

# JOHN 7

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## **John 7:1–13. Pilgrimage to Tabernacles**

That the Feast of Tabernacles, or *Succoth*, is mentioned here places this story about six months after the events of the preceding chapter. Jesus, whose activities in Jerusalem have led to hostility, is naturally hesitant to return to the city even though all Israelite males are required to attend for the feast (Exodus 23:14–17). The connection between “the Jews” and Jerusalem once again demonstrates that in the Gospel of John, this phrase does not denote the Jewish people as a whole but rather the authorities and establishment connected with Jerusalem.

Jesus’s conversation with His brothers (Greek *adelphos*, meaning “a literal or figurative brother”) underscores the important fact that miracles do not produce faith. The Lord’s brothers have seen the miracles, but they do not grasp their significance or see Jesus for who He is. Jesus’s words in verse 8 have a double meaning: while He is not yet departing for Jerusalem, He will also not yet “go up” (Greek *anabainō*) to His Father, a common term for His Resurrection and ascension to heaven. This will not come until a later visit to Jerusalem for a festival.

## **John 7:14–24. Jesus Teaches at the Temple**

The Jewish leaders’ question about Jesus’s education tugs at another, deeper issue: His authority. Jesus recognizes this and appeals not to His educational pedigree but to the source of His teaching. He invites His listeners to put His teachings to the test by acting upon them. This invitation is extended to us, too—gospel learning is best accomplished experientially.

Jesus pivots sharply and confronts the leaders’ hostility head-on. His comments refer back to the healing and ensuing controversy in chapter 5, when He healed a man on the Sabbath. Jesus’s argument in 7:23

uses the *qal wahomer* (light and heavy) tactic common in later rabbinic debates: if something as small and seemingly nonurgent as a circumcision is permitted on the Sabbath, then surely something as important as a healing is also allowed. It is not the appearance of an action that is important but rather its true nature.

### **John 7:25–36. Confusion about Jesus’s Identity**

Once again, controversy erupts at the conclusion of Jesus’s teaching. Some listeners approach the truth, considering the possibility that Jesus perhaps is the Christ. But their prejudices and presuppositions prevent them from fully realizing the truth—surely the Messiah would not come from such an unassuming place as Nazareth. Jesus responds to this criticism by hinting that they are not fully aware of His divine origins. In verse 30, an arrest is attempted, but like the other attempts in the Gospel of John it fails because Jesus’s “hour was not yet come.” Although the means of protection are unclear, Jesus is impervious to human efforts to seize Him until He chooses to allow it.

Others are impressed by Jesus’s teachings and actions and begin to believe in Him. To forestall this, the local authorities send an attachment to arrest Him, but this, too, will be unsuccessful. Perhaps Jesus’s comments in verses 33–34 are a remark on the parties that seek Him to arrest him; as He knows, He will return to His Father shortly. But this statement further confuses the crowd, which once again fails to grasp the deeper meaning behind Jesus’s words.

### **John 7:37–44. Proclamation about the Spirit**

Jesus’s proclamation in verses 37–38 presents a number of ambiguities—it’s unclear if the source of the living water is Jesus or the believer and which scripture Jesus is referring to. It seems reasonable to expect that Jesus is the source of living water, as is the case in John 4:10–14, and that the scriptural quotation reflects a variety of passages about divinely given water in the Old Testament. The Evangelist recognizes that this statement is difficult to understand, so He has given us the interpretation in verse 39 that this proclamation refers to the gift of the Holy Ghost, which would be bestowed upon the faithful after Jesus’s Resurrection.

Many of the people present recognize the divine truth in Jesus’s words and believe in Him, but as before, many others are skeptical that Jesus the Nazarene could be the Messiah. Their comments about Bethlehem reflect the messianic expectations seen in Matthew 2:5–6 but also show that Jesus’s birth in Bethlehem was not public knowledge. For the third time in the chapter, an unsuccessful attempt is made to arrest Jesus.

### **John 7:45–53. Criticism from the Priests and Pharisees**

The attachment of guards that was sent out in verse 32 finally returns to the officials in verse 45, but they return empty-handed. The guards were obviously impressed by Jesus and have only this to offer as an

explanation for their failure to arrest Him. The Pharisees' exasperated question in verse 48 is ironic; in fact, one of them does believe in Him. Nicodemus speaks up in verse 50 to offer a brief defense of Jesus. His case is sound: the Torah requires jurors to hear both sides of a legal case before coming to a decision (Deuteronomy 1:16–17).

The frustrated rulers brush this objection aside; for the third time in this chapter, the possibility that Jesus is the Messiah is dismissed on the grounds of His Galilean origins. We should take caution that we do not fall into the same trap as these rulers. We should allow God's work to proceed in manners that may not conform to our expectations. Often God uses unexpected means—the “foolish [and] weak things of the world”—to accomplish His work, and if we are not prepared to humbly reassess our presuppositions, we may miss out on the full grandeur of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:27).

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