

The Logos

John 1:1-18

2021-01-01

Read/hear the portion: John 1:1-18

{{< toc hide_on="xl" >}}

Video

{{< youtube f7OZlMhy3GI >}}

Introduction

The Gospels are Jewish documents. 1st Century “Christianity” was a Jewish sect. John is often viewed as contrasting the correct way of Christianity with the incorrect way of Judaism, but this represents what is called an anachronistic fallacy, often shortened to “Anachronism” - misappropriation of concepts and ideas in time

We often see anachronisms in period piece movies. Someone will be wearing a digital watch in a movie set in the 18th century. at the 1955 enchantment under the sea dance, Marty McFly is playing a 1958 gibson guitar.

It is a challenge to restrain our own presuppositions, our set of established beliefs, when we read the Bible. It is natural to assume a biblical speaker to affirm our presuppositions in order to justify our positions.

An overarching anachronistic fallacy Many commentators commit is to take what is called “the parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity that occurred much later (2nd-4th centuries CE) and reading it back into this text in the 1st century.

In other words, since it had not occurred yet, there is absolutely no way John or any other biblical writer could have the split between Judaism and Christianity in view when they were writing.

This is called eisegesis - reading into the text. Modern conservative scholars would all agree that eisegesis is bad yet many of them do it almost automatically.

What we strive for is EXEGESIS, understanding the text IN CONTEXT to extract what the author was saying. To do this, we must first realize the gospels are Jewish documents written within a historical context of 2nd Temple Judaism. The audience were Jewish Christ followers together with many non-Jews who had joined a Jewish sect..

The early church fathers affirmed John's authorship of this Gospel strongly and unanimously. Some of the fathers claim to have personally known those who knew John in Ephesus in his later years, thus making a direct link to the tradition of Johannine authorship. The evangelist John is shown here with the symbol of an eagle, the one of the four living creatures which is traditionally associated with him (Ezekiel 1:5-10 and Revelation 4:6-7).

John 1:1

John 1

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Logos in the normal sense means "word or speech". In this prologue, John uses it in the mystical sense. He alludes directly to the beginning of the Torah and the beginning of creation. He starts this with an intentional allusion to Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning"

John 1:2-6

John 1

2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

Recall the first act of Creation. "and God said Let there be Light, and there was light."

In verse 4 John declares that this life had always been available through God's word, which is the same word that he identifies with Jesus (IVP). In John 1:5, The divine light from the first day of creation shines once again into the dark world of man, signifying a new creation (COM)

There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John Excavations in the early 2000s revealed this cave west of Jerusalem near Ein Kerem. Archaeologist Shimon Gibson identified it with the ministry of John the Baptist on the basis of a stick-figure drawing of a man inside the cave. Gibson's theory was published in *The Cave of John the Baptist* (Doubleday, 2004).

For responses, see that by James F. Strange (<http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/reviews/the-cave-of-john-the-baptist/>) and Todd Bolen (<http://www.bibleplaces.com/cave-of-john-the-baptist/>).

Since the writing of the church father Origen (AD 185-254), the location of John's baptizing at Bethany beyond the Jordan has been located at a point near the river opposite Jericho.

John 1:7

John 1

7 He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him

Some scholars note that John has a “legal” feel. As you read John's gospel, be on the lookout for the terms Witness, Testimony, and so on.

Specifically, John is interested not only in establishing Jesus' credentials, he is also interested in “convicting” the corrupt Jerusalem establishment on the grounds of usurpation.

Discovered in Cave 4 of Qumran in the early 1950s, this text contains five biblical verses that focused on the coming of the Messiah. This artifact was photographed in the Amman Museum.

A few scholars suspect John may have been part of the Essene sect, but in any case he was definitely influenced by them. The Essenes believed that the forces controlling Jerusalem and the Temple were usurpers and priests of darkness. They juxtaposed darkness and light just as John does throughout his writings. “in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the forces of light and darkness were engaged in mortal combat, but light was predestined to triumph” (IVP)

John 1:8-13

John 1

8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. 9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

The goal is spiritual rebirth, not ethnic descent.

Jerusalem was the home of David and place where his greater Son was appointed to rule over the nation. John uses a term Ioudaioi, which gets translated as “Jews” but many scholars believe this is too generic. Think of the term “Americans” -The Americans won the Gold medal in 1980 (a group of 20 hockey players). The Americans invaded Normandy (those members of the Army and the Navy in June 1944). The Americans imposed Tariffs on China (specifically referring to the Government). The Americans pay their taxes on April 15 (most Americans but not all - children don't pay taxes). The Americans are guaranteed freedoms under the Constitution (all Americans)

So the term “Jews” could be anywhere from All Jews - which we know is not in view here because the 1st Century church was nearly 100% Jewish. Unfortunately many commentators, view it as exactly this: John is an early Christian Anti-Jewish document. It is more likely that what is in view is not rejection by all-Israel, but rather rejection by a sub-group within Israel.

What might some of these sub-groups be?

It could maybe refer those in Judea who generally rejected as opposed to those in Galilee where Jesus was largely accepted. But even here, not all Judeans rejected him. Nicodemus for example. Several scholars believe Ioudaioi specifically refers to the ruling establishment, which for the most part wanted Jesus out of the picture. Again Nicodemus is an exception and there were probably others.

Many commentaries place the blame on all Israel, which could be painting with too broad of a brush. It would be like holding all 300 million Americans responsible for something done by a small group of corrupt politicians in Washington DC. With that said, a national guilt might also be in view- America is a sinful and unrepentant nation, even though many Americans do repent of their sin. Deuteronomy 9:23 states, “You rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; you neither believed Him nor listened to His voice.”

In any case, we must allow God to own the business of judgment. it is wrong to use our holy book to specifically condemn a group of people (as the church as done to Jews for the last 2000 years). We are to love our neighbors and pray for others.

The Jewish thought of the day was that to be a true Child of God, one had to be a Child of Abraham, either through birth or conversion (even today, Ben Avraham is a common name a gentile takes when converting to Judaism).

John is setting the stage that it is not ethnic affiliation but spiritual rebirth that matters. A topic that will be developed in John Chapter 3

John 1:14-15

John 1

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15 (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”)

“A father’s only son” would remind readers of Genesis 22, where God instructed Abraham “take your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac...”

The star in the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem marks the spot where tradition says that Mary gave birth to Jesus.

To the Greek mind, the invisible spiritual real is far superior to the earthly realm. However, God created man spirit and flesh. Our flesh only became corrupt AFTER the fall. God intended there to be a union.

The verb translated above as “dwelt” (skenoō) is related to the Greek word for “tabernacle” (skene). Just as God dwelt with his people in the tabernacle, so the Word tabernacled with his people in the incarnation.

John 1:16:18

John 1

16 For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 For (as) the (Torah) was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

Verse 17 is often translated “for the law came through Moses *BUT* Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

The “BUT” is a mistranslation (possibly intentional) - it is not in the Greek. John just got through saying that Jesus was there in the beginning. This means Grace and Truth were there in the beginning. The Law has a special role to play for the nation of Israel but it is not in any way antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus. John sees Jesus as affirming the covenant promises God made in the Torah. A better reading might be “for AS the Torah was given through Moses, Grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ

The “but” originally occurred in the King James Version. The anachronistic error here involves the 16th Century division between Protestants and Catholics regarding the function of the law in the life of the believer. One of the Reformation cries was “Faith alone”. It wasn’t until Luther that “Law” and “Grace” became opposites. Superimposing this view on the Biblical Text is simply not correct. The opposite of Law is lawlessness. The opposite of grace is disgrace. It

is wrong to view any part of the Bible as lawless or disgraceful! God's Law is a good and beautiful thing. Read Psalm 119!

Study Questions

1. How can anachronisms and eisegesis be a problem in my studies?
2. In what ways does John 1:1-5 parallel Genesis 1 and how does that change my thinking of Genesis
3. Do I think "His own" in verse 11 refers to all Jews? Why or why not?
4. Did my opinionAs I reflect on the "tabernacle" discussion in John 1:14, how does (or how should) this affect my walk with Jesus? change after this lesson?
5. Did my understanding of the Law/Old Testament change after studying 1:17? How can I apply this going forward?

References

- Bolen, Todd. "John 1." PowerPoint handout, Santa Clarita, CA, 2018.
- Keener, Craig S. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament. 2nd edition. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014.
- Lancaster, Daniel T. "The Logos." In Chronicles of the Messiah, edited by Boaz D. Michael and Stephen D. Lancaster. Second edition. Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2014.
- Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, Eli. The Jewish Gospel of John: Discovering Jesus, King of All Israel. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015.
- Schlegel, William. The Land and the Bible: A Historical Geographical Companion to the Satellite Bible Atlas. <https://www.bibleplaces.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/The-Land-and-the-Bible.pdf>. 2015.
- —. Satellite Bible Atlas. <https://www.bibleplaces.com/satellite-bible-atlas-schlegel/> 2016.

Images used are courtesy of the Photo Companion to the Bible or the Pictorial Library of Bible Lands.