

## John 7, More than Meets the Eye

For a while there, those 3D pictures were all the rage. At first glance the surface just looked like a bunch of dots and swiggles, but if you looked long enough, the image (usually a unicorn or dolphin!) came through. But for some people, no matter how long and hard they stared, they just couldn't see it. In chapter 7 we're going to encounter all sorts of people who have a perspective on Jesus. But as we'll discover, so often they just can't get below the surface to see what's really going on.

The setting for most of this chapter in Jerusalem during the 'Feast of Tabernacles' or 'Feast of Booths' as some translations put it. Most Christians today just think about the Passover Festival, but in the Jewish calendar of the time, the Feast of Tabernacles was perhaps even a bigger time of celebration. It was an eight day festival that ran across late September and early October and it was the festival to celebrate the completion of the harvest (Exodus 23:16; Leviticus 23:33-43). It was a time of joyous celebration and remembrance of God's goodness to them. It was called Feast of Tabernacles or Booths because the people made outdoor leafy shelters in their courtyards or flat roof tops to live in during the Feast. It was a happy time when everyone had the sense of camping out together! Just as with the other great feasts in the Jewish calendar, pilgrims from all over gathered in Jerusalem for this occasion.



Throughout the events of this chapter, there are all sorts of people who react to Jesus in all sorts of different ways. It seems everyone has an opinion! Read through chapter 7, and then have a go at filling in the table below.

	How would you describe their overall response to Jesus?
<p>The Jews                      'The Jews' can't mean every single Jew. But John uses it to collectively describe most Jews who are responding to Jesus in the same way. It's also a term that seems to have as its focus the leadership – Pharisees and high priests, as they are the 'pre-eminent Jews'.</p>	v1, 11, 13, 15, 32, 45-52.
<p>Jesus' brothers</p>	v3-5
<p>The crowds                      Probably a reference to the Jewish pilgrims who have come to Jerusalem for the festival. They may have heard of Jesus but never met him in the flesh.</p>	v12, 20, 31-32, 40-44.
<p>People of Jerusalem                      Not the pilgrims from elsewhere but residents of Jerusalem.</p>	V25-27



The Feast of the Tabernacles or *Sukkot* continues to be celebrated in Israel today. It's a 7 day holiday and the booth or *sukkah* is a central part of it. The booth can be made of wood, branches, canvas, or even aluminium. Many people hang decorations in it such as dried or plastic fruit, streamers, and shiny ornaments. In Israel, Orthodox Jews will conduct all their eating, studying, and sleeping activities in the *sukkah*, and it's common practice for hotels, restaurants, snack shops, and outdoor tourist attractions to provide an eating *sukkah* for their guests.

If credibility is measured by what others think of you – Jesus would not come out looking very well! There is definitely some positive responses within the crowd (v12, 31) and that's probably because they have not been so influenced by the Jews of Jerusalem. But overall, there is a lot of negativity going on here – from plain old sarcasm to outright murderous hate.

In chapter 5 we looked at that moment when persecution of Jesus begins, and Jesus refers to it again here as he talks to the people about why he is being rejected. What is that event? (v21-24)

What is the argument Jesus uses to defend himself?

The instruction to circumcise new born boys came from Abraham and was incorporated into the law given by Moses. It was an outward symbol, a mark, that the people of Israel belonged to God. The requirement for circumcision was that it was to be done on the eighth day after the baby was born, and of course sometimes the eighth day fell on the Sabbath. The point Jesus is making is that – 'you can circumcise a boy on the Sabbath and not break the law, so I can certainly perform that act of compassion and heal the paralyzed man'. The Jews are willing to concede that the law can be kept even when doing something like giving an external snip to a baby, but not willing to bend when a person can be truly healed.

As Jesus says, 'Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment'. They are not willing to accept Jesus for who he really is. In v27, 42-43, v50, what is the thing that the Jews can't get over when they think about Jesus?

The Jews thought they knew Jesus, and in a sense he did not look that impressive. Jesus grew up in Galilee, the 'country-bumpkin' region of Israel, along with his brothers (v3) and mother (2:3) – a far cry from the expectation that the Christ or Messiah would supernaturally burst onto the scene in a blaze of glory and might. Also, the expectation was that the Christ would come from the line of King David (2 Sam 7:12) and come out of David's hometown of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

On this issue of Jesus' descent and place of origin, the other gospel writers show us that Jesus was indeed descended from David and was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 1:1; 2:1; Luke 2:4). But that's not the focus in John's gospel. Right through, we're being shown that we need to understand Jesus at another level. We shouldn't judge by mere appearances.

How does Jesus defend himself in v27-29?

The Jews may think they know Jesus, but they have not come to understand that Jesus is the one who has not come on his own authority, but has been *sent*. Being the *sent* one from the Heavenly Father is a big theme in John and it keeps coming up in places like 3:16-16; 4:34; 5:30; 6:38, to name just a few instances.

If Jesus has been sent, he's been sent for a particular purpose or agenda. How do we see in chapter 7 that Jesus is working with a particular agenda in mind? Hint: look for the places that Jesus refers to 'time'.

Right from 2:4 in that conversation between Jesus and his mum at the wedding reception, Jesus has said that his 'hour' or 'time' has not yet come. Jesus is keenly aware that he is heading in a particular direction and that this has a particular timing. In v33-36, there is confusion about what Jesus is referring to, but with an awareness of where this gospel account will end, how is this a hint of what Jesus' hour will involve?

Part of the week long festival was that on each day water was taken into the temple and poured out on the altar. Ancient Jewish texts tell us that this water ceremony was part of a prayer for rain for the next harvest. But these texts also tell us that as the water was being carried in, they played music and recited texts such as Isaiah 12:3, "with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" speaking of their hope for nationwide salvation and abundance.



How does Jesus play off the imagery of this ceremony in v37-39?

Give thanks to God for Jesus, that in his life he looked ahead to his 'time' and willingly went to it, that is, his death and resurrection.

Give thanks for the Holy Spirit that is poured out by Jesus to all who believe, as a result of his death and resurrection.

Give thanks, that in the face of opposition, Jesus continued to teach about himself as the one sent from the Father to do the Father's will, and that this truth is what we have come to know as followers of Him.

