

## John Chapter 7

John chapter 7 is a fairly lengthy one but it all has to do with a visit by the Lord to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. We shall consider mainly the following verses :

- 17 The feast of Tabernacles and the visit to Jerusalem
- 31 A question about His miracles
- 33-34 Seeking and finding Him after His death
- 37-39 The coming of the Spirit
- 37-40 The officers return empty handed
- 37-41 The defence by Nicodemus
- 37-42 Every man went to His own house

When we read through the first three gospels, it would appear that the Lord spent very little time in Jerusalem, being mainly in Galilee. But in John's gospel, the reverse is true and no less than 14 of the 21 chapters describe events which took place in Jerusalem. Our chapter begins in Galilee. The Lord is there because of the Jews in Judea seeking to kill Him. It is not that He is afraid of going there but as He says in verse 30 of this chapter, His hour was not yet come. But typically of this gospel, the Lord is soon found there again.

One of the striking features of this chapter is the number of questions that are raised concerning Him – there are no less than fifteen questions in the fifty three verses. Questions can often be helpful in bringing us to Christ or in obtaining a fuller knowledge of the ways of Christ. Take that well known question in Acts chapter 16 – "What must I do to be saved?" Or listen to Nicodemus ask, "How can a man be born again?" These questions led to salvation. But in John chapter 7, the majority of the questions raised only emphasized the ignorance of men and their rejection of the Saviour. Here are but a few as examples :

- 11 Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he?
- 25 Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to kill?
- 36 What manner of saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?
- 41 Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee?
- 45 Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him?

Verse 2 tells us that the Jews feast of Tabernacles was at hand. This was one of the seven great feasts of Jehovah. These feasts are

1. Passover
2. Unleavened bread
3. First fruits
4. Pentecost
5. Atonement
6. Trumpets
7. Tabernacles

We are going to look at four issues in this section

What is the meaning of the feast of Tabernacles?

Why did it demand the Lord's attendance in Jerusalem?

What is behind the attitude of His brethren?

Why did the Lord say He was not going up and then seemed to change His mind?

## **1. What is the meaning of the feast of Tabernacles?**

Leviticus chapter 23 tells us what the feast was all about : :

39 Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.

40 And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.

41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:

43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

**The importance** of the feat is seen in Leviticus chapter 23 insofar as it is the only one of the seven feasts for which instructions are given twice. We first read of the feast in verse 34. Further instructions are given in verses 35 and 36. But then the instructions begin again in verse 39 and indeed are expanded upon. Is the Lord not underlining for us the importance of this last feast compared to some of the others?

The feast of Tabernacles was the last of the seven feasts of the Lord and will be the last to be fulfilled. It represents the ingathering of the fruits of Israel and will be marked as a time of rejoicing. Verse 39 says, "When ye have gathered in the fruit of the land". That portion of the nation of Israel remaining after the Great Tribulation will be the Lord's fruit of the land

Other things worth mentioning are the **seven days, the branches of palm trees, and dwelling in booths.**

Out of the seven feasts of Jehovah, five were celebrated on specific days. Two of the feasts lasted seven days – unleavened bread and Tabernacles. Seven represents a complete period of time. The feast of unleavened bread lasted seven days because it typified cleansing and the putting away of sin. This should mark the people of God at all times and not just on certain days. The feast of Tabernacles also is celebrated over seven days for it represents the complete and perfect joy of the nation as it celebrates the return of her Messiah and the unceasing joy of the millennial kingdom.

What reason will they have for this unceasing joy?

Israel will become the head of the nations and not the tail. The times of the Gentiles will have come to an end and the Lord will be present among His earthly people. The scripture says of the Jew in Zechariah chapter 8:

23 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.

The Lord will have introduced the blessings of the New Covenant to Israel:

10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

There will be peace amongst the nations at last according to Isaiah chapter 2:

4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

There will be peace at last in the animal kingdom according to Isaiah chapter 65:

25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

There will be more hunger and famine amongst the nations:

1 The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

Amos chapter 9 speaks of the abundant harvests:

13 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt.

We read some interesting facts about the feast in the last few verses of Zechariah. Jehovah instructs not only the Jews but also the remnants of the nations which remain from the day of the Lord that they are to go up to Jerusalem every year to keep the feast. So important is this commandment that the Lord tells the nations that if they don't go up, He will withhold the rain from them. Then Egypt in particular is mentioned. If Egypt will not go up, then God will bring a plague upon them. Hence we gather that the feast of Tabernacles will be celebrated throughout the duration of the millennium. It is the only one of the seven feasts of Jehovah to be perpetuated in this way.

What else were the people to do? They were to cut down the boughs of goodly trees, amongst which were the branches of palm trees. This explains the actions of the disciples in John chapter 12

12 On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

13 Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

They thought that they were following the Lord into the city of Zion in order to see Him being crowned king - hence the reason for their cries, "Behold Thy king cometh". They were anticipating the millennial kingdom. But soon they will be told that unless the corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies it will abide alone. The Passover must first be killed. But John 12 is surely a preview of the day when He will ride in triumph into the city and claim His throne. "Ye shall not see Me henceforth, until ye shall say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord".

And what about the booths or tabernacles. The feast also looked back to Israel's time in the wilderness, to remind them of their pilgrim character. We have another preview of the millennium on the holy mount when the Lord was transfigured before His disciples. They see the Lord in glory. Mathew records the fact that His face did shine like the sun and His garments were white and glistening. The Lord appears in glory with Moses and Elias. Peter is enthralled by the scene. Hitherto he has been following the Man of Sorrows, the homeless stranger. He is taken up with the glory. But then Moses and Elias make as though they are ready to depart and so Peter speaks out,

"Let us make here three tabernacles". He wanted the glory to continue. We learn the immediate reason for Peter's outburst, but typically it represents the feast of tabernacles and the appearance of the Lord in glory amongst His people. The mountain is only a foretaste of things to come. Moses and Elias spoke of His decease that He should accomplish at Jerusalem and that had to be fulfilled first.

## **2. Why did it demand the Lord's attendance in Jerusalem?**

But why did this feast demand the Lord's attendance in Jerusalem? Out of the seven feasts of Jehovah, the Lord commanded that at three of them, all the males should appear before the Lord. These three feasts were unleavened bread which coincided with Passover, the feast of first fruits, and the feast of Tabernacles – also called the feast of ingathering.

14 Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year.

15 Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:)

16 And the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.

17 Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD.

The Lord's brethren are reminding Him of this obligation in chapter 7. How was the Lord going to respond?

## **3. What is behind the attitude of His brethren?**

But before we find the answer to this question, let us look at these brethren. They are named in Matthew 13 :

55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?

In verse 3 of John chapter 7, the Lord's brethren are goading Him to go up to Jerusalem to show Himself to His disciples. If Thou doest these things, show Thyself to the world. This is the way of the world, "If you want to make a point, then make yourself publicly known". What was behind these taunts? Verse 5 tells us :

For neither did his brethren believe in him.

It is remarkable that the very people who knew Him best did not believe in Him. The people of Nazareth had already rejected Him and tried to kill Him. But now we learn that His brothers also did not believe in Him. This explains the Lord's words in Mark chapter 3:

31 There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him.

32 And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee.

33 And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren?

34 And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

35 For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.

Their unbelief was prophesied in the Psalms. Psalm 69 says :

8 I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children. Many a Christian has felt the loneliness of being the only believer in a household. The Lord knows how they feel for He had this same experience also. It is also a reminder that salvation is not of blood but a work of the Spirit of God.

The unbelief in the Lord's family also explains why Mary is alone at Calvary and the Lord commends her into the care of the beloved disciple John.

Further down this chapter, the Lord will tell us that those who did not believe in Him would not see Him after His resurrection. There was one exception to this rule. In I Corinthians chapter 15, Paul lists many who saw the Lord after He had risen, and included in this list is His brother James. It is an act of pure grace on His part. That is why in Acts chapter 1, we read of a company gathered after His ascension, which includes the disciples, the women (from Galilee), His mother, and His brethren – not just James but the other brothers also.

#### **4. Why did the Lord say He was not going up, and then seem to change His mind?**

Our final question has to do with the Lord Himself. Why did He decline to go up to the city, then apparently have a change of heart?

He declines the challenge to go up and show Himself publicly for as He says in verse 6, "My time is not yet come". This time might appear to be Calvary, but in the context, is He not thinking of the day of His appearing? It was not yet the time for public manifestation. But after His brethren left, He went up, but as it were in secret. As One who came to magnify the Law, He went up as a private individual to fulfill the Lord's command in Exodus 23 about the males appearing before the Lord to keep the three feasts.

But to make a public display of Himself was not the Lord's way. He tells them to go up but He Himself did not go with them. Why did He not go at first? In verse 6 He says, "My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready". What does He mean by , "My time is not yet come". Does He mean the Cross? I believe that in the immediate context, He is thinking of the restoration of Israel and His appearing in glory. It was not yet the time for this.

Verse 11 onward in John chapter 7 tells us the reaction to the Lord by the people of Jerusalem. He is obviously expected but because He arrived in secret, the Jews are asking , "Where is He?" There is also a difference of opinion regarding Him. Some were saying, "He is a good man". Others replied, "Nay; but He deceiveth the people". This is what the rulers of the Jews called Him as they spoke to Pilate after His death – "We remember that deceiver said that in three days He would rise again from the dead".

But the Lord does not stay hidden for long and in the midst of the feast, He went up to the temple and taught the people. Further questions are asked about Him. "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" The man they are hearing is not one of the scribes or Pharisees but the son of a carpenter, from Nazareth of all places. He had not been to a school led by the rabbis. He was not like a Saul of Tarsus, one of the brightest pupils, if not the brightest, of the school of Gamaliel. But the Lord gives some good advice regarding getting to know the doctrine of God. The secret is doing the will of God. The perfect example of this is Abraham in Genesis chapter 12. The Lord appeared to him in Ur of the Chaldees and told him to leave the city behind him. All that God promises him on that first experience that Abraham was to go to a place that God would tell him of. God had promised him no part of the land as yet. Abraham obeys and sets off on his pilgrim journey. He takes with him his father Terah and his

nephew Lot. Both would prove a hindrance to him. Abraham went half way towards Canaan but settled first in Haran. There he remained until the death of his father, then he re-commenced his journey. After this second step of obedience to the will of God, the Lord revealed Himself again, speaking not now of a land that He would show Abraham but of a land that He would give him. Obedience in doing His will led to further revelations. Doing His will, leads to knowing His will. This would be true of us individually – we would learn His will if we did His will. But in the immediate context of John 7, doing His will would lead to greater discernment on our part regarding the doctrine taught by others. We would be more in tune with the doctrine of God.

When we think of the Lord not being part of the schools of men, we must think also of the 12 apostles. Here were men who turned the world upside down by their preaching and led thousands to Christ. But when men heard them, they marveled that these were unlearned and ignorant men. They were in the main fishermen from Galilee. God can use educated men no doubt but equally He can use those who owe little to the wisdom of this world.

This part of the chapter down to verse 31 is full of questions being raised by the Jews in Jerusalem regarding the Lord – not only questions but some wrong statements to boot. But one question raised in verse 31 did have a ring of truth to it:

When Christ cometh, will He do more miracles than this man doeth?

They obviously expected their Messiah to be able to perform miracles, so when they heard of the miracles of the Lord Jesus, some were beginning to ask the question, could not this Jesus be our Messiah? It also explains to some extent why it is that the second beast of Revelation is seen to be doing great miracles. This second beast is also called the Wicked one in II Thessalonians chapter 2. There he comes with signs and lying wonders/ This man is Satan's counterfeit of the real Christ. He therefore has to impersonate the true Christ. He is the Antichrist, the false Christ. He is the false prophet. He is the king in the land, according to Daniel chapter 11. In Revelation chapter 13, he has two horns like a lamb – but he spake as a dragon. How tragic that many in Israel had questions in their mind regarding Jesus being the Christ and yet still rejected Him. The Lord said about Himself and the Antichrist, "I am come in My Father's name and ye received Me not. Another will come in his own name and him ye will receive".

Verses 33 and 34 also deserve some further comments.

33 Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me.

34 Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.

In a little while He would leave them behind and go to the Father. They would seek Him but not find Him. He also adds, "Where I am, thither ye cannot come". He seems to be talking riddles as far as they are concerned, hence they repeat the question in verse 36.

All becomes clear, however, when we come to what at first sight seem to be a repetition of His words in John chapter 13:

33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.

On further examination, however, we learn that there are distinct differences between the two occasions. In chapter 7, He is addressing an audience of unbelieving men in Jerusalem. In chapter 13, He is in the upper room and is addressing His disciples. Even Judas by this time has gone out. He is speaking to the eleven men who believed in Him. First of all He calls them His "Little children" – His dear children. It is a term of endearment that He withholds from His audience with unbelievers. He tells them both

about the "little while", and continues, "Ye shall seek Me". To the unbelievers in chapter 7, He adds the words, "And shall not find Me". He did of course appear after the "little while" to His own, and they did find Him. There appears to be only one exception to this rule and that was to His brother James, as we read of him in the list of those who saw Him risen, in I Corinthians 15. That can only be described as an act of pure grace on His part.

In chapter 7, He says, "Where I am, thither ye cannot come". To His own, He says, "Whither I go, thither ye cannot come." Where was the Lord when He said, "Where I am"? He was surely still in the Father's bosom according to John 1:18. Unbelievers know nothing of the Father's bosom, but we are there already. But in John chapter 13, He is thinking of a physical change – it is "Where I am going". They could not follow Him then, but after a period of time, they would. Hence He adds, "So now I say to you". Indeed we only have to come down a few verses in our bible to hear Him speaking of a "Father's house" and of the day He would come to take His own to that place.

We come now to verses 37 to 39:

37 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

39 (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

In John chapter 4, the Lord says to the Samaritan woman :

14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

This well of water would be in him – a source of blessing to the recipient, but in John chapter 7, rivers of living water are flowing out from the man, now able to bless others due to the work of the Holy Spirit through him.

This outpouring of the Spirit is only hinted at here. The fulfillment of the Lord's words waited upon His ascension. Pentecost was a proof of His ascension for Peter said of the Lord, "He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear". Once the Lord had ascended, it left room for the Spirit Himself to come and dwell in believers. That is why the Lord said later, "It is expedient (or profitable) for you that I go away. For if I go not away, the Spirit will not come".

In verse 32, we read briefly that the Pharisees and the chief priests had sent officers to take Him. These officers were part of the temple guard whose duty was to preserve the temple itself. They evidently must have arrived while the Lord is teaching the people. They would have stood at the back of the crowd that had gathered, waiting for their opportunity to take Him. But as they listen to His words, they become enthralled by them. They were not the first. Back in Nazareth, before they tried to throw Him over the brow of the hill, there were those who gave attention to His words. They noted that He spoke with authority and not as the scribes. Only He could say, "It hath been said by them of old time...But I say unto you..." His words not only had equal weight with the scriptures, but also His words superceded those of the scriptures. His actions were also in keeping with the authority of His voice, for He spoke with authority and the demons obeyed Him. Even the men of Nazareth, soon to reject Him, had to marvel at the gracious words that proceeded from His mouth.

Then there was the occasion when He went with His disciples across the sea of Galilee. A great storm arose so that even these hardened fishermen feared for their

lives. The Saviour is asleep in the boat and they have to waken Him. "Master, carest Thou not that we perish". He awakes and rebukes the winds and the waves and the great storm becomes a great calm. No wonder these disciples, who had had many wonderful things up to this point in time, had to say, "What manner of man is this that even the winds and the waves obey Him".

In verse 45, we read of the return of the officers – they return empty handed. They are asked, "Why have ye not brought Him". They reply with the well-known words, "Never man spake like this man". The Lord was unique in His words.

The Pharisees ask another question, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" Little did they know that at least one, and perhaps two of their number had indeed believed on Him. It seems here that Nicodemus had but is still reluctant to commit himself publicly. Then we read later of Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews. Had he also believed by this time? We cannot tell for sure. Here at least Nicodemus speaks up, "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?" It is hardly a declaration of faith, but perhaps shows that Nicodemus had believed in Him. We read of Nicodemus three times in John's gospel that he came to Jesus by night – in chapters 3, 7, and 19. It is commonly assumed that he did not want to be seen by men to be talking to this Jesus of Nazareth, yet there were questions in his mind that he wanted answers to. But in chapter 19, we come to Calvary, and at last Nicodemus takes a public stand. He and Joseph come and take the Lord's body down and bury it in Joseph's new tomb. It highlights the importance of the cross for the child of God. He sees what men did to Him at Calvary and what they said about Him, and he says, "I cannot stand with these men. I must take a stand with Christ".

And what about Joseph – another secret disciple. He too is often criticized for hiding his light under a bushel. But the reality is that God needed men like Nicodemus and Joseph at this time, to bury His Son. Joseph especially was a man of some influence. He had a measure of authority being one of the Sanhedrin. He was also a rich man, and a good man – an honourable counselor. Only someone like Joseph could have gone to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. Had it not been for these two men, the Lord's body would no doubt have been taken down from the cross and cast into an unmarked grave with the bodies of the two thieves.

Verse 53 ends the chapter :

Every man went unto his own house.

We said at the beginning that 14 of the 21 chapters in John's gospel describe events in Jerusalem. Yet it is strange that we never read of Him spending even one night under a roof in the city. John in his gospel tells us of miracles which He did there yet the city seems to be a hostile place for Him. There is the outright opposition of the chief priests and Pharisees and no doubt because of this being known, there was a reluctance on the part of the people to openly embrace the Saviour. We see an example of this in chapter 9 – the healing of the man who had been born blind. He is very positive in his testimony but his parents hold back because they feared the rulers. To confess Him publicly could have meant exclusion from the synagogue.

20 His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind:

21 But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.

22 These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.

By the end of John chapter 11, the opposition of the rulers has reached the point where they had issued a decree that if any knew where He were, they should make it known, that they might take Him.

John chapter 7 therefore ends with every man going home to his house but chapter 8 begins with the Lord and His disciples going to the Mount of Olives. He was probably heading towards Gethsemane "for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples" (Chapter 18). He was the Son of Man who had nowhere to lay down His head. He only found a resting place for His head when He bowed His head in death upon the cross.