

The Audience and Purpose of John's Gospel

Dr. John H. Niemelä

Water of Life Bible Class

August 15, 2024

Introduction

John's Purpose Statement (John 20:30-31)

³⁰ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Views about the Audience

Believers? Unbelievers? Mixed

Jews? Gentiles? Mixed?

What Makes Many Scholars View John as Abandoning Jews (Replacement Theology)?

1. Harsh statements seemingly directed against the whole nation of Israel

"**You** are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it." (John 8:44)

However, no one spoke openly of Him for **fear of the Jews**. (John 7:13)

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for **fear of the Jews**, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave *him* permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. (John 19:38)

Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for **fear of the Jews**, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace *be* with you." (John 20:19)

2. Statements in which John, a Jewish man, seems to treat Jews as a group to which he does not belong.

These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come. (John 8:20)

John 8:22, 31, 48, 52, 57

The Treasury was within the court of the women. Only Jews could enter, but John distances himself from "the Jews."

Evidence that *Jew* Is Not the Right Translation for *Ioudaios* (Jew, Judean) in John

1:19; 2:6, 13, 18, 20; 3:1, 22, 25; 4:9ab, 22; 5:1, 10, 15-16, 18; 6:4, 41, 52; 7:1-2, 11, 13, 15, 35; 8:22, 31, 48, 52, 57; 9:18, 22ab; 10:19, 24, 31, 33; 11:8, 19, 31, 33, 36, 45, 54-55; 12:9, 11; 13:33; 18:12, 14, 20, 31, 33, 35-36, 38-39; 19:3, 7, 12, 14, 19-20, 21abc, 31, 38, 40, 42; 20:19

After these things Jesus walked in **Galilee**; for He did not want to walk in **Judea** (*Ioudaia*) because the **Jews** (*Ioudaios*) sought to kill Him. (John 7:1)

1. John continued ministering to Jews (even in Jerusalem) for at least 14½ years

Now Peter and **John** went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour... [a lame man] who, seeing Peter and **John** about to go into the temple, asked for alms... And fixing his eyes on him, with **John**, Peter said, "Look at us." ... Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and **John**, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed. (Acts 3:1-11) **Summer 33**

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and **John**, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus... But Peter and **John** answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge." (Acts 4:13, 19) **Summer 33**

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and **John** to them (Acts 8:14) **Spring 35**

when James, Cephas, and **John**, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Gal 2:9; cf. Acts 11:30) **Fall 47**

2. At the time when Paul first met John (14½ years after the cross), John focused on ministry to Jews, not to Gentiles (cf. Galatians 2:9, above).
3. Unlike Paul (who always went to the Jew first, then to Gentiles), John's Gospel evidences no ministry to Gentiles.

Paul's practice of to the Jew first appears in **Acts 13:4-5, 14; 14:1; 16:11-13; 17:1-2, 10, 16-17; 18:1-4, 19; 19:1, 8; 28:16-17; Rom 1:16.**

No ministry to Gentiles occurs in John's Gospel (the trial before Pilate was not ministry, *per se*). Alleged examples of Jesus ministering to Gentiles:

John 4: The Samaritan woman, but God did not regard Samaritans as Gentiles.

John 4: The royal official, but he was Jewish.

John 10: I have other sheep which are not of this fold.

John 12: The Greeks among the Passover worshippers.

Explaining John 1:12

Part 1: Where Jesus was at various points in the Gospel of John: Most locals were Jewish

1:29-51:			Batanea	East side of Jordan River
2:1-12		Galilee		Cana and Capernaum
2:13-3:21	Judea			Jerusalem
3:22-36	Judea			Judean countryside
4:1-43			Samaria	Sychar
4:46-54		Galilee		Cana
5:1-47	Judea			Jerusalem
6:1-7:9		Galilee		by the Sea of Galilee
7:10-10:39	Judea			Jerusalem/Bethany
10:40-11:16			Batanea	East side of Jordan River
11:17-53	Judea			Bethany
11:54-57	Judea			Ephraim
12:1-11	Judea			Bethany
12:12-20:29	Judea			Jerusalem
21:1-14		Galilee		Sea of Galilee

Though Jewish, locals were Judean, Galilean, or Samaritan.

Part 2: In addition to the locals, John also mentions the Diaspora. Sometimes, members of the diaspora were present. At other times, they were not, but were mentioned. Interestingly, only three NT writers use the term Diaspora (Peter, James, and John). Interestingly, Paul referred to two of these as apostles to the circumcision (Gal 2:9)

when James, Cephas, and **John**, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Galatians 2:9)

1. Times when Diaspora Jews were absent:

Then the Jews said among themselves, "Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion of the Greeks and teach the Greeks? (John 7:35)

The *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Sanhedrin* 18d says, "to our brethren, the sons of the **diaspora of Babylon**, the sons of the **diaspora of Media**, the sons of the **diaspora of the Greeks**, and all the rest of the **dispersed of Israel**..."

Diaspora of the Greeks refers to the dispersion that happened under Alexander the Great and his successors. Those Jews who were dispersed under the Greeks were sometimes referred to as Greeks.

As a clarification, this usage of "Greeks" overlaps with the meaning of Hellenists, but is not a synonym. Why not? The Hellenists in Acts 6:1 and 9:29 lived in Jerusalem, so they were not dispersed, but they spoke Greek and could not speak Aramaic. (By contrast, Paul called himself a Hebrew of Hebrews (Phil 3:5).

John 10:16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.

2. Times When Diaspora Greeks were present: John 12:20

Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast.

Why Is It Important that John's Gospel would call attention to Diaspora Jews?

1. Unless one assumes that he originally wrote his Gospel to some people in Israel proper, his original readership would be Diaspora Jews.
2. This would tie together a major theme in John's Gospel: The predicted reunification of Israel under its Messiah:

¹² "As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment." (Ezek 34:12-16)

²¹ "Then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; ²² and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. ²³ They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ David My servant *shall be* king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. ²⁵ Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David *shall be* their prince forever. ²⁶ Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. ²⁷ My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ²⁸ The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.'"" (Ezek 37:21-28)

John 10:16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.

⁴⁹ And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, ⁵⁰ nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." ⁵¹ Now this he did not say on his own *authority*; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. (John 11:49-52)

John 17:22: Jesus prays that those who believe through the apostles' words, "would be one, as We are one."

Conclusion