

The Gospel of John

Part 1

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The Fourth Gospel

- My source material for this series is John Shelby Spong's The Fourth Gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic (2013)
- Spong: John's gospel played a large role in the development of church dogma and contributed to "dreadful events" such as the heresy hunts and the Inquisition
- The disciples of Jesus would not have recognized the Jesus described in the Apostle's Creed
- Creeds (sadly) were written to construct barriers between people instead of providing inspiring, uplifting ideas (Constantine)
- These creeds locked Jesus into a pre-modern world of a three-tiered universe (heaven, earth, and hell) as an "invasive, miracle working deity from outer space" and this makes him hard for us to relate to today
- John's gospel, *because it was misunderstood by Gentile Christians three centuries later*, played a major role in the writing and imposition of church dogma and creeds that have been *harmful* for a long time
- So why study the gospel of John?
- When properly understood, John's gospel paints a *positive* portrait of Jesus that we can benefit from today, so it is worth the effort!

The Gospel of John is Different!

- The gospel of John is very different from the Synoptic Gospels; it is best to “start with a clean slate”
- The gospel of John was written in different layers by different authors over a period of about 30 years (roughly 70-100 AD)
- The stories in John are ***not*** about literal events, though they are narrated as if they are
- Probably ***none*** of the quotations of Jesus were actually spoken by him (the “I am” sayings in John are not in the Synoptics)
- None of the “signs”, as John labels them, which seem like miracles, were actually performed by Jesus
- Most of the characters in John are ***not*** individuals, but instead are ***symbols*** representing people who react a certain way
- The authors of John do ***not*** think of Jesus as an external deity

Source

- The gospel of John involves Jewish mysticism (last stage of composition)
- The gospel is about the *meaning* of Jesus, not his biography
 - Even though the gospel includes things a biography would include, such as stories, characters, quotes of Jesus, etc. none of these items in the first half of the gospel are real, but they do carry meaning!
- The gospel was composed over roughly 30 years when Judaism was undergoing turbulence; *changes to Jewish society had a profound impact on the Jewish Christians* of that time period
- The characters in the gospel are *representative of groups* of people; a story about a character is really telling us about how a group people reacted to the turbulence of this time period
- What was happening in this period? The First Jewish revolt!

The First Jewish Revolt

- The First Jewish–Roman War (The Great Revolt, 66–73 CE): “Sparked by Roman desecration of the Second Temple and heavy taxation, Judean rebels successfully repelled Roman forces early on. Rome responded by sending Generals Vespasian and Titus to crush the rebellion. In 70 CE, the Romans besieged and destroyed Jerusalem, burning the Second Temple. The war concluded in 73 CE with the fall of the desert fortress of Masada.” (from Google)
- Judaism was an old religion but Christianity was new at this time; the Jews had to survive the Roman occupation and the Romans considered Judaism to be only a moderate threat owing to its age and stability; but the newer, more radical Christianity, with talk of a “king”, was much more suspect and thus *many Jews wanted to distance themselves from it*
- Some Jews were initially intrigued by Jesus, but the Roman crack-down scared many of them away from Christianity; when many individuals react a certain way, you may find a character in John doing that!
- Thus the Jewish revolt and Roman response had a significant impact on the willingness of some Jews to consider Christianity

The Time Period when John was written

- The Jewish Christians already had the deck stacked against them because the idea of Jesus as the Messiah was too hard to believe for many Jews; Jesus was nothing like the expected Messiah
- Given the tentative nature of the Jews to accept the idea of Jesus as Messiah, the Roman response to the Jewish rebellion was just too much for many of those who believed in or dabbled in Christianity, and they reverted to Judaism for their safety
- The Jewish Christian (Johannine) community produced the Gospel of John; it evolved a lot during this 30 year period due to the turbulence caused by the Romans; *the gospel evolved as the community evolved*
- The stories in the gospel reflect the reactions Jews and Jewish Christians had; many Jewish Christians reverted to pure Judaism out of fear, leaving the remaining Jewish Christians to write stories about them in the gospel of John
- So while the gospel appears to be about Jesus, *it is more about the Johannine community itself*, and the evolution of that community in this time period caused the gospel itself to undergo expansion and revision
- Spong lists several scholars who spent decades studying John in great detail

The Time Period when John was written

- The Johannine community shrunk as some of their members reverted to pure Judaism; this caused those remaining to alter their gospel
- But meanwhile, and elsewhere, Gentile Christianity was growing
- Prior to this period, Paul had been preaching to the Gentiles, and starting around 70 AD, Mark wrote his gospel, and later Matthew and Luke wrote theirs; thus Christianity among the Gentiles was developing elsewhere, largely unaffected by the turbulence occurring in Judea
- I think of the situation as Paul and the Synoptic gospels are leading Gentile Christianity outside Judea, while the gospel of John is being written to reflect the turmoil and development of Jewish Christianity inside Judea (Spong does not state this)
 - Spong makes a reference to the final author of John having ties to Ephesus (after the expulsion from the synagogue)
- As you know, eventually Christianity dies out among the Jews and is carried forth by the Gentiles; they adopted the Gospel of John, but failed to properly understand it; they also failed to understand how to interpret the Synoptic Gospels, as all four are Jewish literature

The Gospel of John

- The Gospel of John was written by multiple authors (3-5?), and the evidence for this includes:
 - Internal contradictions
 - Instances of “forced unity”
 - “places where editorial additions appear not to have been woven in seamlessly”
 - In some places the gospel has a “low Christology” (Jesus is human) yet in other places there is a “high Christology” (he is divine)
 - Thus later creeds described Jesus as both fully human and fully divine but that comes from a dualistic theology unknown at the time John’s gospel was written
- Some scholars say chapters 2-11 were a standalone book now referred to as the “Book of Signs”, and a later author appended new text to it; and the final editor inserted Chapter 1 before it
- John chapters 20 and 21 cannot be by the same author

The “Book of Signs”: John 2-11

- The “Book of Signs” is a series of stories about Jesus interacting with various individuals; the story of Jesus changing water into wine is described as “the first of the signs” and the gospel says that because of it the disciples “believed in him”
- It then speaks of a “second sign”, and eventually concludes with the story of raising Lazarus from the dead
- Spong writes “a sign is depicted as a mighty act, done quite publicly, that points to something even bigger and more important”
- He says signs “are filled with strange references, enigmatic words, unusual actions and dramatically drawn characters, all of which appear to mitigate against these signs ... (being) ... literal events”
- He writes that miracles in the Synoptics “are much more obscure in John”; the word “sign” stands for this obscurity; a symbolic act?
- Some “signs” stories have counterparts in the Synoptics; but some do not; those that have counterparts often have very significant differences
- The geographical references in John chapters 4, 5, and 6 would make more sense if chapters 5 and 6 were swapped

The “Farewell Discourses”

- The “Farewell Discourses” (a modern name) consist of chapters 13-16 and maybe 17; they tell stories of Jesus preparing his disciples for his death and how to live without him
- Spong writes “in many ways these Farewell Discourses seem to reflect far more the difficult times that the Johannine community itself would endure near the end of the first century than they do the things that Jesus might have said to his disciples before his death”.
 - I interpret this as the Johannine community writing the gospel to say what they felt or would want Jesus to say to them in the midst of their turmoil, but casting it as Jesus saying it to his disciples before his crucifixion
- The idea that there are two authors here (FD) is suggested by Jesus saying “rise, let us go hence” at the end of John 14, yet the discourses continue for two more chapters (chapters made in 1227 CE)

Stages of the Composition of John

- The *first* stage is of a deeply Jewish, synagogue related period; Jesus is viewed as the Messiah and his life is related to Jewish festivals
- The *second* stage is the result of “rising hostility between the followers of Jesus and the leaders of the synagogue”; this situation occurred between roughly 70 CE when the Romans conquered Jerusalem and roughly 88 CE when Jewish Christians were expelled from the synagogue
 - The gospel reflects this hostility between the followers of Jesus and “*the Jews*”, which in this context means *the leaders of the synagogue*; the members of the Johannine community were Jews themselves! Spong discusses the very tragic result of the use of “the Jews”, which is much anti-Semitism, all of which is unfounded
- The *third* stage is when the followers of Jesus defined themselves *apart* from Judaism; this involved a move into Jewish *mysticism* in which they began to adopt a transcendent understanding of God; this led to the “high” Christology and later the imperialistic church of dogmas and creeds; so both Judaism and Christianity suffered from misunderstanding

Misunderstanding the Gospel of John

- The multiple authors and stages of the composition of John caused enough problems in making sense of the gospel, and that is greatly compounded by the later literal interpretations caused by the ***Greek dualism*** mindset; these misunderstandings resulted in creedal exclusiveness (Nicene Creed 325 CE)
- The gospels were written in Greek and for a long time scholars assumed ***Greek dualism*** was the basis for understanding the gospel of John; but in the last 8 decades or so, that has changed, with many scholars thinking now that the Gospel of John is thoroughly Jewish
- Spong, with his awareness of the mistakes made later in interpreting the gospel of John, says he sees in this gospel not religion, sin, and salvation, but ***instead he sees lessons about life, expanded life, and greater consciousness***; Spong sees this gospel as leading in an entirely different direction from “the one traditional Christianity has followed from Nicea to this day”
- Spong believes that this gospel, properly understood, can lead to a new Christianity, but of course that fundamentalist Christianity stands in the way

The Gospel of John is radically different

- John has no account of the birth of Jesus; twice Jesus is referred to as “the son of Joseph”
- John has “John” bear witness to Jesus, but does not call him “John the Baptist” nor has him baptize Jesus
- John has no account of the temptation of Jesus or the transfiguration of Jesus
- John has no short provocative sayings of Jesus, no parables, and nothing like Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount; instead Jesus gives long monologues or dialogues
- John moves Jesus’s cleansing of the Temple from the end to the near the beginning of his ministry
- John places Jesus mostly in Jerusalem, and less so in Galilee, which is the opposite of the Synoptics
- Instead of the “Last Supper” John has the foot-washing ceremony
- John has “signs” instead of miracles; the “signs” describe a “dramatic truth breaking into human consciousness”, and they correlate poorly with the miracles of the Synoptics

The Gospel of John is radically different

- John has no account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (he suffers anguish there in the Synoptics) and Jesus does not ask to be spared his fate
- The crucifixion, when Jesus draws all people unto himself, is portrayed as a glorification, not as a suffering event (I personally do not understand this)
- John's gospel has several characters not mentioned elsewhere in the NT; these start with Nathaniel in chapter 1 and finish with "the beloved disciple" who is never identified and is brought into the story late, in the Farewell Discourses
- John mentions several characters previously included in the Synoptic gospels, but gives them characteristics ***not*** mentioned previously (includes Andrew, Philip, Thomas and others)
- The Synoptics follow a one year liturgy, but John follows a 3 year cycle of reading the Jewish scriptures
- The meaning of these "differences" between the Synoptic gospels and the Gospel of John will be explained as we continue

The Gospel of a Palestinian Jew

- Song makes three key points:
 - John's gospel is the creation of authors who are profoundly Jewish
 - A popular form of Jewish *mysticism* of the first century strongly shaped this gospel's message
 - The authors tell us that a literal understanding of this gospel is worthy of ridicule!
- Each of these points will be elaborated on
- Misunderstanding the mindset of the gospel's authors lead to misunderstanding what the gospel was saying; this misunderstanding, which influenced the ancient creeds of Christianity, is finally being corrected in modern times, after many centuries and much harm

A Creator who is profoundly Jewish

- This point is important because of the mistake made by Gentiles of applying ideas of Greek dualism, which lead to false understandings
- Spong says the writer(s) have a deep familiarity with Jewish Palestine and especially Jerusalem
- The gospel draws on Jewish scripture, using images only a Jewish person would know
- The gospel uses a liturgical style and shows a special knowledge of life in the synagogue and the Jewish holy days; Spong says one not familiar with Jewish worship will miss many nuances of this gospel
- Spong: “The internal evidence of Jewishness in this gospel is so powerful and so overwhelming that it amazes me that any other possibility for its origin was ever seriously advanced in Christian history.” He says commentaries from the 19th and early 20th centuries show scholars wrongly infusing Hellenistic and Gnostic elements or mixing in Greek philosophy
 - One passage wrongly understood in this manner was the opening, John 1:1-18, which is called the “prologue”, because of the word “logos”, meaning “word”

A Creator who is profoundly Jewish

- Spong states that “logos” can also mean “reason”, “rational principle”, “the first emanation of God”, and “the self-disclosure of God”
- Spong states that when Christianity began to turn away from its Jewish roots to embrace the Greek world, John’s gospel formed a key bridge that connected the two worlds (me: in an unintended way!)
- He says that while much of the NT was written in Greek, and thus Greek influence was inevitable, it was not until after all the gospels were completed that Gentile Christians began to read the Jewish scriptures through a Greek lens; to me, he is saying that the proper Jewish oriented mindset lasted a while, but then fizzled out
- The transition to Greek interpretations reached a height in the 4th century when the creeds were written
- Spong says that only in the last half of the 20th century and early 21st century has it become possible to challenge the classical interpretation and recover the original Jewishness of this gospel and other NT books
- What caused this change in understanding? Answer: the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls!

A Creator who is profoundly Jewish

- Spong gives six instances in which the prologue uses terms that only a Jew would understand (and this is in just John 1)
 - The interrogation of John (the baptizer) include “are you the Messiah?”, “Are you Elijah?”, and “Are you the prophet?”; only Jews used the word “messiah”; only Jews would know that the messiah’s coming would involve the return of Elijah
 - John (the baptizer) identifies himself using the words of Isaiah, which only Jews would understand: “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, to make straight the way of the Lord” (John 1:23, Isaiah 40:3)
 - Soon after this, other titles for Jesus are given, titles that only Jewish people would understand: “rabbi” (John 1:38); “messiah”, and “him of whom Moses in the law ... wrote” (John 1:45)
 - The gospel shows an understanding of the tension between Galilee and Jerusalem when Nathaniel asks “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46)
 - Jesus is also referred to “king of Israel” (John 1:49)
 - In John 1:51, there is a reference to Jacob’s ladder of Genesis 28

A Creator who is profoundly Jewish

- The water pots in John 2:6 are pots used in Jewish purification rituals
- Three references in John 2:13 to Passover (a Jewish holiday) and the need to go to Jerusalem for it
- John 7:2 refers to the Feast of Tabernacles and John 10:22 refers to the Feast of Dedication
- The story starting in John 3:1 refers to the Holy Spirit as “wind”, a very Jewish concept
- The gospel of John refers to Sychar, Jacob’s well, and the Jewish-Samaritan relationship in the story of the Samaritan woman (John 4), references only Jews would know about
- Details of Jerusalem in John 5, such as Sheep’s Gate, Bethzatha, the healing power of the troubled waters
- And there are others

Stories reflecting Contemporary events

- The story of the man born blind in John 9 appears to be more about the *time period of the Johannine community* than the period in which Jesus lived: it shows an awareness of the expulsion of the Christians from the synagogue, which occurred long after the crucifixion of Jesus!
- Spong writes “Jesus is portrayed as engaging the Jewish authorities on the issues of the *author’s day*”, but using the form of rabbinic debates of Jesus’s day
- Spong says the gospel of John “reflects the pain and trauma” of the expulsion of the Johannine community from the synagogue, “as well as the necessity for reformulating the Christ message so that it will endure in its new reality as a movement ... outside the synagogue”

The Fourth Gospel

- Scholars unfortunately took a wrong turn about a century ago when they attempted to treat John's gospel as Hellenistic/Gnostic writing (Gnosis refers to knowledge)
- Spong thought better of the Gospel of John when he began to see it as a *Jewish work, and not as Gnostic literature* influenced by Hellenism; Spong began to see John's gospel as *Jewish mysticism*
- Spong began to see Jesus as a person who had developed a new “*God consciousness*”; Jesus' claim of oneness with the Father was no longer incarnational but *mystical* language
- With this insight opening possible new ways of understanding the Gospel of John, Spong began a five year study of this gospel, reading everything he could find about it
- John's gospel is about “expanded life, abundant life, and ultimately eternal life”, but not in the way commonly understood
- John's gospel was written over a period of about 30 years, in different layers, and by different authors
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The Fourth Gospel (Chapter 2)

- To understand what the gospel means, you have to *understand the mind-set of the authors and read their story as they intended it to be read*
- Spong says the notion of an “external deity entering into the flesh of our existence” “is not even close” to what the writer intended (p. 10)
- The Gospel of John went through a *series of editorial revisions* by different authors over a period of years
 - Evidence: contradictions in the text; places in text showing a forced unity; places where additions are not woven in seamlessly
 - The term “Christology” is the issue of “who is Jesus?”
 - Some places in John’s gospel have a “low Christology” in which Jesus is portrayed as a new Moses or a new Elijah, or the prophet of whom Moses spoke (in Deuteronomy); but in other places there is “high Christology” where Jesus is divine, supernatural
- The dualistic “fully human and fully divine” concept (a Greek idea) came to dominance about 300 years later and could not have been the understanding of the authors of the gospel of John (p.12)
- John is believed to include an earlier work (called the “Book of Signs” by modern scholars) that constitutes John chapters 2-11 (almost half the gospel); this portion starts with Jesus turning water into wine and concludes with the raising of Lazarus

The Fourth Gospel

- A “sign” is “depicted as a mighty act, done quite publicly, that *points* to something even bigger and more important” (p.13)
- “signs accounts are filled with strange references, enigmatic words, unusual actions, and dramatically drawn characters, all of which appear to mitigate against these signs ever having been understood as literal events”
- Miracles in the Synoptics are more obscure in John, and are depicted as “signs”; there are many differences between the miracles of the Synoptics and the signs in John
- The stories in John chapters 4, 5, and 6 make more sense geographically if chapters 5 and 6 were to be reversed
- More evidence for the disconnected nature of John is that the “Farewell Discourses” (chapters 13-16, and perhaps 17), in which Jesus turns his attention solely to his disciples as he anticipates his crucifixion, “seem to reflect far more the difficult times that the Johannine community itself would endure near the end of the first century than they do the things Jesus might have said to his disciples before his death” (p. 15)
 - Unlike Mark, Matthew, and Luke, who wrote their gospels *individually*, the authors of the Gospel of John belonged to a *community* (the Johannine community) of Jews who were excommunicated from the Synagogue
 - I get the impression that John’s gospel was written not only *by* but more importantly *for* the Johannine community, who were trying to draw closer to God and trying to avoid the wrath of “the Jews” (synagogue leaders); their gospel was meant to help them interpret who Jesus was, how he related to God, how they should relate to God, etc.; they were not writing with us in mind

How John Differs from the Synoptics

- John differs on many biographical stories in Mark, or Matthew, or Luke:
 - No virgin birth (Matthew and Luke have it)
 - John the Baptist does not baptize Jesus
 - No temptation of Jesus in the wilderness
 - No transfiguration story
 - No short provocative sayings of Jesus, no parables, and no Sermon on the Mount
 - The cleansing of the Temple is early in Jesus' ministry, not at the end as in the Synoptics
 - Jesus spends most of his time in Jerusalem, in contrast to the Synoptics in which he goes to Jerusalem only once (for the Passover and is then crucified)
 - Jesus spends three Passovers in Jerusalem
 - No Last Supper
 - Miracles become "signs" which are "dramatic truths breaking into human consciousness in Jesus"
 - No prayer by Jesus to be spared the crucifixion
 - Instead of suffering on the cross, Jesus is glorified in John's gospel
- John has a "host of memorable characters" not mentioned in other gospels, especially the mysterious "beloved disciple"
- John adds new characteristics to some of the people cited in the Synoptics

Jesus Turns Water into Wine

- The “water into wine” story has the following themes:
 - The transformation of water into wine will occur “on the third day”
 - The six stone jars are meant for Jewish purification
 - The mother of Jesus stands at the nexus of the shortcoming of the purification rites and the *celebration of the new life Jesus came to bring, which is symbolized by a marriage ceremony*
 - The “old” wine is spent, the “new” wine overflows
 - The mother of Jesus pushes him to act, but he tells his “hour has not come”; the word “hour” occurs many times in this gospel and refers to the moment of *death on the cross*, when ‘who he is’ is *revealed*
 - In John 12:23, Jesus announces that “the hour has come for the son of man to be glorified”, referring to his crucifixion
 - The water is turned into wine and the disciples believe in Jesus (John 2:11), the first of several “signs”
 - Mary is not mentioned by name, and not again until the crucifixion
 - Do *not* carry over information from the Synoptics to John

Jesus Turns Water into Wine

- Symbolism of the water into wine sign includes:
 - Jesus is calling Israel to a new (higher) status
 - The wine of the spirit has replaced the waters of purification; purification itself was part and parcel of deliberate separation of Jews from non-Jews; the voluntary separation from Gentiles, part of the “Holiness Code”, was a hallmark of Judaism; Jesus is saying “no” to that idea
 - The “*mother* of the Lord” symbolizes *Israel*, the faith tradition that *gave birth to Christianity*, so she is its “mother”
 - John sees a transition from Israel to Christianity, but for now this transition is a secret; only at the crucifixion will it be revealed who Jesus is
 - This understanding of Jesus as given by the gospel of John is very different from that of the Synoptics

John 2

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. **2** Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. **3** And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.” **4** Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.”

5 His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do *it*.”

6 Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. **7** Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. **8** And He said to them, “Draw *some* out now, and take *it* to the master of the feast.” And they took *it*. **9** When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. **10** And he said to him, “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the *guests* have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!”

11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days.

John 2

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. **15** When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. **16** And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" **17** Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. **22** Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

The Fourth Gospel

- The last two chapters of John (21 and 22) also present a problem; Spong writes “There is almost no possibility that the same person wrote both of these mutually contradictory chapters”. (p.15)
- Scholars debate how many authors contributed to John
 - Raymond Brown says five; Urban von Wahlde says three
- Spong outlines the stages of composition
 - First, a deeply ***Jewish and Synagogue related stage*** written in the mid-70’s when Jesus is seen as Messianic
 - Secondly, text written during the ***rising hostility between the followers of Jesus and synagogue leaders***, resulting in the expulsion in the year 88
 - Thirdly, the ***rise of Jewish mysticism in response to the need to establish themselves outside the synagogue***; this phase produced the “high Christology”
 - Fourthly, the epilogue (Chapter 21) was by yet another author
- Spong says the second stage led to anti-Semitism since the followers of Jesus referred to the Judaic Jews as “the Jews”, even though both sides were ethnically Jewish; the third stage had ideas that centuries later unfortunately turned into imperialistic Christianity with its strident creeds
- Spong says this third stage has the tension between those who saw Jesus as “God infused human life” and those who thought Jesus was divine

The Fourth Gospel

- The divine claims were later liberalized into a dualistic Greek speaking world which became the basis of creedal exclusiveness
- Spong writes “I believe that this book leads us in an entirely different direction from the one traditional Christianity has followed from Nicea to this day.” (p.19)
- Spong wants his readers to know the meaning of John’s gospel as “a doorway into a new dimension of life”, “a journey into the heart of life”, and into “a new consciousness” and a “whole new understanding of what Christianity is”
- Historically, Christianity arose from Judaism, and the New Testament was written by Jews (except Luke, who was a Jewish convert) and so ***understanding the NT requires a Jewish background; but the Jews rejected Christianity; the Gentiles adopted it, but they lacked the background knowledge to properly interpret the Gospels and other NT books***
- Spong says one must see with Jewish eyes to understand the Gospel of John
- Sadly, over the first few centuries after Jesus lived, the Gentiles, lacking an understanding of anything Jewish, increasingly misinterpreted the gospels and as Christianity diminished among the Jews, there were fewer people who could (or would) stand up and say “Gentiles, you are misunderstanding these gospels!”