

LIVING WATER

Introduction:

Before the class reads John 7, make the teacher answer the following:

1. What are the major Spring Feasts? Fall Feasts?
See supplemental material
2. What are some important things that happened in the Feast of Tabernacles that make the text of John 7 more meaningful?
See supplemental material.

READ John 7:1-13:

1. Why were Jesus' brothers urging him to go to the Feast? What do they assume about Jesus' motivations? Why?

Wiersbe's comments on this are good: They approach his from a worldly point of view. If you're a worldly revolutionary, there's a predictable way of going about things.

2. Sometimes believers face opposition or ridicule for their faith from family members. Do you know anyone who has been in that situation? How does this passage encourage you?

READ John 7:14-36:

3. The Feast of Tabernacles was the climax of all the feasts of Israel, and Jesus went right into the Temple and started teaching. How did people receive at first?

Mixed response

4. Did the people understand Jesus' statement in vs. 33-34? What was Jesus talking about? Where was he going?

He's referring to his death, resurrection and ascension.

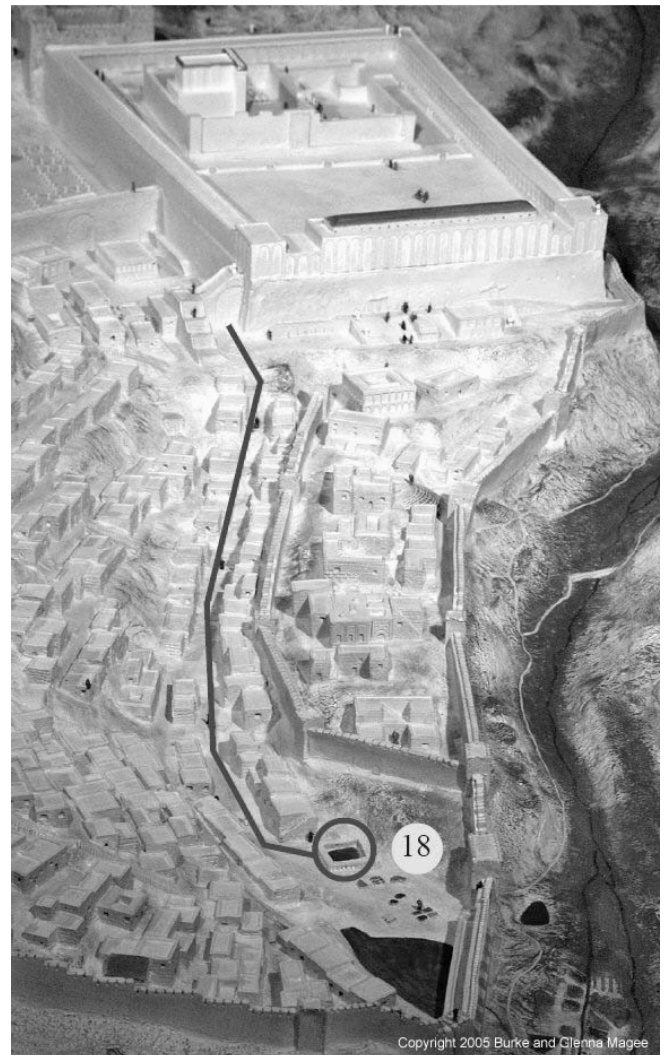
READ John 7:37-52:

5. What did Jesus cry out at this point in the ceremony? How did the crowd react?

See supplemental info regarding water ceremony...route in picture at right. Once you understand what was happening this is a huge statement. Context is everything here.

6. Why did the temple guards report back without apprehending Jesus?

Apparently they found him to be speaking with authority and power...this was no simple rabble rouser.



Gospel of John
Westgate Church of Christ
Sunday Feb. 16, 2020

7. Nicodemus, a top Jewish leader, argued for a fair trial for Jesus. How did the rest of the leaders respond? Why did it matter where Jesus was from?

Where he was from...this gave them the cover to not believe.

8. What are some of the different opinions of Jesus today? What are some reasons people give for not believing in him?

We rely on similar thinly veiled intellectual excuses at times.

9. Have you ever seen someone grasp at anything they can grab in an effort to avoid Jesus? When?

10. Explain v. 39.

It isn't that the Holy Spirit had never been active before, but we should acknowledge that the guaranteed indwelling deposit of the Holy Spirit is a unique and precious gift that we enjoy as New Covenant believers. Truly the prophets of old would have longed for the day.

11. How can you tell when streams of living water are flowing from within you?

Are you bringing new life and hope to those around you? Have you dammed up the stream???



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

THE MESSIAH HAS COME • Rivers of Living Water

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

John 7

The Feasts of Israel

The Jews hosted seven primary holidays in Jerusalem. Four occurred in the Spring and three in the Fall. Passover was the first feast of the year, and it celebrated God's miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt. On the second night of the Passover feast, they began to serve the Unleavened Bread which symbolized purity. The Feast of Firstfruits came right on the heels of the Passover. The Jews dedicated best of their new crops to the Lord. Several weeks later they celebrated the summer harvest with a feast called Pentecost,

Later in the Fall the Jews celebrated the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Feasts of Israel

Spring	The Feast of Passover - <i>Salvation</i>
	The Unleavened Bread - <i>Purity</i>
	The Feast of Firstfruits - <i>God's Provision</i>
	The Feast of Pentecost - <i>God's Provision</i>
Fall	The Feast of Trumpets - <i>Worship</i>
	The Day of Atonement - <i>Confession</i>
	The Feast of Tabernacles - <i>Presence of the Lord</i>

The Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles (also known as the Feast of Booths) was the last celebration of the year. It took place in Jerusalem each fall. As part of the festival, which lasted 8 days, the Jews erected temporary shelters all over the city and the hill called the Mount of Olives. The shelters served as reminders of the days of Moses when Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. The festival included a lot of singing and dancing and a tremendous feast. For the first seven days, 70 bulls were offered for the nations of the world but everything built toward the last day, when 1 bull was offered for Israel.

What's the Big Idea?

Everyone is challenged by the claims of Jesus.

What's the Problem?

We often view Jesus as a great leader or teacher, but miss the fact that he is the Messiah of God.



The Ceremony at the Feast of Tabernacles

The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles was the greatest day of the celebration. Early in the morning on that day the chief priest led a procession from the altar in Jerusalem down to the pool of Siloam. Once he got there he filled a golden pitcher with water then headed back toward the temple. The masses waved palm branches and cheered him on. Three series of trumpet blasts announced his arrival into the city. When he entered the Temple area, he circled the altar seven times before ascending it. Once atop the altar, he poured out the water at the base of the altar signifying that the nation was still in bondage and waiting for the messiah. Then he raised his hand and the priests began singing choruses which the people repeated. "Oh Lord, send salvation" "Oh Lord, bring prosperity" "Oh give thanks to the Lord."

It was at this point in the Feast that Jesus cried out "If anyone is still thirsty let him come to me and drink! Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water!'"

With this announcement, Jesus formally presented Himself as the Messiah to Israel, and he stunned the crowd. Some people believed in him. Others called him a prophet. The Pharisees and their guards stumbled all over themselves, and a controversy arose.

Many people knew that Jesus was from Galilee and the Messiah was supposed to be born in Bethlehem. These people didn't know, of course, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and only moved to Galilee later in his life.

This is another passage where we see Nicodemus, an elite Pharisee and member of the ruling Sanhedrin, continue to wrestle with the identity of Jesus. But many of the other Jewish leaders were too prideful to believe in Jesus and they were jealous of his popularity. They copied the crowd, saying "a prophet does not come from Galilee." Sometimes people grasp at anything they can to deny the truth regarding Jesus.

A Great Opportunity

The Apply Section of this study starts off with the questions, "What are some of the different opinions of Jesus today? What are some reasons people give for not believing in him?" Try to use these questions to surface any doubts people in your group have about Jesus, the Bible, or faith in general. You don't need to know the answers. Just take some notes.

Then do a little research between this week and next. Consider using the websites suggested on the next page. You might choose to discuss the topics further with individuals or your whole group.

This is a great opportunity because there are great answers to every question about the Christian faith. Consider the journey of Lee Strobel. Lee Strobel graduated from Yale Law school and worked for 14 years as a research journalist for the Chicago Tribune. He was also a strong atheist. So it initially bugged him when his wife Leslie came to Christ. But over time, he saw an attractive change in her character. He began to research the Christian faith. As a world-renowned journalist, he had access to all the leading people in the fields of science, philosophy, history, and more. And the more research he did, the more he became convinced of the truth of Christianity. Over time, he gave his heart to Christ. You can read his research yourself in his best selling books entitled The Case for Christ, The Case for a Creator, and The Case for Faith.

What's Our Response?

You will want your group to understand that many people are confused about Jesus, and it's important to know who he really is.

Tabernacles (*Sukkoth*)³⁰⁴

The Feast of Booths or Tabernacles was the most popular festival with the people and is called in Tannaitic literature “the Feast.” It began on 15 Tishri (the month from Sept. 20 to Oct. 19) and lasted for eight days, coming after the grape harvest. It too was given a redemptive significance, commemorating the living in tents during the time of the wilderness wandering. The practice of building individual booths for the week of the festival is referred to in connection with the transfiguration of Jesus ([Mark 9:5](#)).

The observance of Tabernacles included a procession of the people carrying palm branches (*lulav* or *lulab*, palm shoots bound together with three myrtle twigs and two willow branches) and citrons (*ethrog*), which were waved aloft during the daily singing of the Hallel ([Pss. 113–118](#)) as an expression of joy. (This practice led to the suggestion that Jesus’ triumphal entry occurred at the time of

Tabernacles and not a week before Passover as the traditional dating had it.)

Each morning of the period of the feast priests brought water from the fountain of Siloam and poured it out as a libation on the altar. On the last day the priests marched around the altar seven times, praying for rain during the ensuing rainy season. Four large menorahs were set up around the temple courts and kept burning each night. Dancing and pipe-playing lasted most of the night. The Levites chanted the Psalms of Ascent ([120–134](#)), one for each of the steps between the court of Israel and the court of women. These customs at Tabernacles ([John 7:2, 14](#)) provide the background for Jesus’ statements “If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink” and “I am the light of the world” ([John 7:32; 8:12](#)). The cycle of Torah readings in the synagogue began at Tabernacles.

³⁰⁴ [Exod. 23:14–17](#); [Lev. 23:33–36, 39–44](#); [Deut. 16:13–15](#). See the Mishnah tractate *Sukkoth*; cf. Philo, *Special Laws* [2.32–33.204–13](#); Josephus, *Ant.* [3.10.4 \[244–47\]](#); Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods* (Atlanta, 1995).

CHAPTER SEVEN

FEAST FIGHT

John 7

The Feast of Tabernacles looked back to Israel's journey through the wilderness, and looked forward to the promised kingdom of Messiah. The Jews lived in booths made of branches to remind them of God's providential care of the nation for nearly forty years ([Lev. 23:33-44](#)).

Following the Feast of Trumpets and the solemn Day of Atonement, Tabernacles was a festive time for the people. The temple area was illumined by large candlesticks that reminded the people of the guiding pillar of fire; and each day the priests would carry water from the Pool of Siloam and pour it out from a golden vessel, reminding the Jews of the miraculous provision of water from the rock.

The feast may have been a jubilant time for the people, but it was a difficult time for Jesus, for it marked the beginning of open and militant opposition to Him and His ministry. Ever since He had healed the paralytic on the Sabbath Day, Jesus had been targeted by the Jewish leaders who wanted to kill Him ([John 7:1, 19-20, 25, 30, 32, 44](#); and note [8:37, 40](#)). He remained in Galilee, where He would be safer, but He could not remain in Galilee

and also observe the feast.

[John 7](#) has three time divisions: before the feast (vv. [1-10](#)), in the midst of the feast (vv. [11-36](#)), and on the last day of the feast (vv. [37-52](#)). The responses during each of those periods can be characterized by three words: disbelief, debate, and division.

Before the Feast: Disbelief ([John 7:1-10](#))

Mary bore other children, with Joseph as their natural father ([Matt. 13:55-56](#); [Mark 6:1-6](#)); so Jesus would have been their half brother. It seems incredible that His brothers could have lived with Him all those years and not realized the uniqueness of His person. Certainly they knew about His miracles (see [John 7:3-4](#)) since everybody else did. Having been in the closest contact with Him, they had the best opportunity to watch Him and test Him; yet they were still unbelievers.

Here were men going up to a religious feast, yet rejecting their own Messiah! How easy it is to follow tradition and miss eternal truth. The publicans and sinners were rejoicing at His message, but His own half brothers were making fun of Him.

These men certainly had the world's point of view: if you want to get a following, use your opportunities to do something spectacular. Jerusalem would be

crowded with pilgrims and this would give Jesus the ideal “platform” to present Himself and win disciples. No doubt the brothers knew that the multitude of disciples had deserted Jesus ([John 6:66](#)). This was His opportunity to recoup His losses. Satan had offered a similar suggestion three years before ([Matt. 4:1ff](#)).

Jesus had already turned down the crowd’s offer to make Him King ([John 6:15](#)), and He was not about to yield to them in any way. Celebrities might ride to success on the applause of the crowd, but God’s servants know better. By doing miracles during the feast, at the “official city,” Jesus could muster a crowd, reveal Himself as Messiah, and overcome the enemy. The suggestion, of course, came from hearts and minds blinded by unbelief. This unbelief had been prophesied in [Psalm 69:8](#)—“I am become a stranger unto My brethren, and an alien unto My mother’s children.” (Since Jesus was not Joseph’s natural son, He could not say “My father’s children.”)

It was not the right time for Jesus to show Himself to the world ([John 14:22ff](#)). One day He shall return, and “every eye shall see Him” ([Rev. 1:7](#)). We have noticed that our Lord lived on a “divine timetable” that was marked out by the Father ([John 2:4](#); [7:6](#), [8](#), [30](#); [8:20](#); [12:23](#); [13:1](#); [17:1](#)).

Jesus was exercising caution because He knew that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Him. Though they were “religious” leaders, they were a part of “the world” that hated Jesus because He exposed their evil works. By His character and His ministry, He revealed the shallowness and emptiness of their futile religious system; He called the people back to the reality of life in God. History reveals that the “religious system” often persecutes the very prophets of God who are sent to save it!

Some manuscripts do not have the word *yet* in [John 7:8](#), but its absence does not alter the thrust of the statement. Jesus was certainly not lying or being evasive; rather, He was exercising sensible caution. Suppose He told His brothers His plans, and they told somebody else? Could the information possibly get to the leaders? “I am going to the feast when the right time comes,” is what He said. After His family had gone, Jesus went to Jerusalem “under cover,” so as not to call attention to Himself.

In our Lord’s actions, we see a beautiful illustration of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Father had a plan for His Son, and nothing could spoil that plan. Jesus did not tempt the Father by rushing to the feast, nor did He lag behind when the proper time had come for Him to attend the feast. It requires

spiritual discernment to know God's timing.

In the Midst of the Feast: Debate (John 7:11–36)

Note that this public debate about the Lord Jesus involved three different groups of people. First, of course, were the Jewish leaders (“the Jews”) who lived in Jerusalem and were attached to the temple ministry. This would include the Pharisees and the chief priests (most of whom were Sadducees) as well as the scribes. These men differed theologically, but they agreed on one thing: their opposition to Jesus Christ and their determination to get rid of Him. The exceptions would be Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38–42).

The second group would be “the people” (John 7:12, 20, 31–32). This would be the festival crowd that had come to Jerusalem to worship. Many of them would not be influenced by the attitude of the religious leaders at Jerusalem. You will note in John 7:20 that “the people” were amazed that anybody would want to kill Jesus! They were not up to date on all the gossip in the city and had to learn the hard way that Jesus was considered a lawbreaker by the officials.

The third group was composed of the Jews who resided in Jerusalem (John

7:25). They, of course, would have likely sided with the religious leaders.

The debate began before Jesus even arrived at the city, and it centered on *His character* (John 7:11–13). The religious leaders “kept seeking” Jesus, while the crowd kept arguing whether He was a good man or a deceiver. He would have to be one or the other, because a truly good man would not deceive anybody. Yes, Jesus is either what He claims to be, or He is a liar.

But when Jesus began to teach openly in the temple, the debate shifted to *His doctrine* (John 7:14–19). Character and doctrine go together, of course. It would be foolish to trust the teachings of a liar! The Jews were amazed at what He taught because He did not have any credentials from their approved rabbinical schools. But since He lacked this “proper accreditation,” His enemies said that His teachings were nothing but private opinions and not worth much. It has often been said that Jesus taught with authority, while the scribes and Pharisees taught from authorities, quoting all the famous rabbis.

Jesus explained that His doctrine came from the Father. He had already made it clear that He and the Father were one in the works that He performed (John 5:17) and in the judgment that He executed (John 5:30). Now He claimed that His

teachings also came from the Father, and He would make that astounding claim again (John 8:26, 38). When I teach the Word of God, I can claim authority for the Bible but not for all of my interpretations of the Bible. Jesus rightly could claim absolute authority for everything that He taught!

But does not *every* religious teacher make a similar claim? How, then, can we know that Jesus is teaching us the truth? *By obeying what He tells us to do.* God's Word proves itself true to those who will sincerely do it. The British preacher F.W. Robertson said that "obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge." John 7:17 literally reads, "If any man is willing to do His [God's] will, he shall know." This explains why the Jewish leaders did not understand Jesus' teachings: they had stubborn wills and would not submit to Him (John 5:40).

Is our Lord suggesting here a "pragmatic test" for divine truth? Is He saying, "Try it! If it works, it must be true!" and thus suggesting that if it does not work it must be false? This kind of a test would lead to confusion, for almost any cultist could say, "I tried what the cult teaches, and it works!"

No, our Lord's statement goes much deeper. He was not suggesting a shallow "taste test" but rather the deep personal

commitment of the person to truth. The Jews depended on education and authorities and received their doctrine second-hand, but Jesus insisted that we experience the authority of truth *personally*. The Jewish leaders were attempting to *kill Jesus*, yet at the same time they claimed to understand God's truth and obey it. This proves that an enlightened and educated mind is no guarantee of a pure heart or a sanctified will. Some of the world's worst criminals have been highly intelligent and well-educated people.

Satan offered Adam and Eve knowledge, but it was knowledge based on disobedience (Gen. 3:5). Jesus offered knowledge as the result of obedience: first the yoke of responsibility, then the joy of knowing God's truth. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said it perfectly: "When men are wholly, completely consecrated to the will of God and want to do that above everything else, then they find out that Christ's teaching is divine, that it is the teaching of God."

If we really seek God's will, then we will not worry over who gets the glory. All truth is God's truth and God alone deserves the glory for what He has taught us. No teacher or preacher can take the credit for what only can come from God. If he does go after the glory, then it is proof that his teaching is self-generated

and not received from God. This is the origin of many cults and church splits: somebody “invents” a doctrine, takes credit for it, and uses it to divide God’s people.

The first “debate” was with the Jews: but the visitors to the city entered into the discussion ([John 7:20](#)). Jesus had boldly announced that the leaders wanted to kill Him because He had violated the Sabbath and then claimed to be God (see [John 5:10–18](#)). The orthodox Jews broke the Sabbath laws when they had their sons circumcised on the Sabbath, so why could He not heal a man on the Sabbath? “Why go ye about to kill Me?”

The visitors, of course, did not know that their leaders were out to kill Jesus; so they challenged His statement. But their reply contained a serious accusation—that Jesus had a demon. This was not a new accusation, for the leaders had said it before ([Matt. 9:32ff](#); [10:25](#); [11:18–19](#); [12:24ff](#)). “You must be crazy to think that anybody wants to kill You!”

Our Lord used the very Law of Moses to refute the enemy’s argument; but He knew that they would not give in. Why? Because their standard of judgment was not honest. They evaluated things on the basis of superficial examination of the facts. They judged on the basis of “seems” and not “is.” Unfortunately, too many

people make that same mistake today. [John 7:24](#) is the opposite of verse 17, where Jesus called for sincere devotion to truth.

The residents of Jerusalem entered the conversation ([John 7:25](#)). They knew that the rulers wanted to kill Jesus, and they were amazed that He was teaching openly and getting away with it! Perhaps the rulers had been convinced that indeed He is the Messiah, sent from God! Then why were they not worshiping Him and leading others to worship Him?

Their question ([John 7:25](#)) suggested a negative answer: “No, the rulers do not believe that He is the Christ, do they?” They were able to defend their conclusion with logic:

1. Nobody knows where the Christ comes from.
2. We know where Jesus of Nazareth came from.
3. Conclusion: Jesus cannot be the Messiah.

Once again, the people could not see the truth because they were blinded by what they thought were dependable facts. Jesus had met this same kind of resistance in the synagogue in Capernaum ([John 6:42ff](#)). Even the learned teachers—the “expert builders”—would not be able to identify the Chief Cornerstone, even

though they had studied the God-given “blueprints” for centuries! ([Acts 4:11](#))

At this point, our Lord raised His voice so that everybody could hear (note also [John 7:37](#)). He was probably speaking in a tone revealing irony: “Yes, you think you know Me and where I came from! But really, you do not!” Then He explained why they did not know Him: *they did not know the Father!* This was a serious accusation to make against an orthodox Jew, for the Jews prided themselves in knowing the true God, the God of Israel.

But Jesus went even further: He boldly asserted that He not only knew the Father, but was sent by Him! He was once again claiming to be God! He was not simply *born* into this world like any other human; He was *sent* to earth by the Father. This means that He existed before He was born on the earth.

This was certainly a crisis hour in His ministry, and some of the leaders tried to have Him arrested; but “His hour was not yet come.” Many of the pilgrims put their faith in Him. It was a faith based on miracles, but at least it was a beginning (see [John 2:23](#); [6:2](#), [26](#)). Nicodemus first became interested in Jesus because of His miracles ([John 3:1–2](#)), and eventually he openly professed faith in Christ.

The Pharisees and chief priests, who presided over the Jewish religious estab-

lishment, resented the fact that the people were trusting in Jesus. Apparently these “believers” were not afraid to tell what they had done ([John 7:13](#), [32](#)). This time, the rulers sent members of the temple guard to arrest Jesus, but it was Jesus who “arrested” them! He warned them that they had but “a little while” to hear the truth, believe, and be saved (see [John 12:35ff](#)). It was not Jesus who was in danger, but those who wanted to arrest Him!

As in previous messages, the people misunderstood what Jesus was saying. Within six months, Jesus would go back to the Father in heaven, and the unsaved Jews would not be able to follow Him. What a contrast between “where I am, there ye cannot come” ([John 7:34](#)) and “that where I am, there ye may be also”! ([John 14:3](#))

Had these men been willing to do God’s will, they would have known the truth. Soon it would be too late.

The End of the Feast: Division ([John 7:37–52](#))

The last day of the feast would be the seventh day, a very special day on which the priests would march seven times around the altar, chanting [Psalm 118:25](#). It would be the last time they would draw the water and pour it out. No doubt just

as they were pouring out the water, symbolic of the water Moses drew from the rock, Jesus stood and shouted His great invitation to thirsty sinners.

It has been pointed out that this “great day,” the twenty-first of the seventh month, is the same date on which the Prophet Haggai made a special prediction about the temple ([Hag. 2:1–9](#)). While the ultimate fulfillment must await the return of Christ to this earth, certainly there was a partial fulfillment when Jesus came to the temple. [Haggai 2:6–7](#) is quoted in [Hebrews 12:26–29](#) as applying to the return of the Lord.

Jesus was referring to the experience of Israel recorded in [Exodus 17:1–7](#). That water was but a picture of the Spirit of God. Believers would not only drink the living water, but they would become channels of living water to bless a thirsty world! The “artesian well” that He promised in [John 4:14](#) has now become a flowing river! While there are no specific prophetic Scriptures that indicate “rivers of water” flowing from the believer, there are a number of verses that parallel this thought: [Isaiah 12:3](#); [15](#); [32:2](#); [44:3](#); and [58:11](#); and [Zechariah 14:8](#). Note that [Zechariah 14:16ff](#) speaks about the future Feast of Tabernacles, when the Lord is King.

Water for drinking is one of the sym-

bols of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. (Water for washing is a symbol of the Word of God; see [John 15:3](#) and [Eph. 5:26](#).) Just as water satisfies thirst and produces fruitfulness, so the Spirit of God satisfies the inner person and enables us to bear fruit. At the feast, the Jews were reenacting a tradition that could never satisfy the heart. Jesus offered them living water and eternal satisfaction!

What was the result of this declaration and invitation? The people were divided: some defended Him and some wanted to arrest Him. Is He a “good man” or “a deceiver”? ([John 7:12](#)) Is He “the Christ”? ([John 7:31](#)) Is He the promised “Prophet”? ([John 7:40](#); [Deut. 18:15](#)) If only they had honestly examined the evidence, they would have discovered that, indeed, He was the Christ, the Son of God. They identified Jesus with Galilee ([John 1:45–46](#); [7:52](#)) when in reality He was born in Bethlehem (see [John 6:42](#) for similar reasoning).

The temple officers returned to the Jewish council meeting empty-handed. It certainly should have been relatively easy for them to arrest Jesus, yet they failed to do so. What stopped them? “Never man spoke like this Man!” was their defense. In other words, “This Jesus is more than a man! No mere man speaks as He does!” They were “arrested” by the Word of God,

spoken by the Son of God.

Again, the leaders refused to face facts honestly but passed judgment on the basis of their prejudices and their superficial examination of the facts. It is much easier to label people (and *libel* people!) than to listen to the facts they present. “So some of the people have believed on Jesus! So what? These common people know nothing about the Law anyway! Have any *important* people—like ourselves—believed on Him? Of course not!” They would use a similar argument to try to discredit the witness of the blind man that Jesus healed ([John 9:34](#)).

We should not be surprised when “the intelligentsia” refuses to trust Jesus Christ, or when religious leaders reject Him. God has hidden His truth from “the wise and prudent” and revealed it to “spiritual babes,” the humble people who will yield to Him ([Matt. 11:25–27](#)). Paul was a very intelligent rabbi when God saved him, yet he had to be “knocked down” before he would acknowledge that Jesus Christ was the resurrected Son of God. Read [1 Corinthians 1:26–31](#) to learn Paul’s explanation for the difficulty of winning “smart religious people” to the Saviour.

No doubt the rulers would have sent the guard out again, but Nicodemus spoke up. This man is found three times in John’s Gospel, and each time he is iden-

tified as the one “who came to Jesus by night” (see [John 3:1–2](#); [19:39](#)). No doubt Nicodemus had been doing a great deal of thinking and studying since that first interview with Jesus, and he was not afraid to take his stand for truth.

Nicodemus was sure that the council was not giving Jesus an honest hearing. The rulers had already passed judgment and were trying to arrest Him before He had even been given a fair and lawful trial! Perhaps Nicodemus had in mind such Old Testament Scriptures as [Exodus 23:1](#) and [Deuteronomy 1:16–17](#); [19:15–21](#).

What did Nicodemus want them to consider about Jesus? His Word and His works. It was Jesus the Teacher and the miracle worker who had attracted Nicodemus’ interest in the first place ([John 3:2](#)). In fact, Jesus had pointed to His works as proof of His deity ([John 5:32](#)); and He repeatedly urged the people to pay attention to His words. The two go together, for the miracles point to the messages, and the messages interpret the spiritual meaning of the miracles.

You can hear the sarcasm and disdain in the reply of the rulers: “Are you a lowly and despised Galilean too?” They refused to admit that Nicodemus was right in asking for a fair trial, but the only way they could answer him was by means of ridicule. **This is an ancient debate trick:**

when you cannot answer the argument, attack the speaker.

They challenged Nicodemus to search the prophecies to see if he could find any statement that a prophet would come out of Galilee. Of course, Jonah was from Galilee; and Jesus said that Jonah was a picture of Himself in death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 12:38–41). Perhaps Nicodemus read Isaiah 9:1–2 (see Matt. 4:12–16) and began to trace the great messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. If he did, then he became convinced that Jesus of Nazareth was the very Son of God.

You cannot help but feel sorry for the people described in this chapter, people who responded to Jesus in the wrong ways. His half brothers responded with disbelief; various people responded with debate; and the result was division. Had they willingly received the truth, and had they acted with sincere obedience, they would have ended up at the feet of Jesus, confessing Him as Messiah and Son of God.

But people *today* commit the same blunder and permit their prejudices and superficial evaluations to blind them to the truth.

Don't let it happen to you!

The third stage of the Festival Cycle continues with the background of the exodus motif in mind, but the focus shifts from Passover to the Festival of Tabernacles/Booths (*Sukkoth*) and the wilderness experience. This section involves [John 7–9](#),¹²⁰ with the exception that the pericope of the woman taken in adultery ([7:53–8:11](#)) does not belong to this discussion. As indicated earlier, that pericope will be treated as an addendum or biblical insertion into the text. I regard the text as a fully canonical and inspired pericope but not as part of the evangelist’s original design. Therefore I have placed it after the Festival Cycle.

The month of Tishri was regarded by most Jews in Jesus’ day as the most popular or festive month of the year.¹²¹ Span-

¹²⁰ A number of scholars, such as Beasley-Murray and Carson, recognize the connection between chaps. 7 and 8, but few recognize the continuation of the argument in chap. 9. From my perspective chap. 9 is the sign climax of the two previous chapters. But also see my critique of Guilding in connection with the discussion of n. 250 on p. 328 and the bibliographical references there.

¹²¹ See Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.100. For an introduction to the role of tabernacles in understanding these chapters see Guilding, *Fourth Gospel and Jewish Worship*, 98–110. But

ning parts of our months of September and October, Tishri began on the first and second with the celebration of the Jewish New Year. It was followed on the tenth by the most revered day of the year, Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered the most holy place in the temple for the annual sprinkling of blood on the bar, slab, or cover of gold (often called the mercy seat), which sat atop the ark and was adorned with two cherubs ([Exod 25:10–22](#)). Although the ark had been lost (whether carried off or hidden is not clear) centuries earlier when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, the Jews continued the ceremony of Atonement in the second temple by sprinkling the blood on the stone where it was imagined the ark would have been placed.¹²²

Five days after this holy day the Jews held a celebration for eight days. Falling as it did at the end of the grape, fruit, and

also see my critique of Guilding in connection with the discussion of n. 250 on p. 328 and the bibliographical references there.

¹²² For the fascinating theory of L. Ritmeyer that the great stone in the Muslim Dome of the Rock bears evidence of where the ark originally was set, see “The Ark of the Covenant: Where It Stood in Solomon’s Temple,” *BARev* 22 (1996): 46–55, 70–73.

olive harvest (not wheat), Tabernacles was a time of camping for Israel. Particularly in Jerusalem, visitors set up booths all over the city in remembrance of the years when Israel wandered in the wilderness. The festival originally lasted for seven days (cf. [Deut 16:13–15](#); [Ezek 45:25](#)), but later an eighth summary day or Solemn assembly was added that brought together the reflections of Israel’s history and hopes for Israel’s future (cf. [Lev 23:36](#); [Num 29:35–38](#); [Neh 8:18](#)).¹²³ In the evenings lamps and torches were lit to commemorate God’s leading of the people at night by a pillar of fire ([Exod 13:21](#)). It is extremely important for interpreters of John to note this context for Jesus’ proclamation as the Light of the world (cf. [John 8:12](#); [9:5](#)).

In our Lord’s day the festival had also become a time of expectation and hope that the Messiah would appear and rescue the people from their Roman conquerors. Moreover, it clearly had become a festival that reminded the people of the conflict of the Pharisees with the Sadducees in the time of Alexander Janneus and Queen Alexandra in respect to the water festival (to be discussed at [7:37](#)).¹²⁴

¹²³ See Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.242.

¹²⁴ For an excellent discussion on tabernacles of the Feast of Tabernacles,” *CBQ* (1960): see G. MacRae, “The Meaning and Evolution 251–76.

7:37–38 The next three verses of the Gospel¹⁵¹ draw our attention to one of the most memorable parts of the Festival of Tabernacles, the seven-day water ceremony and the prayers for rain. On each of the seven days prior to the final day (the added day), priests drew water from the Pool of Siloam and carried a golden pitcher full of the water to the temple and then around the altar with the high priest leading the way. As the priests neared the water gate, the shofar was blown, and then the psalms of praise and thanksgiving were sung to God for the harvest (Pss

¹⁵¹ These verses have been the subject of a great deal of discussion. For a review of the patristic discussions see J. Menard, “L’interprétation patristique de Jean VII, 38,” *Revue de l’Université d’Ottawa* 25 (1955): 5–25. For other representative points of view see Z. Hodges, “Problem Passages in the Gospel of John: Part 7: Rivers of Living Water—John 7:37–39,” *BSac* 136 (1979): 239–48; J. Blenkinsopp, “The Quenching of Thirst: Reflections on the Utterance in the Temple, John 7:37–9,” *Scripture* 12 (1960): 39–48; M. Boismard, “De son ventre couleront des fleuves d’eau (Jo. VII, 37–38),” *RB* 65 (1958): 523–46; A. Corell, *Consummatum Est*, 60–62; K. Kuhn, “St. John vii. 37–38,” *NTS* 4 (1957): 63–65, and Blenkinsopp, “John vii. 37–39: Another Note on a Notorious Crux,” *NTS* 6 (1959): 95–98.

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113–118). As the ceremony developed, the Pharisees, who were primarily urban dwellers,¹⁵² insisted that a significant emphasis should be placed on the petition for rain because by this time of year (the fall) their cisterns would nearly be empty after the dryness of summer. Such symbolism carried the meaning beyond the

¹⁵² See L. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees: The Sociological Background of Their Faith* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938). In a captivating study Finkelstein argued that the Pharisees were primarily oriented to urban environments whereas the Sadducees were primarily rural absentee landowners. The sociological conservatism of the Sadducees thus led them to resist changes the urban-oriented Pharisees sought to infuse into Israel’s worship practices. His view was that much of the conflict between these two sects of Judaism could be understood not merely as a clash of theologies but also as a clash of cultural orientations. Finkelstein undoubtedly pushed the implications of his arguments too far, but his understanding of cultural differences between the two groups undoubtedly is a reasonable thesis. The Pharisees’ ability to adjust to changing social conditions after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple undoubtedly led to their continuation and the demise of the land- and temple-oriented sect of the Sadducees.

emphasis of the desert experience, and the harvest symbolized in the citrus symbols that were raised in thanksgiving to God for the recently gathered fruits (cf. [Zech 14:16–19](#); *m. Sukk. 5:1*).¹⁵³

The Sadducees in general resisted such a changed emphasis in Sukkoth as revisionist, and the issue came to a head in the time of the Sadducean high priest and king Alexander Janneus. Angered by the Pharisees, he poured out the water at his feet rather than making an offering of it and raising his arm in solemn affirmation of having delivered the petition on behalf of the people. This act so infuriated the Pharisees that they pelted the high priest with the citrons, the primary symbol of the Sadducean emphasis on thanksgiving.

¹⁵³ For a brief summary of the celebration of Booths see C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 157–59. For the extended statement see the Sukkah tractates in H. Danby, *The Mishnah*, 172–81. For further details related to the development of the traditions concerning the Festival of Booths and the conflict between the Pharisees and Sadducees see G. MacRae, “Meaning and Evolution of Tabernacles,” 251–76, and J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege/Oxford University Press, 1940), 418–25. Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.372.

ing. A rapprochement was not effected until after the death of Janneus when his wife, Alexandra Salome, made peace with the Pharisees in exchange for their support of her remaining queen of the land and her son’s being given the high priesthood. The triumph of the Pharisees in this event meant that by the time of Jesus the Pharisaic water prayers were firmly established in the festival.

For six days the water parade took place once each morning. Then on the seventh day it was repeated seven times. On the eighth day there was no water ceremony, but it was a solemn time of reflection and prayer. Whether the events in [John 7:37–39](#) took place on the seventh or eighth day is not clear because either day could technically be called “the last and greatest day” ([7:37](#)) since the eighth day was not really an original part of Tabernacles.¹⁵⁴ Whichever day is in mind here, Jesus’ act was remarkable. He stood up and cried out (*krazein*) in solemn announcement ([7:37](#); cf. [7:28](#)), “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me.”¹⁵⁵ The

¹⁵⁴ The expression “the great day” is not specifically found in the Jewish sources though either the seventh or eighth day could be so designated depending on one’s point of view.

¹⁵⁵ The Greek punctuation of the remainder of vv. [37–38](#) has been debated by scholars. The

impact of that announcement must have been stunning. It was a magnificent model of contextual preaching and teach-

reading in the NIV is one major option. This option was supported by the Western church fathers including Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus. The other is a rather rough chiasmic parallelism:

If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me,
And let him drink, the one who believes in me.

This view was supported by the Eastern church fathers including Origen. Both forms have stalwart modern supporters. The major difference is that in the chiastic form the emphasis falls on Jesus as the source of water flowing to the believer, whereas the form in NIV carries the argument a stage further. In that case believing supplies the resource of living water in the believer. The chiastic form would begin a new sentence, "As the Scripture says." My own preference is for the form in the NIV for reasons detailed by G. Fee, "Once More—John 7:37–39," *ExpTim* 89 (1978): 116–18, where he argued that the opening words of v. 39 are generally employed to refer to Jesus' teaching and not to Scripture as some other person. The statement in v. 38 would then be a statement of Jesus, who cites the Scripture in his support. Cf. also Carson, *John*, 322–25. Contrast Beasley-Murray, *John*, 114–17. See the excellent summaries in Brown,

ing.

The exact scriptural text to which Jesus was referring when he spoke of the Scripture (7:38) is not immediately clear, though many water texts come to mind, including the water flowing from the rock in the Exodus story and the reflection in Ps 105:40–41, where bread and water are linked (cf. Exod 16:12; 17:6; Neh 9:15; Ps 78:15–16, 24–25; Isa 48:21). The flowing water as a symbol of God's provision is likewise epitomized in Ezekiel's temple vision, a picture also employed in the last chapter of the Johannine Apocalypse (cf. Ezek 47:1–12; Rev 22:1–2; cf. also *t. Sukk.* 3:3–18). The linkage of water and salvation is reminiscent of Isa 12:3, and the connection between flowing water and Israel's hope is a reminder of Zech 14:8.¹⁵⁶

John, 1.320–23; Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2.152–54.

¹⁵⁶ Concerning John's reference to possible OT and other Jewish quotations see E. Freed, *Old Testament Quotations in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 22–38; F. F. Bruce, "The Book of Zechariah and the Passion Narrative," *BJRL* 43 (1961): 348; M. Boismard, "Les citations targumique du quatrième évangile," *RB* 66 (1959): 374–78; J. Danielou, "Joh 7, 37 et Ezéch 4, 1–11," in *SE III*, ed. F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), 158–63. See also E.

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The Greek for “within him” (7:38) is literally “out of his belly [*koilia*].” The belly, the deep cavity in a human being, was regarded by the ancient Hebrews as the seat of the emotions.¹⁵⁷ It can carry a negative sense with the meaning of “stomach” (cf. [Mark 7:19](#); [Phil 3:19](#)), or it can also mean “womb” ([John 3:4](#)). Some interpreters, both ancient and modern, have seen a connection between this statement and the piercing of Jesus’ side by the soldier with the consequent flow of blood and water ([19:34](#)). Although the ideas are somewhat parallel in that Jesus is the great source of life, it is pushing the argument to see such a direct connection between these two texts, as was suggested by Schnackenburg.¹⁵⁸

7:39 In reflecting on the events surrounding the founding of the Christian community, the evangelist could not help but comment on this important statement. He saw in Jesus’ words a foreshadowing of the era when the Spirit would be given, a time such as that anticipated in [Isa 44:3](#) when the pouring out of God’s

Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 21, n.13.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. [Str-B 2.492](#); J. Behm, “κοιλία” (*TDNT* 3:787–89); can be equiv. of καρδία (“heart”).

¹⁵⁸ See Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2.156, 478, n.81.

Spirit would be like the pouring out of water on the parched earth. Undoubtedly John believed Jesus was speaking of the postresurrection era after Jesus had breathed on them the promised Spirit ([20:22](#)), which he had earlier foretold would be given to his followers (cf. the five Paraclete/Spirit sayings of the Farewell Cycle in [14:15–16:12](#)).¹⁵⁹ At this point the Paraclete’s (Counselor’s) provision could not be realized because Jesus had not yet been “glorified” ([7:39](#)), the all-encompassing Johannine term for the

¹⁵⁹ Haenchen notes: “John is not speaking of the third person of the trinity,” but he settles for a more general idea of spirit ([John, 2:17–18](#)). One could argue that the formula known as the third Person of the Trinity was a later theological identification, but such a theological distinction seems both unnecessary and unwarranted. What John was talking about was the era of the Spirit in the time of the church. While Haenchen does not capitalize “spirit” here, the present commentator does so, in harmony with most translations. For John the Spirit was not just some generalized spirit related to the divine reality. Contrast S. Hooke, “[The Spirit Was Not Yet](#),” *NTS* 4 (1963): 372–80; A. Wainwright, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1962), 261–63; H. Woodhouse, “[Hard Sayings—IX. John 7:39](#),” *Theology* 67 (1964): 310–12.

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unique, era-transforming events involved
in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the
Son of God.