expelled from synagogues when they entered the Johannine circle of belief ...*[Now] *a grave theological debate has rent into pieces a body of believers* who once saw themselves as a single family of God’s children. This theological struggle is also a very personal struggle.” [George L. Parsenius, *1, 2, 3 John*, p.]
- For Jesus’ synagogue-expelled followers, “the Johannine community was a new family, formed by people who *experienced the trauma of separation from their blood relations & their home in the synagogue*. Being children of God & children of ‘the Elder’ (2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1) is interchangeable, just as fellowship with God depends on fellowship with the Elder. *Now, however, the new family is experiencing its own trauma & the split in the community* is...a struggle between brothers & sisters...1 Jn. 2:9-11 *this split is trauma in the family*...In 3:11-12...the paradigmatic figures for family strife are Cain & Abel ...those who injure members of the church are committing... fratricide.” [George L. Parsenius, *1, 2, 3 John*, pp.]

2. 1 John’s Purpose: Address the trauma, reassure believers, & rebut the Separatists

- “We...assume that the 3 Johannine letters came from the same stable... Perhaps the most important clue to the relationship between these...documents ...is the *lack of reference to ‘the Jews’ in the three letters*. ‘The Jews’ form a crucial... feature...of the Gospel ...It makes best sense to infer that the *three letters were written after the rupture with the (local?) synagogue*, reflected in Jn. 9:22, when the Johannine communities were trying to find their own feet, in independence... from their Jewish matrix.” [J. Dunn, *Neither Jew nor Greek*, p. 774]
- “The issues at the heart of the schism concern [1.] a refusal to confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh (4:2; 2 Jn. 7) & [2.] failure to acknowledge the obligation to love the brother (one another). All of the issues... in 1 John ...relate to these two interrelated issues. The schism had left believers uncertain of their standing, uncertain of their faith. There’s also the trauma caused by the rending of a community with all the pain & confusion that brings. 1 John addresses the trauma of the schism & its aftermath and sets out to heal, reaffirm, & reassure the believers. At the same time, it... undermine[s]... the schismatics [so] their destabilizing influence is minimized. It does this by setting out...tests, which expose the false claims & provide assurance for those... abiding in faith & love.” [John Painter, “*Johannine Literature*,” in DE. Aune (ed.) *Blackwell Companion to the NT*, p. 367]
- 1-3 John’s author “writes to *assure the community, which... recently suffered the trauma of schism, that its members are in communion with God*. If this... is correct, 1 Jn. was originally a circular letter...deal[ing] with the crisis occasioned by the departure of some of its members.” [Frank J. Matera, *NT Theology*, 319]

VIII. Applications

- Let’s have a realistic view of NT church-life. The history of John’s Church includes crises & traumatic events.
- “We can and should *lay to rest the fantasy of a pristine, harmonious early Christianity*.” – Gary Burge
- “Far from being an age of pristine harmony, NT Christianity already shows an all-too-human face. 3 John is an early instance...” — David Rensberger
- The three crises (traumas) of John’s community had positive results:
 - #1 Their migration from Judea to Asia Minor brought John’s community into the Gentile w

- #2 Their synagogue-expulsion was the catalyst for producing John's Gospel.
- #3 The Church Split was the catalyst for John's clarifying & correcting Letters.
- The history of CIT has included crises & (for some) traumatic events, but also positive results!
- At CIT, we shouldn't expect a "smooth ride" in following Jesus. Don't be discouraged by "turbulence"
- Let's try to understand & support church-members who've experienced trauma in their life & church-life.