

## Notes on John 7

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### The Feast of the Tabernacles in Jerusalem – John 7

#### Discussion Regarding Jesus' Attendance of the Feast – 7:1-13

Verses 1,2

1. What feast was approaching, and where was Jesus at this time (vv 1,2)?
2. Explain what this feast was about (check Old Testament references).

#### *The Feast of the Tabernacles approaches.*

For a period of time, Jesus remained in Galilee, rather than Judea, because He knew that the Jews there were still wanting to kill Him (see 5:18).

However, the time came for the Feast of Tabernacles. At this feast people lived in booths, or temporary dwellings, as a reminder of the time when the Israelites lived in such circumstances after leaving Egypt (Lev. 23:33-43; Deut. 16:13-16; note vv 33-36,39-44). The feast lasted a total of eight days – seven days of living in booths, followed by a great assembly. It was one of the three annual feasts that all males were expected to attend, and was also a time of celebration of the harvest. As such, it involved much rejoicing and happiness.

Verses 3-5

3. What did Jesus' brothers want Him to do? (Thought question: Where else have we studied about Jesus' brothers?)
4. What did Jesus' brothers think about His claims?

#### *Jesus' brothers urge Him to attend the feast.*

Jesus brothers wanted Him to go to this feast and publicly prove to the people who He was. They said that, if He wanted to be publicly accepted, He had to act publicly and not remain in secret. Jesus had become increasingly well-known and had developed a reputation for miracles. His brothers apparently believed it was time for Him to step out into public and demonstrate the evidence for His claims in the most prominent place He could do it: in Jerusalem at a feast that would be attended by Jews from all over the nation and the world.

Yet they themselves did not believe on Him at this time. They may not have been openly antagonistic, but they at least harbored doubts. They were not confident He was who the crowds were saying He was. Perhaps they hoped He would convince them too. Or maybe they felt the family reputation was suffering because He made these claims but did not (in their eyes) convincingly prove them. Maybe the public exposure of the feast would settle the matter one way or the other. These brothers did later become believers and were influential in the early church – Acts 1:14.

Note that Jesus did have brothers. They must have been physical brothers, for they were surely not spiritual brothers, since they did not believe on Him. This proves Mary was not a perpetual virgin after Jesus was born. See notes and references on John 2:12.

Some have claimed that Jesus' brothers were numbered among His apostles, but these verses indicate that is not so. The apostles had been chosen long before this, and even at this point His brothers were unbelieving.

Verses 6-8

5. What reason did Jesus give why the world hated Him?

6. List two other passages that mention Jesus and/or His disciples rebuking people for their sins. (Thought question: What reaction may we expect when we do this?)

*Jesus explains that the time is not yet right for Him to make this public demonstration.*

Jesus explained that it was not yet time for Him to publicly manifest Himself in Jerusalem. He knew the world hated Him because of His teachings (i.e., they wanted to kill Him — v1). Eventually He would have to face them and be killed, but it was not yet time for that.

This reasoning did not apply to His brothers, however. They could go to the feast with no opposition or hatred, so He encouraged them to do so. There was no danger to them, because the world did not hate them. The world opposes, not its own, but those who dare to be different. Jesus was hated, because of His opposition to the sins of the “world.” But the brothers did not have this problem, because they were not yet convinced to follow Jesus’ example of opposing the world. Probably the brothers did not understand the significance of Jesus’ statement.

Note that Jesus did not compromise with sin. He plainly rebuked it, even if that meant people wanted to kill Him. Some people believe that Christian love requires us to keep quiet about sin and not tell people they are wrong. They say it is not “Christ-like” to condemn other religious people. Had Jesus held this belief, He could have avoided the kind of opposition He faced. He faced hatred and opposition because He did rebuke sin (cf. Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4). See notes on 6:66. Is it “un-Christlike” for us to do as Christ did?!

Some translations have Jesus saying that He was not going up to the feast. See notes on v10.

Verses 9,10

7. In what way did Jesus go to the feast?

*Jesus goes to the feast after the others had gone.*

Jesus remained in Galilee awhile. But after the brothers had gone to the feast, He also went up. But He went up secretly, not publicly. He did not take a large multitude of followers, openly declaring who He was. He went up quietly with no fanfare or other means of attracting attention. In short, He went, but not the way His brothers wanted Him to go.

In some translations, v8 has Jesus saying He would not go up to the feast. How could He go after saying He would not go? NKJV and other translations add the word “yet” (see ASV footnote). Hendriksen argues that there is as much evidence for this translation as for excluding the “yet.”

Or perhaps Jesus meant He would not go up in the *manner* the brothers wanted Him to go. He did not go and make a major spectacle to invite the crowds to examine the proofs of His claims. He went, but secretly, not openly. Or perhaps His comment meant that He would not go for the *whole* feast (which lasted seven days). V14 implies He went up in the middle of the feast.

The idea that Jesus would not go “yet” is implied, even if there is no word for “yet” in the original. Jesus is discussing the time of when He would (or would not) go. He had said, “I am not going” – i.e., at the present time I am not going – that is the significance of the Greek. This did not deny that He would go later. So the time element is involved in any case, implying He would not go at the present time. To go later would not contradict His statement. In any case, there was no intent to deceive.

Verses 11-13

8. What did the Jews at the feast wonder about Jesus (v11)?

9. What different views were expressed about Jesus by the people at the feast (v12)?

### ***Confusion and disagreement about Jesus among those at the feast***

Many Jews at the feast apparently also expected to see Jesus. They looked for Him and wondered where He was. His teaching and works had caused much interest among the people, both for Him and against Him. The people remembered things He had done at earlier feasts (chap. 2,5). They anticipated learning more about Him, and perhaps were eager or fearful of what might happen at this feast.

He was surely the topic of many conversations and much disagreement. Some claimed He was a good man, but others said He was deceiving the people. But no discussions were conducted openly, because people feared the Jews. They knew the Jewish leaders were opposed to Jesus. It is stated later that these leaders had declared that anyone who believed in Him would be put out of the synagogue. Statements like this demonstrate how powerfully the Jewish leaders controlled and censored even what the people discussed.

Note again that Jesus was clearly not an inoffensive character who avoided at all costs stirring up controversy or disagreements. Everywhere He went, people formed strong views about Him, pro or con. This often caused division among the people, and this division will be mentioned in succeeding chapters. As Christians, we should not enjoy strife; but we will find that if we stand up for Jesus' will, we too will often be a center of controversy.

And notice again that the people discussed the two basic alternative views of Jesus. If He is not who He claims to be, then He is a fraud and deceiver. In that case, He is not good at all. There is no point in claiming to believe in Jesus as a "good man," while denying the claims He made and allowed others to make that He is the Christ, the Son of God, God in the flesh.

### **Discussions at the Feast – 7:14-52**

Verses 14-16

10. What amazed the people about Jesus' teaching, and why did this amaze them?

11. Besides the things said here about Jesus, similar statements were made about whom?

12. Application: What lessons can we learn from these statements about Jesus and others?

### ***Criticism of Jesus' lack of formal training***

About the middle of the feast, Jesus began to teach in the temple. It seems that, at first, He did not identify openly who He was nor announce His presence to His disciples. So people did not seem to recognize Him. Even so, it was a bold thing to do, knowing the rulers wanted to kill Him.

The people were amazed at His teaching since He had never learned letters. This means He had not gone to any of the special Jewish schools for religious teachers. He had no "seminary" training. People today also tend to think that every preacher must have seminary training (cf. Acts 4:13). If a religious teacher lacks formal training, some people will automatically reject his teaching as lacking in authority or credentials. However, what guarantee is there that the seminary teaches the truth? Neither Jesus nor most of His apostles had formal training. Why then should people insist that preachers today have formal training?

Jesus' response was that He was not the originator of what He taught, but it was given Him by the One who sent Him (the Father in heaven, though Jesus did not yet mention this). The same fact explained the apostles' ability to teach. They were not teaching human ideas, so they did not need training in human schools. Their doctrines came from God, so all they needed was to know His will.

The same is true today except that, where Jesus and the apostles received information by direct revelation, we receive it from the Bible. If a person today studies and knows what the Bible teaches, that is all the training he needs to be a teacher of God's word. So, the issue is whether or not a man teaches what God has revealed. The way to determine whether or not a man speaks the truth is, not by his formal education, but by comparing His teaching to Scripture (Matthew 7:15-23; Acts 4:13; 17:11; Galatians 1:6-10; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

If individual Christians choose to operate schools or colleges, that may be fine, depending on how it is done. But there must never be any requirement that training at such schools is necessary for a man to be considered qualified to preach to God's people. Nor should people accept the teaching of a man because he has attended some school. A man's work should be evaluated in terms of whether or not he understands and teaches what God says in the Bible.

Verse 17

13. What must we do to know whether Jesus' teaching was from God (v17)? Why is this true?

14. Application: Explain the importance of v17, and tell what lessons we can learn.

### *The importance of an honest desire for truth*

Jesus then explained a necessary requirement for someone to know whether or not His teaching came from God. Contrary to what the people were wondering, the real issue here was not **how** Jesus learned these things. The real issue was whether or not He was teaching what God said. Was it from God or not?

As so often is the case, people raise issues that are not essential. As teachers, we need to do as Jesus did and turn the conversation to the issue that matters. What does it matter what the teacher's background is? The issue is whether or not he is teaching the truth!

If someone wants to know whether or not a teaching is true, he must **will to do** God's will. Often people reject truth because other things are more important to them than doing God's will. They are not really devoted to serving God as the number one priority in life. They prefer to do please themselves, please loved ones, pursue wealth, pleasure, etc. (see notes on John 3:19-21).

Such people may not admit or even realize what their real problem is. When confronted with God's will, they may make excuses for rejecting it. Like these Jews, they may say the teaching cannot be right, because the person who presented it is not qualified enough to speak on the subject. They may say, "My preacher says that's not the way it is, and he was trained at XYZ seminary." Hosts of similar excuses can be given. ("People can't understand the Bible alike anyway." "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." etc.)

But a fundamental reason why many people reject the truth, is that they simply are not devoted enough to really **doing** whatever God wants them to do. If you are willing to accept the truth, whatever it may be, and make whatever changes God may require of you, no matter what the cost, then you can learn God's will for your life. Otherwise, sooner or later His word will say something you don't like, and you will reject it.

Note the consequence of this to people who argue that it doesn't really matter whether we obey God, as long as we believe in Him. Jesus is here saying that, if you are not totally determined to **do** God's will, you may never even really **know** the truth, let alone believe it. If a person believes that you don't have to obey God, that very attitude itself keeps many people from even **knowing** what the truth is!

Verse 18

15. If one wants to be true to God, what must he do and what must he avoid (v18)?

***Teachers must also teach from proper motives.***

Not only must the hearers of God's word have proper motives, so also must the teachers. Instead of seeking their own glory, exaltation, and other selfish goals, they must seek the glory of the one who sent them.

One of the greatest dangers for teachers is having the wrong motive for our work. If hearers are not devoted to doing God's will, they may never learn the truth. Likewise, if teachers are not devoted to exalting God and His will, they may not teach the truth. And even if they taught the truth, but from a false motive, God would not bless them for their work.

Teachers must guard against a variety of impure motives. Some may teach doctrines to please the people, have a large following, and bring praises of men to themselves (2 Tim. 4:2-4; John 12:42,43; etc.). Others preach for money to become wealthy, so they preach whatever doctrine they think will bring in large contributions (1 Timothy 6:5-11; 2 Peter 2:15,16). Others preach doctrines that justify their own pleasures and immoral conduct (2 Peter 2:13). To be sure he is faithful and will receive God's reward, a teacher must above all else be devoted to pleasing and honoring God, not himself or men (Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6; 1 Corinthians 4:1-4).

Note that at times Jesus recognized the need to defend His own life, motives, and conduct in order to keep false accusations from leading people to reject what He taught. Sometimes we must do the same.

Verses 19,20

16. What questions did Jesus ask, and how did people respond (vv 19,20)?

***Jesus introduces the issue of their attitude toward the law and their desire to kill Him.***

Having defended His doctrine and motives, Jesus proceeded to point out the real reasons people were rejecting His teaching. It was not, as they pretended, because of any lack of qualifications in Him. As always when people reject truth, the problem was in the hearers. Some teachers, even when they teach the truth, may demonstrate attitudes that turn people away from the message. But if the message is true, the people should be honest enough to accept it despite the faults of the messenger. However, when Jesus was the teacher, the people had no grounds whatever to find fault in Him or His message. The fault was entirely in them. The same is true when people reject Jesus' teaching today.

Jesus had already proved that Moses testified about Him, so if they truly were following Moses' law they would have accepted Jesus (5:46,47). But they were not keeping the law given through Moses. This was their real problem and reason for rejecting Jesus. Even the law that they admitted was from God, still they did not obey that law. What are the chances they would obey further revelation when it came?

In citing Moses' law, Jesus was laying the groundwork to return to a discussion of their earlier criticisms of Him, claiming that He had broken the Sabbath (see v23).

He then asked why they wanted to kill Him. The people responded by denying any intent to kill Jesus. So, they dismissed Him as being demon-possessed to even think such a thing. Perhaps they answered so because they did not remember the rulers' plan to kill Jesus. Or, perhaps this was a cover-up. If so, by v25 of this chapter they had it figured out. Or perhaps this was just a cover-up — surely they would not admit it if they did intend to kill Him. In any case, it has already been clearly stated that they did intend to kill Him (5:18).

Note how, when people are in sin and refuse to repent, they will often attack the one who reveals their error. In this case, Jesus had pointed out the failure of the people to keep the Law of

Moses. Rather than acknowledge His criticism to be valid, they attacked Him as having a demon. This is the same treatment sinful people gave to Old Testament prophets and to New Testament apostles and prophets. It is the attitude that often leads to persecution of faithful teachers. And we may as well expect it to occur today, for it surely will come if we stand for the truth (Matthew 5:10-12; 13:21; John 15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; Romans 5:3; 8:17-39; 2 Corinthians 1:4-10; 4:17; 7:4; 2 Timothy 3:12; Hebrews 10:32-36; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 3:14-18; 4:1,15-19; 5:10).

Note further that it is proper, at times, not only to defend our own teaching and conduct, but then to point out the sins of those who are opposing the truth and show the reasons why they oppose it. This chapter begins a series of confrontations between Jesus and these Jews. Many object to such debating and confrontation, especially when a teacher begins to pointedly demonstrate that his opponents are in error. Yet, Jesus did it and so should we.

Verses 21-23

17. What work had Jesus done that caused them to marvel (v21)? How this had led them to seek to kill Him?
18. Explain in your own words Jesus' argument in vv 22,23.
19. Where else had Jesus discussed the Sabbath with the Jews? How does His argument here compare to His arguments elsewhere?

### *Jesus again defends His act of healing on the Sabbath.*

Jesus had asked why they wanted to kill Him, and they had implied that they sought to do no such thing (vv 19,20). However, the last time He had been in Jerusalem, the Jews had sought to kill Him for healing a man on the Sabbath. See notes on 5:10-18. Jesus here returned to that event and again defended His conduct. In so doing, He showed they were in error, while simultaneously reminding them that they did seek to kill Him.

First, He pointed out the miraculous nature of the healing. It caused them to marvel, and they ought to have believed in Him as a result. The very act for which they had condemned Him was a miracle – a miracle of healing. The purpose of miracles was to prove that a man spoke a message from God. If Jesus said it was right to heal on the Sabbath while doing a miracle, the miracle proved that God confirmed His message. So the very act that the people criticized had proved, of itself, that healing on the Sabbath was not wrong. Yet, the people completely overlooked the significance of the miracle and sought instead to kill Jesus.

Jesus then appealed again to their supposed respect for Moses' law (v19). They claimed to follow Moses, especially in his command about the Sabbath. But Moses also gave a command about circumcision (though it was actually given first to the fathers such as Abraham — cf. Gen. 17). The Jews gave great respect to the circumcision ritual, just as they did for the Sabbath. Circumcision was the sign a man was a Jew and one of God's chosen people. No one dared oppose this practice among the Jews.

But the circumcision command required a male child to be circumcised on the eighth day. This was a medical procedure. If that day fell on a Sabbath, they circumcised the child to obey the law. They did not refuse on the grounds that it was a medical procedure and involved "work," nor did they condemn people for doing this work on the Sabbath.

Jesus' point was that the Sabbath law did not forbid circumcision on the Sabbath, and they all knew that. In the same way, it did not forbid other forms of medical treatment and care for the sick. What Jesus had done in healing on the Sabbath was no more a violation of the Sabbath than circumcision would be. Yet, the people accepted the circumcision on the Sabbath, while condemning Jesus to death for healing on the Sabbath.

Again, Jesus was showing that the Sabbath law was never intended to forbid all forms of activity that anyone could classify as "work." Some needs and services rendered to others took precedence; they were exceptions to the Sabbath law, and everyone realized they were not forbidden. Hence, for the Jews or anyone today to argue that Jesus broke the Sabbath law is to

completely misunderstand the facts. What He violated was, not God's Sabbath law, but rather the Jews' human traditions about the Sabbath law.

Verse 24

20. What kind of judging is forbidden in v24, and what kind is commanded?

21. Application: Explain and give examples to show the difference between these two kinds of judging.

22. List other passages that talk about proper or improper judging.

23. Case Study: Whenever anyone uses the Bible to prove someone else is wrong spiritually, some people object saying Jesus said, "Judge not." How should we respond? (Note 7:7.)

### *Judge righteous judgment*

In condemning Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, the Jews had judged Him unrighteously. They were judging according to external appearance, not according to truth. It may have appeared on the surface that He had violated the Sabbath, but a righteous view of the event would have shown that he had not sinned. This statement shows again that what Jesus had done, when viewed properly (righteously), was not a sin.

Note that Jesus did not say that all judging was wrong. Many people today, whenever sin is condemned (especially their own sins), will say that Jesus said, "Judge not!" But Jesus never condemned all rebuking of sin. On the contrary, He and His apostles rebuked people frequently, and He commands us to do the same (see Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Prov. 10:17; 15:31-33). Those who use the principle of "judge not" to condemn everyone who rebukes their sins, need to reckon with Jesus' statement here in John 7:24. He here commands us to "judge with righteous judgment."

Nevertheless, there are principles we should follow when "judging." It must be "righteous," not according to appearance. This includes at least the following principles:

(1) Judging must be based on the real facts of the case, not on outward appearance. We must be sure we know what really happened and why, not just what may seem to have happened.

(2) Judgment must be based on the standard of God's word, not human doctrines, man's wisdom, or personal opinions (Matt. 15:1-14; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; Gal. 1:8,9; Prov. 17:15; Rom. 14:1-4,10-13; etc.) When people have sinned according to God's word, they need to be told they have done wrong. But people are not guilty of sin simply because they violate human tradition, man-made laws, or our own personal opinions. What Scriptural teaching is involved?

(3) Our own lives must be consistent with our judgments. If we condemn others for practices that we ourselves commit, then we condemn ourselves in condemning them (Matt. 7:1-6,12). This does not mean we should not rebuke the sin, but it means we need to clean up our own sins first (Rom. 2:1-3,17-24).

(4) We must speak from proper motives, sincerely seeking the well-being of everyone involved, not just to exalt self or win an argument or get vengeance on one we think has hurt us, etc. See 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Gal. 6:1; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; James 3:14-18; 1:19,20; Rom. 12:17-21.

In their criticism of Jesus, the Jews violated these principles of righteous judgment. In the first place, they were condemning Him on the basis of their own human traditions, nor on the basis of what God's law really said. In the second place, they did things on the Sabbath that were just as much "work" as what Jesus did, yet they realized their acts were not wrong. To condemn Jesus, when they did similar things, was unrighteous judgment.

We today must take care that we properly apply the principle that Jesus states here, whenever we rebuke other people for sin.

Verses 25,26

24. What did the people wonder about in vv 25,26?

### ***Questions regarding why the rulers did not confront Jesus***

Interestingly, some of the people now remembered that this is the one the Jews were wanting to kill! When Jesus had first mentioned this idea, they had, in effect, denied it (vv 19,20). But after He challenged their judgment of Him and showed that not all work on the Sabbath was sinful, they remembered that some had sought to kill Him. Note that those who remembered this were from Jerusalem, where the miracle of healing on the Sabbath had occurred. Perhaps the previous denial had been initiated by visitors from out of town who came for the feast. But as the discussion proceeded, people from Jerusalem recognized Jesus based on His actions at previous feasts.

Then the people observed that He was speaking openly and boldly and nothing was being done to stop Him. So they wondered if even the rulers knew He was the Christ. The implication is that, if they could prove He was not the Christ, they would stop Him, probably by killing Him as they intended. Since the rulers did nothing, could that mean they thought He might be the Christ?

Actually the rulers were about to take action (see v32). Perhaps He had been gone from their territory so long, and had just recently returned, so they were not fully aware of Him yet. But other passages also show that they were hesitant to act because they feared the people. Furthermore, they feared causing turmoil, especially during a feast, that might cause the Romans to intervene in their affairs.

Note that, when religious leaders allow people to teach and do not actively oppose them, others will likely assume that we endorse them. This may not be correct, as in this case, but people will still think it. That is why the church, for the sake of influence and reputation, must take care who we allow to preach and teach in our assemblies and classes. If people, who are known to hold erroneous views, are allowed to teach unopposed, people will assume the church accepts the view. Cf. 2 John 9-11.

Verse 27

25. Why did some think Jesus could not be the Christ (v27)? (Thought question: Where else were similar issues raised?)

### ***Questions regarding Jesus' origin***

Jesus' origin seemed to create serious problems for some people (see. 6:42; 7:41,42). They knew He was from Nazareth, and they knew His family. This caused some of them to stumble, because they did not see how such a great leader could come from such humble origins. Others knew the Christ would be a descendant of David from Bethlehem, so they rejected Jesus because He was from Galilee (see notes on vv 41,42,52). Still others seemed to think the Christ would just appear to take leadership with no known origin at all (cf. Dan. 7:13?).

Actually, Jesus fulfilled all prophecies regarding His origin, but the people were just ignorant either of what the prophecies meant or else of the facts of Jesus' origin. Specifically, He did, in a sense, appear from unknown origins, for He was from heaven and was eternal. He came to earth as a man miraculously, but had existed from eternity before that (John 1:1-3,14). But the people were ignorant of all this (cf. vv 28f).

It is interesting that the people were still making judgments based on appearance! They had no knowledge of Jesus' real origin or of the prophecies, but they were still jumping to conclusions, even after Jesus warned them not to.

Verses 28,29

26. How did Jesus respond to the people's objection?

***Jesus responds to the doubts about His origin.***

Jesus dealt briefly with the issue of His origin, though He had told them about this before. He said, in a sense, they did know where He came from. They knew His physical family, and He had also told them before of His ultimate heavenly origin.

But the real problem was they did not believe in His heavenly origin. They did not realize that He had not come from Himself — i.e., by His own authority. He had come from the Father. But they rejected Him, because they did not know the Father. They had not been faithful in serving God, so they did not recognize one who came from Him.

Jesus knew the Father, because He had been with Him from the beginning (John 1:1) and had come from Him. He had given the evidence for this the last time He had been in Jerusalem (5:16-47), but the Jews had rejected it. Jesus did not repeat it in detail here (or we are not given the detail), but He did repeat the claim of His origin.

Verses 30,31

27. What did some want to do (v30)? Why did they fail?

28. What had convinced many people to believe in Jesus (v31)?

***Some seek to capture Jesus, but others believe in Him.***

Jesus' sayings stirred some people up to oppose Him, as had happened the last time He had been in Jerusalem (chap. 5). But they could not capture Him, because His time had not come. This must surely refer to His time to die. That would come soon, but not yet. In the meantime, it appears that God was protecting Him, so He could complete His earthly work before dying. Of course, Jesus had miraculous power to avoid them taking Him, if it was necessary for Him to use it. Perhaps this is what He did in this case; or the proceedings may have appeared to occur by natural means, though God was actually in control (providence).

But some people in the crowd did believe in Jesus. And on what basis? His miracles! They were impressed by His signs and did not believe that even the Christ could do more or greater miracles than Jesus had. John here again gives us testimony of Jesus' miracles based on the admission of the people. Note that the people here testify that Jesus had done great miracles. See introductory notes for a more complete list of John's evidence regarding Jesus' miracles.

King observes that the miracles of Jesus would be especially striking to the people, since there had been a period of 300-400 years prior to His coming in which there had been no prophets. John the Baptist had preceded Jesus, but even he did no miracles. This would make the miracles of Jesus all the more striking. However, no one before or since did as many great miracles as Jesus. How could anyone doubt that He was the Messiah?

Notice again how the conclusion that people reached was determined by how they approached the evidence. When people would begin with an honest examination of the evidence of miracles and fulfilled prophecy — the evidence Jesus had appealed to — they were convinced His claims were true. But other people started by comparing His teachings and actions to what they expected according to their preconceived ideas, meanwhile ignoring the evidence of miracles, etc. These people were the ones who rejected Him. We today must likewise take the right course. Start with the evidence, not with our preconceptions of what teachings or works we think ought to characterize God.

Verse 32

29. What did the rulers do about this (v32)?

***The Jewish leaders decide it is time to act.***

Meantime, these events came to the ears of the Pharisees — the ones most determined to destroy Jesus. They heard what the crowd was saying about Jesus. No doubt, they were especially upset by the fact some people were coming to accept Him. Nothing upset them more than when they feared they would lose influence and honor in the eyes of the people. This was the main reason they viewed Jesus as a threat (Matthew 27:18).

In any case, they decided to take action and sent officers to arrest Jesus. The result of this effort is discussed further in vv 45ff.

The reference to the Pharisees and chief priests may mean that this referred to the Sanhedrin council. They had not acted before, leading some people to wonder how they viewed Jesus (v26). However, they had finally heard enough that they decided to act.

Verses 33,34

30. Where did Jesus say He was going, and what did He mean by this?

***Jesus predicts that He would soon go where they could not follow.***

Jesus then gave the people still more to contemplate. They had doubted Him, because of their view of His origin. He had said He had been sent by Someone else (obviously the Father — vv 28,29). He then proceeded to say that, in a little while, He would go back where He came from — to the One who sent Him. They would seek Him but not find Him.

To understand that He came from the Father, of course, is to realize that He was saying He would go back to the Father in heaven. He would be among the people yet a little while. But His death and the end of His earthly life and work was drawing close. Then He would leave them in death. Though He would come back in the resurrection, He would ultimately ascend to the Father miraculously (Acts 1). We understand this in light of what eventually happened.

The people could not go there because they were not dead yet. Besides, if they were not faithful, they could not go there when they died unless they repented. Perhaps this refers also to the fact that, even when we die, we do not go to Heaven but to the place of waiting till the judgment (Luke 16:19ff).

Verses 35,36

31. How did the Jews react to this, and what did they think Jesus meant?

***The people wonder about Jesus' statements.***

Jesus' statements had really confused the Jews. They had thought they knew where He came from, though they did not understand where He ultimately came from. Then they were really confused when He said He would go back and they could not go there. They wondered if He intended to go teach the Greeks among the dispersion.

The word for Greeks here refers to Greek-speaking Gentiles. It is not the same as the word for Hellenistic or Greek-speaking Jews in Acts 6:1, etc. Because Greek was the universal language of the day, Jews often described Gentiles - anyone other than Jews - as being Greeks.

These Jews seems to be implying that, if Jesus was going where they could not come, He must be going among the dispersed Jews and there teach Gentiles. Perhaps this is a form of derision, as though if He could not teach the Jews and get them to accept Him, He would have to teach Gentiles to find a following. Of course, Jesus did eventually save Gentiles, but not at all as these Jews had in mind.

Verses 37-39

32. What did Jesus say on the last day of the feast?

33. Where else in John did He make similar statements?

(Thought question: To what was Jesus referring with this statement — v39?)

### *Jesus offers spiritual drink to those who thirst.*

This is similar to 6:53-58 (see notes there). There Jesus had told the Jews that He was the bread of life and could give them eternal life if they would come to Him. However, He also said they could drink of Him (see also 4:10ff).

The point, explained in that context, is that Jesus gives us what we need spiritually so we may receive eternal life, just like physical food and drink provide what we need for physical life. Coming to Jesus is explained as simply meaning to learn of Him, believe on Him, and serve Him.

These events happened on the last day of the feast, the great day. The feast lasted several days, while the people lived in tabernacles (see references under 7:2). The feast was about to end. Jesus had taught the people and stirred up their thinking since He had come to the feast, as the context shows. But the discussions were about to end when the feast would end.

### *The rivers of living water explained*

Not only did Jesus say people could drink of Him, He said further that believers would have rivers of living water flowing from within them (from their hearts). This was spoken of, He said, in the Scriptures (see similar ideas in Isaiah 55:1; 58:11; 44:3; Psalms 36:8,9; Prov. 10:11; 18:4; Ezek. 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8). He explained this as referring to the Holy Spirit, who would be received by those who believed in Jesus (cf. Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Ezekiel 39:29; Joel 2:28-32). This would not occur till after Jesus had been glorified and the Holy Spirit had been given (apparently meaning the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2:1ff). Regarding Jesus' glorification, note John 11:4; 12:16,23; 13:31.

There are several possibilities as to what this could refer to. (1) It could mean that some of His followers would be inspired, receive spiritual gifts, and be able to speak God's word to others. Hence, the Holy Spirit (i.e., His message and truth) would flow from their hearts to instruct others.

(2) It could mean that believers would receive the Holy Spirit by being taught and obeying the word of the Spirit (John 6:44,45; Eph. 6:17). The Holy Spirit would then dwell in them, meaning they would have fellowship with the Spirit and all the spiritual blessings that accompany it (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19,20; see notes on Acts 2:38). The blessings the people received, because they were saved and had received the Holy Spirit, would be like well of life within them, springing up to meet their spiritual needs.

(3) Related to #2, believers would receive the Spirit and would then teach the Spirit's word to others (not by inspiration, but simply because they had learned it, like we do today).

#1 and #3 seem to agree with the idea that the Spirit would flow from the person. But #2 seems to agree better with the Old Testament passages Jesus apparently refers to. Further, the context might imply that this was something to be received by all believers, which would eliminate #1 since not all believers received spiritual gifts. On the other hand, this promise could not be fulfilled till the Spirit came after Jesus had been glorified, and this seems to imply #1 is correct.

It is hard for me to determine which of these views is correct. However, all of them harmonize with the teaching of Scripture elsewhere. The only issue is which is meant by Jesus here.

Note that coming to Jesus (v37) is again identified with believing on Him (v38,39).

Verses 40-42

34. Who did some people think Jesus was (vv 40,41)? (Thought question: Where else have similar questions be raised?)
35. Why did some people reject Jesus as Christ, and what facts were they missing?

### *Division among the people*

Jesus' teaching caused considerable stir and difference of viewpoint among the people. Different people expressed different views of Jesus, just as the disciples had described to Jesus in Matt. 16:15ff. Some people said He was the prophet, probably the one predicted by Moses in Deut. 18:15 (see notes on John 1:15; cf. Acts 3:22f). Others said He was the Christ. Actually, He was both, since the prophecies all referred to the same person.

However, some people could not believe He was the Christ, because Jesus came out of Galilee and the prophecies said the Christ would be of the seed of David from Bethlehem. They were correct in their understanding of Scripture (Micah 5:2; cf. 2 Samuel 7:11-14; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; Psalms 18:50; 89:4f,36), but wrong in their knowledge of the facts of Jesus' case. He was born in Bethlehem of the seed of David (see Matt. chap. 1; 2:1; etc.). He grew up in Galilee after Joseph moved the family there to be safe from Herod (Matt. 2).

Here is another example of the Jews' making unrighteous judgments (7:24). They did not have the facts of the case, but they could easily have learned them had they put forth the effort to do so. Instead, they just made a judgment which satisfied their desires and rejected Jesus. (Cf. 7:27,31).

Verses 43,44

36. What condition existed among the crowd because of Jesus and what lessons can we learn (v43)?
37. What did some want to do to Him, and what was the result (v44)?

### *Division results in an effort to capture Jesus.*

These verses describe the end result of the interaction between Jesus and the people: they were divided because of Him. As described in the previous verses, some believed that He was the Christ, but others denied it.

Many Scriptures show that Christians should not seek to cause division (1 Cor. 1:10ff; John 17:20,21; etc.). These verses mean that true believers in Jesus should not be divided among themselves. However, passages such as this and many others show that division followed Jesus and His apostles almost everywhere they went. People were often alienated from one another because of their teaching (cf. Matt. 10:34ff). Paul was forced to leave almost every city where he taught, because people opposed His teaching.

The Bible is not saying that we should compromise the truth in order to have peace and avoid division. It is saying that we should not cause division, because we preach error or because we bind our own opinions instead of God's truth or because of our unkind attitudes (Romans 16:17,18; Titus 3:10). But truth will always cause division whenever there are some people who will not accept it. Those who believe the truth will be divided from those who do not.

We will see this pattern repeated again and again in the book of John (as in other books). It becomes clear that the gospel is intended to separate those who are willing to submit to God from those who are not. This is not an accident, nor is it something we can or should avoid, provided it results from sinful attitudes of other men who reject God's word. Those who are responsible for the error are those who prefer false teaching. We must make sure we are not the ones who are responsible because of our bad attitudes or rejection of truth. See John 3:19-21; Matthew 13:13-17.

Some people wanted to lay hands on Jesus, but no one did so. This is the same as v30 — see notes there.

Verses 45,46

38. What reasons did the officers give why they did not capture Jesus (vv 45,46)?  
(Thought question: What does this tell us about Jesus' teaching?)

### *The officers testify regarding Jesus' teachings*

The rulers, being upset by what they heard about the effects of Jesus' teachings, had earlier sent officers to capture Jesus (v32). Here the officers returned having failed to arrest Him. When asked their reason, they said that no one had ever spoken like Jesus! Note that they had not failed because they feared Jesus or His disciples would overpower them, or even because they feared the people might get upset. Rather, it was Jesus' own teaching that hindered them.

They were obviously so impressed by His teachings that they did not fulfill their mission to arrest Him. This shows the amazing power of His words, if even the enemies sent to capture Him could not bring themselves to do so. These men were presumably soldiers or police officers. They would be hardened to the treachery and deceit of those who would seek to maintain their freedom or try to talk their way out of being arrested. Yet, experienced and hardened as they were, they still could not bring themselves, after hearing Jesus, to believe that He deserved to be arrested. This becomes indirect testimony, even from Jesus' enemies, of the great power of His teaching.

Doubtless, these officers did not understand the degree of truth of their statement. But indeed no man in history ever did speak as Jesus did. He is the greatest character in history, never equaled before or since. No one spoke as He did, because no one else was as great as He nor had as important a message as He. Do we appreciate the greatness of His words? Far too many do not appreciate His words, because they will not listen. Those who will honestly listen, even if they have been enemies, may well be converted or at least much more sympathetic.

Verses 47-49

39. What reason did the rulers give why others should not believe in Jesus in vv 47,48?

40. What did they say about those who did believe in Him?

41. Application: Name some examples in which people today use similar "reasoning" in religion.

### *The Jewish leaders respond to the officers.*

The Jewish rulers asked the officers if they were being deceived by Jesus like other people were. This response demonstrated their arrogance and false standard for determining right from wrong.

On what basis did they conclude Jesus was a false deceiver? On the basis that none of **them** believed in Him! The rulers and Pharisees did not accept Him, so how could He be right? They viewed themselves as the educated, informed, spiritual leaders. They were the authorities to determine right from wrong for everybody else! Other people should just accept their word that their conclusions were right. If they believed a thing to be untrue, then everyone else should believe the same.

We will see that their statement, besides constituting a false basis for faith, was even factually untrue. Nicodemus was one of their number (see on v50). Though he may not have openly declared his faith in Jesus, he was yet obviously sympathetic and eventually became a disciple. Likewise, Joseph of Arimathea was a council member who became a disciple (Mark 15:43). The Jewish rulers may not have known these things, but the fact remains that even their argument was factually in error.

Of course, this raised the issue of why many people disagreed with the rulers and believed in Jesus. The rulers responded to that by saying the people were ignorant of the law and were therefore accursed. Hence, all who believed in Him were ignorant and accursed, and all who did not believe were right and should be followed. This approach ignored all the **factual** evidence

such as Jesus' miracles, fulfilled prophecies, and the myriads of times He had proved **by the law** that He was right and these rulers were wrong.

The effect of this reasoning, of course, is to make the religious leaders the standard of right and wrong for everything. Yet, they themselves, and all honest people, knew that throughout the history of the Jewish nation the religious leaders had often been wrong (cf. Acts 7). Jesus often warned the people of the danger of just accepting the convictions of the leaders (cf. Matt. chap. 23). In particular, this approach involves men following human guides in religion, a practice that the Bible often rebukes (2 Cor. 10:12,18; 1 Cor. 1:18ff; Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19). This practice also ignores the multitude of warnings about the dangers of false teaching (Matthew 7:15-23; 15:14; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; Acts 20:28-30; 1 John 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Titus 1:9-14; 2 John 9-11; Romans 16:17,18; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter chap. 2)

Yet, many people today still advocate this approach. Official Roman Catholic doctrine states that, if members just do what the Pope or the priest say, they will be acceptable to God. Others believe that preachers are trained at special schools, so you can trust them. Good old bro. so-&-so always taught it this way. The elders decided it, so how can we object? Scientists think it happened this way. This is the way it is taught by college professors or textbooks, etc. Even members of Jesus' church sometimes make such fallacious "arguments" to defend their point.

All who reason this way are as wrong today as were these Jewish leaders. Truth is determined by **facts**, evidence, proof, not by **who** accepts or rejects a viewpoint. Yet, people still continue to determine what they believe, not by investigating facts, but by considering **who** is lined up on the various sides of the issue. This is especially offensive when it comes from the mouths of those who want other people to take **their** word for it!

Verses 50,51

42. Who tried to get Jesus a fair hearing, and what argument did he make? (Thought question: Where else have we discussed this man?)

### ***Nicodemus responds to Jesus' critics.***

Now we are told that Nicodemus was among the number of this council (very likely this was the Sanhedrin council). He had earlier had a private meeting with Jesus in which he had stated faith in Him (see notes on John 3:1ff). The statements here made by the other leaders constituted a direct challenge to such as him. They had just said that no rulers or Pharisees believed in Jesus. Yet, Nicodemus did believe in Him. As noted already, Joseph was or soon would be a believer. Probably others also believed or at least suspected Jesus' claims were true. But they were very careful how they spoke out, because the rulers opposed all who openly stated their faith (cf. 7:13; 12:42,43).

Nicodemus, however, did make an attempt to reason with these men by asking whether it was right, according to the law, to condemn a man before he even had a chance to speak for himself and defend his beliefs. The answer, of course, was that the law required that a man be given a chance to speak on his own behalf. And these rulers knew such to be the case, or as rulers ought to have known. By condemning Jesus without a proper trial, they demonstrated that they, not Jesus, were the ones disobeying and disrespecting Divine law. Rather than maintaining proper objectivity till the evidence had been considered, they proved themselves unfit to rule. See Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:16,17; 17:4-6; 19:15ff.

Note that Nicodemus here advocated the proper approach. Not just in courts of law, but also in matters of personal faith, issues must be decided on the basis of evidence and facts. That means that we must be willing to hear both sides and must give an honest consideration to the evidence. It is not fair to just reject a man's view without ever considering the evidence for it. Yet how often today are people, even in the Lord's church, guilty of doing this very thing! Note again Jesus' challenge in 7:24.

***The rulers oppose Nicodemus.***

The rulers responded to this challenge by asking if Nicodemus was from Galilee. They claimed that no prophet had ever arisen from Galilee. Here again is another example, a classic example, of refusing to judge righteous judgment (7:24). This was wrong in hosts of ways:

(1) Prophets had arisen from Galilee. Jonah was from Gath-hepher, a town in lower Galilee not far from Nazareth (2 Kings 14:25; cf. Joshua 19:13). Elijah was from the inhabitants of Gilead, which was east of the Jordan from Galilee (1 Kings 17:1). Nahum and Malachi may also have been from Galilee (Nahum 1:1). So once again these rulers and supposed experts in the law demonstrated that their conclusions did not even have the facts straight!

(2) Even if no prophet had ever arisen from Galilee, would that prove none ever could? What kind of evidence is this to say God could never do such a thing, even if He never had? The “argument” amounts to regional bigotry. It is like saying no black man can ever be a faithful preacher. What does the region of a man’s origin prove about whether or not God can use him as a teacher or prophet? See notes on vv 27,41,42.

(3) The fact is that Jesus Himself was born, not in Galilee, but in Bethlehem (see on vv 41,42 where the issue was already dealt with). So the whole discussion is irrelevant and is based on misconception and ignorance. Note that it is the rulers who are ignorant, though they had accused the multitudes of being ignorant! And again, simple research would have shown them the truth, but they were too bigoted to search for truth.

(4) The argument ignores the proof repeatedly presented and well known to all these people that Jesus had done miracles and had fulfilled prophecy. The rulers ignored facts of major relevance and based their case on what amounts to regional bigotry!

(5) Finally, their response does not answer Nicodemus’ point but rather ignores it. He had pointed out that they were refusing to let Jesus present His own evidence and were reaching a conclusion without considering what facts He might be able to produce. So how did they respond? They proceeded to do exactly what he had accused them of! They refused to consider anything Jesus had to say and proceeded to reach a conclusion based on ignorance and prejudice. Had they called Jesus and asked a few simple questions (such as where He was born), they could have eliminated their whole objection.

The fact is, of course, these men did not want to be convinced to believe in Jesus. They had their minds made up to oppose Him, not because of evidence, but because of envy. Jesus was a threat to their popularity in the eyes of the people, and the facts of the case did not matter. We must beware lest we allow our own personal preferences to lead us to ignore evidence and judge people and truth unfairly.

Everyone then went to his own house, perhaps not just in the sense of the end of the day, but also in the sense of the end of the feast. These events had occurred on the last day of the feast (v37). The officers had failed to arrest Jesus, so everyone would disperse to his own city across the nation. Their opportunity to capture Jesus had ended.

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