



The Gospel of John - Chapter Seven

II. John 1:19-12:50 - The Signs of the Messiah (continues)

II.c John 5:1-10:42 - Mounting Jewish opposition, additional signs (continues)

Summary of Chapter Seven

Despite initially telling his family that he would not be attending the autumn festival in Jerusalem but would be staying in Galilee, Jesus did in fact travel and mid way through the weeklong festival he stood up in the temple courts to teach the crowds despite the opposition he knew he would face from the religious leaders.

Jesus shows himself first to be a disciple of God and not a disciple of the chief priests, Pharisees and scribes. But his claims go further still by clearly indicating that he is the Christ, causing uncertainty in the crowd as they start to debate the issues, arguing between what they have heard and seen of Jesus, and what they believe they know about his earthly origin.

The authorities try to have Jesus arrested but he evades capture not by escaping but with a cryptic message that indicates he came from the father and would be returning there. The fact that he continued to teach in the temple complex despite claims that the Jews were trying to kill him added further to the debate about who Jesus really is.

Having announced himself as the bread of life in the previous chapter, Jesus now states that he is also the source of living water and that all should come to him to have their spiritual thirst satisfied.

The chapter concludes with the chief priests and Pharisees criticising the temple police for their failure to arrest Jesus, with further criticism coming upon Nicodemus when he stated that Jesus should be heard before being dismissed as either an imposter or a blasphemer.

II.c.vi John 7:1-52 - Controversy at the Festival

Jesus once again travels from Galilee to Jerusalem to attend a festival, this time the festival of Tabernacles or Booths, an autumn celebration of God's good provenance in the harvest. The chapter starts with an interesting insight into the relationship with the other sons of Mary, Jesus reluctance to go to Jerusalem and their advice that he should.

Jesus does eventually go to the festival but apparently keeps a low profile because the authorities were trying to intercept him. The reaction of the crowd is mixed as some believe he is an imposter but others that he could indeed be a very special teacher despite his lack of rabbinical training. Jesus states that his teaching is from God and those who know God will accept his teaching as being true. He also challenges the crowd calling them law breakers as his opponents are trying to kill him, which is contrary to the Law of Moses.

Jesus' bold teaching in the face of opposition and the signs he has performed sparks a debate as to whether he could indeed be the Messiah. There are thoughts that the authorities actually know that Jesus is the Messiah and are trying to kill because of it. Others say that he cannot be the Messiah because they think they know his earthly origin. Jesus counters by saying that they should know where he is from because he speaks the words of God.

The religious leaders then despatch the temple police to arrest Jesus but he mystifies them with his reply about his death, resurrection and ascension which they take to mean that he will be leaving the region and perhaps going out to teach other Jews dispersed around the Roman Empire. Despite the attempts to arrest him, Jesus continues to speak out in the temple complex and invites believers to come to him for living water.

Again, the crowd is divided as to whether Jesus is who he claims to be. The temple police who were sent to arrest Jesus report back that they did not do so because no one had ever spoken the way Jesus had. The authorities counter their claims by saying they had been fooled by Jesus just as the crowds had been. The Pharisee Nicodemus speaks out saying that the law states that Jesus should at least be heard before being condemned, but those in authority overrule his counsel.

II.c.vi.1 John 7:1-9 - The Unbelief of Jesus' Brothers

There is a debate between Jesus and the other sons of Mary as to whether he should attend the forthcoming festival in Jerusalem. Jesus said that he did not intend to go as the time was not yet right. But his brothers urged him to go as they believed he should show more of his signs in order to win back the disciples who had deserted him as described at the end of the previous chapter.

However, Jesus did not come to win disciples but to do the will of his Father, and he describes how the time is right for his brothers because they were worldly, but it was not right for him because the world rejected his condemnation of them.

¹ After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judæa because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him.

John 7:1

After this. As he did at the beginning of both the previous chapters John indicates that a period of time had elapsed but that a chronological sequence is being followed.

Jesus had been causing concern for the religious leaders, referred to as the Jews here, in Jerusalem which was the principle city in Judæa to the point where they were looking for an opportunity to kill him: <<*But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him*>> (Matthew 12:14). Therefore, he had returned to Galilee to continue his ministry in that region.

² Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near.

John 7:2

The Jewish festival of Booths, also called Tabernacles, was celebrated in September or October, two months prior to the Feast of Dedication, which was also an eight-day festival to celebrate the rededication of the Jewish temple in December 164BC, after its desecration by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes IV in 167BC. This festival is mentioned in 10:22.

It is called the festival of Booths because people lived in leafy shelters to remember God's faithfulness to Israel during her wilderness wanderings: <<*You shall live in booths for seven days; all that are citizens in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God*>> (Leviticus 23:42-43). It was also a time of celebration and thanksgiving for the harvest: <<*You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing-floor and your wine press. Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. For seven days you shall keep the festival to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate*>> (Deuteronomy 16:13-15).

³ So his brothers said to him, 'Leave here and go to Judæa so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing; ⁴ for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.'

John 7:3-4

Jesus' brothers are mentioned elsewhere: <<*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?*>> (Mark 6:3), with James and Judas, known also as Jude, later becoming NT authors. His brothers are best understood to be other naturally born sons of Mary to her husband Joseph, for that is the ordinary and natural sense of the Greek *adelphoi* or brothers. However, Roman Catholics believe that Mary remained a perpetual virgin and did not have

any naturally conceived children, so they commonly explain this verse by saying that Joseph must have had other children from a previous marriage, or less frequently by saying that these must be Jesus' cousins. Jesus' brothers' advice stems from their unbelief (v.5), and reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of Jesus' messianic identity.

There is no requirement for Mary to have remained a virgin following the birth of Jesus. In fact, having a normal sexual relationship with her husband Joseph and bearing him children would be far more honouring to God than for her to have remained chaste.

That your disciples also may see the works you are doing. Jesus' family obviously knew of the signs attributed to Jesus and indeed had been at the wedding when he had turned the water into wine. However, they clearly did not yet comprehend the source of the signs or what they pointed to, perhaps believing him to be a clever illusionist or even a magician. They thought that if he went to the festival and performed more signs than the disciples who had deserted him because of his difficult commands to eat his flesh and drink his blood would return to him and his status as a Rabbi would be restored.

For no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. Jesus' fame would spread widely soon enough but during his ministry much of what he was doing was to be kept within the local community for Jesus' hour had not come and he did not want a confrontation with the Roman authorities until the time designated by his Father. Examples of Jesus wanting his work to be kept low key are evident throughout his ministry, such as the raising of Jairus' daughter to life: *<<He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat>>* (Mark 5:43), or on the occasion of Jesus' transfiguration: *<<Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!' When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen>>* (Luke 9:35-36).

If you do these things, show yourself to the world. The phrasing here confirms that his brothers do not really accept that Jesus was performing the signs that he is reported to be doing.

⁵ (For not even his brothers believed in him.)

John 7:5

So real and genuine was Jesus' humanity, and so well hidden was his deity before he began his earthly ministry, that even those who had lived in the same house with him for nearly 30 years did not know who he was - not even his brothers believed in him: *<<When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind'>>* (Mark 3:21). They lived and ate and slept in the same rooms as the eternal Son of God and did not know it.

⁶ Jesus said to them, 'My time has not yet come, but your time is always here.

John 7:6

My time in John probably refers to the Cross as confirmed on the day before his death: <<*He said, 'Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, "The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples"'*>> (Matthew 26:18). Jesus speaks at a deeper level that is misunderstood by his brothers. Your time then refers to 'your time to go up to the festival with the crowds who are going to Jerusalem'. In both cases the word time is *kairos* in Greek, meaning time that is suitable, right or opportune.

⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil.

John 7:7

The world cannot hate Jesus' brothers because they themselves belonged to the world; they did not yet believe in Jesus and were not under God's guidance.

It hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil. Jesus spoke out against anyone who was not working according to the will of God, irrespective of who they were or what power and influence they had. This made him very unpopular with the Roman authorities, some Jewish leaders and even the local population when he was critical of some of their actions and attitudes. Jesus will raise this again with his disciples: <<*If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you*>> (John 15:18-19).

⁸ Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come.' ⁹ After saying this, he remained in Galilee.

John 7:8-9

Jesus' statement, I am not going to this festival, should not be taken as a mistake by John or a falsehood by Jesus, even though John then records that Jesus did go up to the festival (v.10). The Greek present tense in v.8 can legitimately have the sense, 'I am not now going', indicating that Jesus did not go up to the festival in the way the brothers suggested, for they wanted Jesus to manifest himself to his contemporaries for secular reasons. In fact, many of the oldest and best manuscripts have *oupō*, Greek 'not yet', rather than simply *ouk*, Greek 'not', and that might have been the original reading, although the reading 'not' seems more likely to be original.

What seems most likely is that when Jesus made the statement to his brothers he only had their word that he should go, and he rejects them as a source of guidance. The fact that he does actually go to the festival suggests that he received instructions from the Father to go after he spoke to his brothers. Such apparent inconsistency is a common feature in the lives of believers who are sensitive to the Lord's leading.

II.c.vi.2 John 7:10-24 - Jesus at the Festival of Booths

Jesus travelled to Jerusalem for the festival, where there was considerable interest among the crowds as to who this man was. Some were saying he was a good man while others accused him of being a deceiver.

He astonished the crowds with his teaching in the temple courts as they knew he had had no formal rabbinic training. Jesus confirms that the teaching is not his own but is from God, and that those who were of God would recognise it as such.

Jesus, probably speaking to his opponents in the crowd, spoke out against those who were trying to kill him, stating clearly that such action was contrary to the Law of Moses, and therefore they were the law breakers.

¹⁰ But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret. ¹¹ The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, 'Where is he?' ¹² And there was considerable complaining about him among the crowds. While some were saying, 'He is a good man', others were saying, 'No, he is deceiving the crowd.' ¹³ Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews.

John 7:10-13

Not publicly but as it were in secret. Jesus' secret arrival and departure are part of the theme in these chapters of where Jesus is from and where he is going. This motif is very significant theologically, for Jesus is from and is going to the Father. Later Jesus will state: <<*Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret'*>> (John 18:20). There is no inconsistency here as Jesus will speak quite openly and publically when he does arrive at the festival as will soon be recorded.

The Jews were looking for him at the festival and saying, 'Where is he?' The Jews here probably refers to his opponents, probably the religious leaders, who were not looking for Jesus to hear him but to try to stop him from teaching. They would look for him again at another festival, his final Passover celebration: <<*They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?'*>> (John 11:56).

He is deceiving the crowd. Some say Jesus is a good man, and others say he is a deceiver. The accusation that Jesus is a deceiver is a very serious charge, and it continued on in the polemic later between Jews and Christians. Labelling Jesus as a deceiver is probably like charging him as being a false prophet who should be put to death for leading Israel astray in its relationship with God; refer to Deuteronomy 13:1-11. Hence John notes the threats against his life. Later Jewish literature likewise calls Jesus a deceiver.

Yet no one would speak openly about him for fear of the Jews. Much of the debate about Jesus at this stage was held in private for anyone who may seem to

be a supporter of his would face sanctions from the religious authorities, referred to here as the Jews, which could even lead to them being excluded from all aspects of religious life in their communities.

The Jewish leaders understand the enormity of Jesus' claims and the foundational issues he raises. Their reaction is justified if Jesus' claims are indeed false. If Jesus' claims are not true, then he is not a harmless teacher who can be tolerated or ignored.

¹⁴ About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach.

John 7:14

Jesus went up into the temple. Just as people always go up to Jerusalem or down from there because of its high elevation above the surrounding landscape, so to people go up to the temple as it was the highest point in the ancient city. This is not a reference to the temple itself but the wider court complex where people gathered at festivals and on the Sabbath. Refer to the comments made on 2:14. This sudden appearance is again reminiscent of prophecy: <<*See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts*>> (Malachi 3:1).

¹⁵ The Jews were astonished at it, saying, 'How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?'

John 7:15

The Jews may include both the Judæan crowds and the Jewish authorities.

How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught? Jesus lacked formal rabbinic training, as did his disciples: <<*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realised that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognised them as companions of Jesus*>> (Acts 4:13), but his teaching and authority came from God: <<*Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes*>> (Matthew 7:28-29), and: <<*So Jesus said, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realise that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me*>> (John 8:28).

¹⁶ Then Jesus answered them, 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. ¹⁷ Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. ¹⁸ Those who speak on their own seek their own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and there is nothing false in him.

John 7:16-18

My teaching is not mine. Jesus again acknowledges the role of the Father in all that he does and says. Whether people follow Jesus depends on whether they are willing to obey him. Those who are morally willing to follow Jesus will be intellectually convinced that he is the way, the truth, and the life (14:6).

The teaching is from God. Jesus and the Jewish opponents agreed that Scripture is the word of God, but whose interpretation of Scripture is correct? Jesus does not point to confirmation from external sources. He points rather to the internal disposition of the individual, a heart that is God-centred. One who is centred in God rather than in oneself will be able to recognise God's voice in a teacher who has come from God. To choose to do God's will is not just a matter of moral purity as such; it is a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, a seeking first of the Kingdom. Such a heart is open to God, committed to him and his ways and willing to act on what is revealed.

Those who speak on their own seek their own glory. This is not just something that exists outside of the Christian church but is a flaw in the characters of so many who seek the power and status of public office that so often attracts them. Thankfully, God has always raised up sufficient genuine teachers who seek the glory of him. Jesus' humility and obedience allow him to speak with the authority of God, and these are the same qualities that enable a person to recognise God's word in Jesus' teaching.

The one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true. Jesus sees this a core value for a true believer - that they seek to bring glory to God in all that they do, say and are.

There is nothing false in him is something that Jesus recognised in Nathanael: <<*When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!'*>> (John 1:47).

When Jesus chose his early disciples he taught them to faithfully replicate what he had given to them: <<*Freely you have received; freely give*>> (Matthew 10:8b NIV). His disciples are to pass on faithfully what they have received from him: <<*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*>> (Matthew 28:19-20), and to ensure that it continues to be passed on by faithful teachers: <<*You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well*>> (2 Timothy 2:1-2). Therefore, the rabbinic ideal is not wrong, but it must be coupled with a heart that is open to God, in contact with God and guided by his Spirit.

¹⁹ 'Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?' ²⁰ The crowd answered, 'You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?'

John 7:19-20

The rabbinic teachers trace their teaching back to Moses himself, so Jesus turns from defending himself to attacking their claim to Moses. The foundation on which they build is wrong. Moses indeed gave them the law; Moses was a faithful teacher who passed on what he received from God, not caring for his own glory but for the glory of the one who sent him. The issue is not with Moses and the law; it is with the opponents who do not keep the law.

Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me? Jesus' charge that his opponents are not keeping the law turns up the heat of the debate. They believe Jesus does not keep the law, and now he says the same of them. Jesus brings two pieces of evidence to show they fail to keep the law. The first piece of evidence is that they desire to kill him. Jesus could be referring to a violation of the sixth commandment: <<**You shall not murder**>> (Exodus 20:13), but something much more profound is going on. If Jesus were a false prophet, he would have deserved to die according to the law; refer to Deuteronomy 13:5. But Jesus is actually the one of whom Moses wrote in the law. So their desire to put Jesus to death shows they violate their own law because the law itself witnesses to Jesus.

This is one of several instances where Jesus is falsely charged with demon possession: <<**But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons'**>> (Matthew 12:24), and: <<**The Jews answered him, 'Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?'**>> (John 8:48). The same charge was levelled against John the Baptist: <<**For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"**>> (Matthew 11:18). Examples of other false accusations include breaking the Sabbath (5:16), blasphemy (8:59), deceiving the people (v.47), being a Samaritan (8:48), madness (10:20), and criminal activity (18:30).

Who is trying to kill you? The crowd consisted of three general types: his opponents, other local inhabitants and pilgrims visiting Jerusalem for the festival. The first and some in the second group would have been aware of the commotion Jesus had caused on previous visits, such as his clearing the temple and healing on a Sabbath, and the authorities' resolve to kill Jesus. However, the pilgrims would probably be unaware of this and are likely the ones posing the question.

²¹ Jesus answered them, 'I performed one work, and all of you are astonished.

John 7:21

This one work is probably the healing of the invalid in 5:1-15, which had caused such commotion in the city during a previous visit by Jesus. The response of the general public is that all of you are astonished. All, that is, except those who were opposing him and seeking his death.

²² Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses, but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the sabbath. ²³ If a man receives circumcision on the sabbath in order that the law of

Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man's whole body on the sabbath? ²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement.'

John 7:22-24

This recalls Genesis 17:9-14, with Abraham representing the patriarchs, and the instructions given to Moses in Exodus 12:44, 12:48-49, and Leviticus 12:3. Jesus' argument is from the lesser to the greater: the Jews were to circumcise their males on the eighth day even if that day fell on the Sabbath, the lesser issue; if 'perfecting' one part of the human body on the Sabbath was legitimate, how much more the healing of an entire person, the greater issue.

Indeed, at the time John was writing, this very point was being argued by rabbis using the same type of argument. In circa AD90 Rabbi Eliezer said, 'If one supersedes the Sabbath on account of one of his members (in circumcision), should he not supersede the Sabbath for his whole body if in danger of death?' (Torah Shabbat 15:16). So there is an order of precedence not only between commands in the law, but for the sake of saving a life. Jesus, however, goes even further and says not only does the saving of a life take precedence, but so does doing good, which includes healing. This is an application of his principle that: <<*The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath*>> (Mark 2:27b). If this principle is accepted, then Jesus is not a lawbreaker.

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgement. Jesus is still speaking of the law, which requires fair judgements based on the facts and not on appearances: <<*You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people*>> (Deuteronomy 16:18). Paul also criticises believers who judge by appearances: <<*You are judging by appearances. If anyone is confident that they belong to Christ, they should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as they do*>> (2 Corinthians 10:7 NIV).

The right judgment of which Moses speaks includes such things as refraining from showing partiality. They are observing the letter of the law, but do not understand what the law is really about, neither in its witness to Jesus nor in its goal of expressing God's own love and mercy in the life of God's people. Making a right judgment is dependent on seeking God's will and not one's own. God's own judgement is always just: <<*His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked*>> (Isaiah 11:3-4), and that is what believers should model.

II.c.vi.3 John 7:25-31 - Is This the Christ?

The people of Jerusalem now question Jesus' Lordship on the basis of where he has come from. They think that the Messiah's origin will be unknown; so since they know where Jesus is from, he is disqualified (v.27). Later, others among the crowd

state their belief that the Messiah's origin is known and then disqualify Jesus because they think he comes from Galilee (vv.41-42). Neither of these opinions is accurate, which reveals the confusion and ignorance of the people, who, like the opponents, are judging by appearances rather than with right judgment.

²⁵ Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill?' ²⁶ And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah?

John 7:25-26

The people of Jerusalem distinguishes those in the crowd who were locals as opposed to the pilgrims in the city for the Festival. These people would have heard of what Jesus had done on previous visits and had obviously started to debate the possibility that their Messiah had come at last.

The authorities here probably refers to the Sanhedrin, the religious council which comprised of seventy members, mostly Sadducees including the High Priest but with a significant minority of Pharisees. The crowd started to ponder the idea that their leaders did in fact know that this is the Messiah and yet he is the man whom they are trying to kill. John does not record why the crowd thought they would want to extinguish the light they had waited so long for: <<*he says, 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth'*>> (Isaiah 49:6).

²⁷ Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.'

John 7:27

Yet we know where this man is from. Some rabbis taught that the Messiah would be wholly unknown until he set out to procure salvation for Israel. Others, however, were sure about his birthplace as is indicated by the report of the chief priests and scribes to Herod recorded in Matthew 2:1-6.

²⁸ Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, 'You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. ²⁹ I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.' ³⁰ Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.

John 7:28-30

You know me, and you know where I am from. Jesus had already told them that he was from the Father: <<*And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf*>> (John 5:37a), and comes with his full authority: <<*All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*>> (Matthew 11:27).

I have not come on my own. Jesus was not on his own for he had the Holy Spirit within him: <<*In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased’*>> (Mark 1:9-11).

The one who sent me is true. This speaks of the faithfulness and righteousness of God, who can always be relied upon: <<*They in their turn said to Jeremiah, ‘May the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act according to everything that the Lord your God sends us through you’*>> (Jeremiah 42:5). Jesus naturally has the same characteristics: <<*And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation*>> (Revelation 3:14).

You do not know him. Jesus shows them that, despite their beliefs as the chosen people of God, they have never really understood who he is, what he wants from his people, or what he really represents.

I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me. Once again, Jesus confirms that he has come from God and that he has a truly intimate relationship with him.

They tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. In context, this could be the ordinary people in the crowd rather than the authorities that were trying to seize Jesus. There is no indication that Jesus tried to evade capture, just that the people were prevented somehow from carrying it out. The temple police would later have similar difficulties because of what Jesus said to them but here it may have been intervention by the Holy Spirit because it was not time for Jesus to be arrested.

Because his hour had not yet come shows Jesus’ strong awareness of God’s providential direction of the circumstances of his life; his enemies could not capture or harm him until ‘the hour’ of his arrest, crucifixion, and death, as ordained by God. God the Father would not allow these things to happen until the earthly ministry of Jesus, as God the Son, was complete.

³¹ Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, ‘When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?’

John 7:31

Since the Messiah would be a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-18), and Moses performed many miraculous signs at the Exodus, as recorded in Exodus Chapters 7-11, the Messiah was expected to perform miracles as well: <<*So they said to him, ‘What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat”*>> (John 6:30-31). In any case, it would have been natural for people to wonder, after witnessing Jesus’ miracles, if he is indeed the Messiah.

II.c.vi.4 John 7:32-36 - Officers Are Sent to Arrest Jesus

The religious leaders dispatch the temple police to arrest Jesus because of the commotion his teaching was causing. When they came to Jesus he speaks cryptically about his return to heaven, somewhere the unbelievers cannot follow him. They believe he is speaking literally and start to ponder the idea that he is going to leave the region to teach Jews and Gentiles in other parts of the Empire.

³² The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent temple police to arrest him.

John 7:32

The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering such things about him so they were determined to find a way to stop them before the rumours went too far.

The chief priests and Pharisees, representing the Sanhedrin, deployed officers or temple police to arrest Jesus. The temple police were drawn from the Levites and were charged with maintaining order in the temple precincts. The order to arrest Jesus implies that they planned to allege criminal activity on his part.

³³ Jesus then said, ‘I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. ³⁴ You will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come.’ ³⁵ The Jews said to one another, ‘Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? ³⁶ What does he mean by saying, “You will search for me and you will not find me” and, “Where I am, you cannot come”?’

John 7:33-36

I will be with you a little while longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. Jesus is clearly speaking of his death, resurrection and ascension back into heaven but no one had been able to interpret this from the Scriptures and therefore this made no sense to even these learned men.

The mystery deepens even further for them when he says you will search for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come, which is not only a reference to the fact that Jesus must face this alone but it also indicates that those who fail to believe in him will never enter the presence of God.

People misunderstand Jesus’ statement in v.34, as noted elsewhere in 3:4, 4:15 and 6:52. The Dispersion, Greek *diaspora*, was a common Jewish expression to refer to all the Jewish people scattered throughout the Roman Empire, and even beyond the bounds of the Empire, but not living in Palestine itself. Many years later, Jesus’ brother would write to these people: <<*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings*>> (James 1:1).

Teach the Greeks. Not only did they believe that Jesus would speak with the Jews in foreign lands but that he would also teach the Greeks the ways of God. The

Jews always required Gentiles to become proselyte Jews before they could be taught the Scriptures and the thought of someone teaching them in this way would have been abhorrent. This was a problem that would continue to plague the early church as many Jewish Christians tried to convert Gentiles to Judaism before becoming Christians. Paul goes into great detail about this, particularly in his letter to the Galatian churches. Yet it was always in God's plan that the Messiah would go to the Gentiles: *<<I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness>>* (Isaiah 42:6-7 NIV), or at least his message would go to them for his teaching was taken later by others.

II.c.vi.5 John 7:37-39 - Rivers of Living Water

On the last day of the festival, despite the attempts to arrest Jesus, he again addresses the crowd in the temple courts, speaking of the living water that he will provide, a reference to the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The imagery presented by Jesus here has eschatological overtones with links to Ezekiel Chapter 47. John will return to this theme in his final book: *<<Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations>>* (Revelation 22:1-2).

This invitation to come and drink is the climax of a series of references to water in this Gospel: the water turned to wine in Chapter 2; the water of the new birth in Chapter 3; the living water of Chapter 4; the cleansing water of Beth-zatha in Chapter 5; and the calming of the waters in Chapter 6. All of these have revealed Jesus as the agent of God who brings God's gracious offer of life.

³⁷ On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me,
³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."³⁷

John 7:37-38

The great day. While v.14 makes reference to *<<the middle of the festival>>*, this is now the last and greatest day of the festival of Tabernacles: *<<For seven days you shall present the Lord's offerings by fire; on the eighth day you shall observe a holy convocation and present the Lord's offerings by fire; it is a solemn assembly; you shall not work at your occupations>>* (Leviticus 23:36). Jesus' invitation refers back to OT prophetic passages such as: *<<With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation>>* (Isaiah 12:3), and: *<<Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price>>* (Isaiah 55:1).

This festival was one of great joy and celebration. On each day of the festival there was a procession of priests to the pool of Siloam to draw water. The priests returned to the temple, where the water was taken in procession once around the altar with the choir chanting Psalms 113-118, and then the water was poured out as a libation at the morning sacrifice. On the seventh and final day of the festival the priests processed around the altar with the water not once but seven times. This is why John refers to it as the great day.

He cried out. Using the same Greek word *krazo* as he did in v.28, John indicates that, at this high point of the festival, Jesus dramatically cries out loudly. If he spoke this invitation during the revelry, he would have to shout just to be heard. It also gives an allusion to the image of Wisdom, calling out, inviting all mankind to come and drink as in Proverbs Chapters 8-9.

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, that is, those who thirst for God, as discussed in comments on John 4:14. By stating anyone, Jesus' invitation is both global and individual. However, there has to be spiritual thirst for a person to respond, something that is in everyone yet not all perceive it as such. What does one thirst for? What does one really desire? Sin is so often the relief from this thirst in something other than God.

Let the one who believes in me drink. This verse indicates a staged process. Those who wish to seek God should come to Jesus. Once they believe and accept that Jesus is their Lord and Saviour then they can drink from the well of life.

To come to Jesus and drink means to believe in him, to enter into a trusting, ongoing personal relationship with him. Both the image of 'coming' to Jesus as one would come to a person and the image of drinking imply not mere intellectual assent but a wholehearted personal involvement and participation. Here, Jesus is fulfilling the role of God, of whom it is written: **<<for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them>>** (Isaiah 49:10). His offer shows he is far more than just a prophet or an agent; here it is God himself offering life. Although the call to come to Jesus to drink will be issued again at the end: **<<The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift>>** (Revelation 22:17), the reality is that it is already available in Jesus in this present age.

Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water. Although there is no specific Scripture passage from the OT that matches Jesus' words here, he is apparently giving a summary of the teaching and implication of several passages that picture the inward work of God in a believer as a river of water flowing out to bring blessing to others: **<<Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life>>** (Proverbs 4:23), and: **<<The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail>>** (Isaiah 58:11). However, God is referred to as living water: **<<O hope of Israel! O Lord! All who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be recorded in the underworld, for they have forsaken the fountain of living water, the Lord>>** (Jeremiah 17:13).

³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 7:39

The Spirit, which believers in him were to receive. Those who come to Jesus will be endowed with the Holy Spirit: <<Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'>> (Acts 2:38).

As yet there was no Spirit does not mean that there was no work of the Holy Spirit in the world prior to Jesus' resurrection, for already in the NIV translation of Genesis 1:2 the Holy Spirit was present in the world: <<the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters>>. Refer also to Genesis 6:3 and 41:38, Exodus 31:3, and Numbers 11:25. Some OT verses even speak of the Spirit of God at work within believers prior to the coming of Christ, including Numbers 27:18, Deuteronomy 34:9, Ezekiel 2:2 and 3:24, Daniel 4:8-9, 4:18 and 5:11, and Micah 3:8. This verse must therefore mean that 'the Spirit had not been given' in the full and powerful sense that was promised for the new covenant age: <<A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances>> (Ezekiel 36:26-27), <<Then afterwards I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit>> (Joel 2:28-29), and: <<When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'>> (John 20:22). This came to pass on the Day of Pentecost and is recorded in Acts 2:1-13.

Jesus, in offering the Spirit, is claiming to be able to satisfy people's thirst for God. The cries of the psalmists are answered. David prayed: <<O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water>> (Psalm 63:1). The sons of Korah sang: <<As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?>> (Psalm 42:1-2). Both of these psalms go on to speak of meeting God in the temple. David has seen God in the sanctuary: <<So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory>> (Psalm 63:2), and the sons of Korah speak of: <<These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival>> (Psalm 42:4). When Jesus cries out at the end of the Festival of Tabernacles on this particular day, the worshippers meet God in his sanctuary in the person of his Son. The longing for God is met with God's invitation to come and be satisfied. In Jesus, God's own desire for man is expressed and the desire of man for God is met. All that the temple represented to the Jewish nation is now found in Jesus.

Jesus was not yet glorified. Jesus would be glorified when he returns to his Father: <<After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him>> (John 17:1-2).

II.c.vi.6 John 7:40-44 - Division among the People

The crowd start to discuss the merits of Jesus' identity. Some believe that he could be the promised Prophet or even the Christ, but others dispute this based on their supposed knowledge of Jesus' earthly origin.

⁴⁰ When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, 'This is really the prophet.' ⁴¹ Others said, 'This is the Messiah.' But some asked, 'Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?'

John 7:40-41

When they heard these words. Jesus' teaching about the giving of the Spirit had the required effect on some of the crowd and they started to come to an understanding that Jesus was sent by God.

The Prophet is the figure referenced in Deuteronomy 18:15-18. This Prophet and the Messiah were held to be different persons by some in 1st Century Judaism. Jesus is both.

The Messiah does not come from Galilee. Because of a warning to Joseph that Jesus' life was in danger, the family had returned to Nazareth in Galilee: <<But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judæa in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee>> (Matthew 2:22). Therefore, many people believed this was the place of his birth, whereas it was known the Messiah would be of the line of David and was to be born in Bethlehem in Judah (v.42).

These reactions reflect the variety of views within Judaism concerning the one, or ones, God would send to rescue his people. Despite this diversity, Jesus' words and deeds reveal him to be the expected one. Those in the crowd who recognise him as the Prophet or the Messiah still do not fully realise who it is they are dealing with any more than the Samaritan woman did when she accepted him as the Messiah. But such faith is the right start and true as far as it goes. The sower has sown seed, and some of it is producing fruit.

⁴² Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?' ⁴³ So there was a division in the crowd because of him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

John 7:42-44

Bethlehem, a village south of Jerusalem in the heart of Judæa, is clearly predicted as the Messiah's birthplace: <<But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one

who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days>> (Micah 5:2).

The Messiah is descended from David. It was long prophesied in Scripture that the Messiah would come from the line of David: <<*The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi.' They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David*>> (Ruth 4:17), combined with: <<*A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots*>> (Isaiah 11:1). Jesus' Davidic inheritance was taught in the early church: <<*Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judæa, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David*>> (Luke 2:4), and: <<*Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David – that is my gospel*>> (2 Timothy 2:8).

The Messiah comes from Bethlehem. The irony is apparent, for they did not realise that Bethlehem was in fact Jesus' birthplace. John's point is to reveal how ignorant those who rejected Jesus were and how unjust their rejection was.

The village where David lived was Bethlehem as confirmed in Scripture: <<*The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons'*>> (1 Samuel 16:1).

There was a division in the crowd because of him. Jesus taught that he would bring division in the world: <<*Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!*>> (Luke 12:51). The result of Jesus' clear teaching is division among the crowd. This is the judgment that comes when the light shines. Such judgment is part of the job description Jesus spelled out in his keynote address, as is evident throughout his ministry and as will be addressed more directly later at this festival.

Some of them wanted to arrest him. Another attempt is made to seize Jesus. Instead of receiving him as the Son of God whose word they should obey, they wanted to have him under their own will. This disordered desire is at the heart of human rebellion against God. However, they do not act on their desire: no one laid hands on him. Again the contrast between the desire of rebellious humanity and the sovereign outworking of God's plan is revealed.

II.c.vi.7 John 7:45-52 - The Unbelief of Those in Authority

The temple police report back to the authorities with regard to their failure to arrest Jesus based on his remarkable comments. The leaders then accuse both the police and the crowd in general of being deceived by Jesus' teaching and actions. Only Nicodemus speaks out in his defence saying that Jesus should be given a chance to be heard. He, too, is accused of being deceived, and he is told to read the Scriptures for, so they tell him, no prophet ever came out of Galilee.

⁴⁵ Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, ‘Why did you not arrest him?’ ⁴⁶ The police answered, ‘Never has anyone spoken like this!’

John 7:45-46

The temple police report back to the religious authorities that never has anyone spoken like this man is more profoundly true than these officers could have realised, for no other man in history has been fully God as well and thus able to speak with the infinite knowledge and authority of God himself. The effect of Jesus’ words on these men was so profound that there is a four day gap between them being sent to arrest Jesus and their return to the authorities, perhaps allowing time for reflection on what they had heard.

Why did you not arrest him? Following his final Passover meal and all that followed it that evening, the temple police, supported by others, would succeed in arresting Jesus, but even that would not be straight forward: <<*Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, ‘For whom are you looking?’ They answered, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus replied, ‘I am he.’ Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, ‘I am he’, they stepped back and fell to the ground*>> (John 18:4-6).

⁴⁷ Then the Pharisees replied, ‘Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? ⁴⁸ Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd, which does not know the law – they are accursed.’

John 7:47-49

Their own servants have born witness to Jesus, but the authorities are rigid in their opposition. They accuse their servants of having been deceived, a view expressed earlier by some in the crowd (v.12). They knew their servants had knowledge of the Scriptures as they were Levites, so they were surprised that they have been deceived. So they point to themselves as the ones learned in the Scriptures and capable of discerning the truth of religious teaching, and then they contrast their secure assessment with that of the crowd, which was ignorant of the law and therefore considered accursed.

This crowd, which does not know the law. The Pharisees were speaking about Jews who had known nothing but the law and the traditions that had been taught to them since birth. Yet they make this disparaging remark because they know that the ordinary people had not studied the Scriptures in the way they had and therefore they considered themselves to be the authority, and the rest to be ignorant of the Law of Moses.

Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? Although the majority of the Pharisees and chief priests would never come to believe in Jesus, some, like Nicodemus, would. However, not all would be as open about it as Nicodemus would become: <<*Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue*>> (John 12:42).

⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, ⁵¹ ‘Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?’

John 7:50-51

Nicodemus is the Pharisee who came to speak with Jesus one night as recorded in John 3:1-15. He argues from the fact that the law required that a person be given a fair hearing before being judged. Although there is no specific law to support Nicodemus, it does state that those investigating an alleged crime must: <<*make a thorough inquiry*>> (Deuteronomy 17:4b).

This passage reveals that the Pharisees are at the heart of the opposition to Jesus. Given the strong dualistic language John uses throughout his Gospel, it is important to see that he realises that even the most negative group, the Pharisees, contains a person who is open to Jesus. John focuses on groups, but he also keeps sight of individuals.

⁵² They replied, ‘Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.’

John 7:52

Surely you are not also from Galilee. It is likely they made this remark in a sarcastic tone, indicating that they thought Nicodemus was becoming a disciple of Jesus, and therefore like the ordinary people that were being deceived according to their understanding.

Search and you will see is an instruction to Nicodemus to search the Scriptures indicating that he might not have understood them properly.

Contrary to the Pharisees’ implication, prophets occasionally did arise from Galilee, such as Jonah: <<*He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher*>> (2 Kings 14:25), as Gath-hepher was about 3 miles northeast of Nazareth; and possibly Nahum: <<*An oracle concerning Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum of Elkosh*>> (Nahum 1:1), since Elkosh is located about 30 miles or 50km northwest of Capernaum.

The Pharisees may simply have been reflecting current bias against Galilæans, or John may be reporting their willingness even to distort the facts in order to make their arguments against Jesus.

Although most English translation states no prophet is to arise from Galilee, there are some manuscripts that refer to ‘The Prophet’ in keeping with v.40. However, Scripture does not provide any insight as to where the prophet referred to by Moses will arise from. Therefore, the opponents’ rejection of Galilee is based more on prejudice against that region than revelation.

The next section that commences in v.53 will be commented on in Chapter 8.