

The Gospel of John (46) **Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles (1)**

Introduction:

Today we arrive to the seventh chapter of this fourth Gospel. It is our intention today to address verses 1 through 13, Lord willing. Here we read of the conflict and clash between Jesus and His half-brothers. We may consider the great difference between them is due to the two different world views from which they interpreted how they should live. Before us is the clash between the world view of fallen mankind and the worldview of God Himself. His brothers saw and assessed circumstances differently from Jesus and they preferred a different course of action for Him than that which He determined to take. We read that His brothers were unbelievers, and therefore they were incapable of understanding why Jesus conducted His public ministry among the Jews in the way that He did. We also see that even blood relation may not be the context in which a true family relationship may be experienced and enjoyed. True family fellowship, a kindred spirit, may be enjoyed among brothers and sisters in Christ, who share a common “blood”, even the blood that their Savior shed upon His cross. Here we may see “ironically, when the world or even our biological families begin to hate us on account of Christ, it is then that we know that we are home, residents in the family of God.”¹

Of course these opening verses are establishing the setting for an event, that is, a “sign” as John’s Gospel calls them, which then provides the occasion for another discourse of Jesus. And so, the larger episode that we are beginning to address this morning actually encompasses the entire chapter, ending with the last verse of John 7, which is verse 53. And so there is a larger picture before us than just verses 1 through 13, but with these verses we have an introduction to the setting and occasion for another teaching session of Jesus.

Let us read the first 13 verses of this chapter from the New King James Version (NKJV).

After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. ²Now the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. ³His brothers therefore said to Him, “Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. ⁴For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.” ⁵For even His brothers did not believe in Him.

⁶Then Jesus said to them, “My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. ⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. ⁸You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.” ⁹When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee.

¹⁰But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. ¹¹Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, “Where is He?” ¹²And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, “He is good”; others said, “No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.” ¹³However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.

Our Lord traveled to Jerusalem in order to observe the Feast of the Tabernacles. This was a week-long festival observed in the fall, which culminated with the Jewish New Year and the annual Day of Atonement, commonly called, *Yom Kippur*. Sometimes the Feast of Tabernacles is called the Feast of Booths. It was the Jewish commemoration of the 40 year wilderness wandering of Israel between their exodus from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses and their entrance into the Promised Land under Joshua. During this seven-day festival the Jews would fashion booths or tabernacles and sleep out-of-doors. But their doing so was not simply to commemorate their wilderness wanderings. The primary idea was that during those 40 years God Himself had begun to dwell, or tabernacle, with them. The glory of God, the Shekenah--a pillar of

¹ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 358.

fire by night and a cloud by day--was the physical and visible presence of God among the people. In the Shekenah, God's presence dwelt with His people through means of the Mosaic tabernacle, the dwelling place of God. The Feast of the Tabernacles was to reminisce that God has been dwelling with them as God's people, as they enjoyed His protection and His provision as His people. In time, after Israel had entered the Promised Land, this festival also became associated with the end of the growing season culminating in their gratefulness expressed to God for their harvest. But this festival not only had a remembrance of what had once taken place, it was a feast that stimulated anticipation of God's future blessing. It suggested a future realization of God's promises to His people. After all, while in the wilderness their dwelling in booths was due to the fact that they were on a journey to their promised land, in which they would enjoy the full blessing of God's blessing and provision in their lives.

The event of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem was one of the highlights of the year for the Jewish people. It was particularly for this feast that Jews from the nations of the world would arrive and dwell in the streets and on the housetops, and in the outlying fields of Jerusalem. It must have been quite an amazing experience to participate in this festival. The older writer, **Alfred Edersheim** (1825-1889) had a gift in describing the setting of the ancient Jewish world. I would like you to hear this rather long description of what would have been observed by Jesus and His disciples on this occasion:

IT was *Chol ha Moed* -- as the non-sacred part of the festive week, the half-holy days were called. Jerusalem, the City of Solemnities, the City of Palaces, the City of beauty and glory, wore quite another than its usual aspect; other, even, than when its streets were thronged by festive pilgrims during the Passover-week, or at Pentecost. For this was pre-eminently the Feast for foreign pilgrims, coming from the farthest distance, whose Temple-contributions were then received and counted. Despite the strange costumes of Media, Arabia, Persia, or India, and even further; or the Western speech and bearing of the pilgrims from Italy, Spain, the modern Crimea, and the banks of the Danube, if not from yet more strange and barbarous lands, it would not be difficult to recognize the lineaments of the Jew, nor to perceive that to change one's clime was not to change one's mind. As the Jerusalemite would look with proud self-consciousness, not unmingled with kindly patronage, on the swarthy strangers, yet fellow-countrymen, or the eager-eyed Galilean curiously stare after them, the pilgrims would, in turn, gaze with mingled awe and wonderment on the novel scene. Here was the realization of their fondest dreams ever since childhood, the home and spring of their holiest thoughts and best hopes -- that which gave inward victory to the vanquished, and converted persecution into anticipated triumph.

They could come at this season of the year -- not during the winter for the Passover, nor yet quite so readily in summer's heat for Pentecost. But now, in the delicious cool of early autumn, when all harvest-operations, the gathering in of luscious fruit and the vintage were past, and the first streaks of gold were tinting the foliage, strangers from afar off, and countrymen from Judea, Perea, and Galilee, would mingle in the streets of Jerusalem, under the ever-present shadow of that glorious Sanctuary of marble, cedarwood, and gold, up there on high Moriah, symbol of the infinitely more glorious overshadowing Presence of Him, Who was the Holy One in the midst of Israel. How all day long, even till the stars lit up the deep blue canopy overhead, the smoke of the burning, smoldering sacrifices rose in slowly-widening column, and hung between the Mount of Olives and Zion; how the chant of Levites, and the solemn responses of the *Hallel*² were borne on the breeze, or the clear blast of the Priests silver trumpets seemed to waken the echoes far away! And then, at night, how all these vast Temple-buildings stood out, illuminated by the great Candelabras that burned in the Court of the Women, and by the glare of torches, when strange sound of mystic hymns and dances came floating over the intervening darkness! Truly, well might Israel designate the Feast of Tabernacles as '*the Feast*' (*haChag*), and the Jewish historian describe it as 'the holiest and greatest.'

Early on the 14th of Tishri (corresponding to our September or early October), all the festive pilgrims had arrived. Then it was, indeed, a scene of bustle and activity. Hospitality had to be sought and found; guests to be welcomed and entertained; all things required for the feast to be got ready. Above all, booths must be erected everywhere - in court and on housetop, in street and square, for the lodgment and

² *Hallel* (Hebrew הלל, "Praise") is a Jewish prayer, a verbatim recitation from Psalms 113-118 which is recited by observant Jews on Jewish holidays as an act of praise and thanksgiving.

entertainment of that vast multitude; leafy dwellings everywhere, to remind of the wilderness-journey, and now of the goodly land. Only that fierce castle, Antonia, which frowned above the Temple, was undecked by the festive spring into which the land had burst. To the Jew it must have been a hateful sight, that castle, which guarded and dominated his own City and Temple--hateful sight and sounds, that Roman garrison, with its foreign, heathen, ribald speech and manners. Yet, for all this, Israel could not read on the lowering sky the signs of the times, nor yet knew the day of their merciful visitation. And this, although of all festivals, that of Tabernacles should have most clearly pointed them to the future.

Indeed, the whole symbolism of the Feast, beginning with the completed harvest, for which it was a thanksgiving, pointed to the future. The Rabbis themselves admitted this. The strange number of sacrificial bullocks -- seventy in all -- they regarded as referring to 'the seventy nations' of heathendom. The ceremony of the outpouring of water, which was considered of such vital importance as to give to the whole festival the name of 'House of Outpouring,' was symbolical of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As the brief night of the great Temple-illumination closed, there was solemn testimony made before Jehovah against heathenism. It must have been a stirring scene, when from out of the mass of Levites, with their musical instruments, who crowded the fifteen steps that led from the Court of Israel to that of the Women, stepped two priests with their silver trumpets. As the first cockcrowing intimated the dawn of morn, they blew a threefold blast; another on the tenth step, and yet another threefold blast as they entered the Court of the Women. And still sounding their trumpets, they marched through the Court of the Women to the Beautiful Gate. Here, turning round and facing westwards to the Holy Place, they repeated: 'Our fathers, who were in this place, they turned their backs on the Sanctuary of Jehovah, and their faces eastward, for they worshipped eastward, the sun; but we, our eyes are towards Jehovah.' 'We are Jehovah's -- our eyes are towards Jehovah.' Nay, the whole of this night--and morning -- scene was symbolical: the Temple-illumination, of the light which was to shine from out the Temple into the dark night of heathendom; then, at the first dawn of morn the blast of the priests' silver trumpets, of the army of God, as it advanced, with festive trumpet-sound and call, to awaken the sleepers, marching on to quite the utmost bounds of the Sanctuary, to the Beautiful Gate, which opened upon the Court of the Gentiles -- and, then again, facing round to utter solemn protest against heathenism, and make solemn confession of Jehovah!³

During the festival two prominent symbolic actions were observed. *First*, there was *a public drawing of water* from a pitcher which pointed to God's provision of water for Israel throughout their desert wanderings. The account of this provision of God is set forth in **Numbers 20:2-13**.

²Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.

³And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! ⁴Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? ⁵And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink." ⁶So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them.

⁷Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁸"Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals." ⁹So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him.

¹⁰And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" ¹¹Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.

³ Alfred Edersheim, **The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah**, 3rd edition, vol. 2 (E. R. Herrick & Company, 1886), pp. 148-150. This two volume work is also on line at <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/edersheim/lifetimes.i.html> and this particular block quote is at <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/edersheim/lifetimes.ix.vi.html>.

This event of publically pouring out of water is what gave occasion to Jesus standing forward and making His declaration in **verses 37 and 38**.

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ***“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”*** (John 7:37f)

This He said, in anticipation of that Day of Pentecost when He would pour out the Holy Spirit upon His people.

A second ***public action during this festival was the lighting of a lamp***. This symbolized the manifestation of the glory of God to His people, the Shekenah glory, which was the visible presence of God who tabernacled with His people during their wilderness wandering. The initial appearing of this glory is described in Exodus 40. This is what happened after Moses had completed erecting the tabernacle:

³³And he (Moses) raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work.

³⁴Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

³⁵And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁶Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. ³⁷But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys. (Exo. 40:33-38)

This event of publically lighting a lamp is what gave occasion to Jesus standing forward and making His declaration in the next chapter, **John 8:12**. There we read, ***“Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’”***

But there is a larger picture being portrayed in this episode than what we have already considered. The Holy Spirit through the pen of the apostle John is setting forth ***the Lord Jesus as the true tabernacle***, in whom God dwells with His people, those who know Him and believe on Him. He is the One through whom God satisfies the spiritually thirsty, by giving to them the blessed life-giving, life-empowering Holy Spirit. He is the One through whom God provides clear insight as to who He is and how He would have His people live in His world. As one succinctly described Jesus set forth before us in this chapter:

Jesus is the true tabernacle, the fulfillment of the world’s hopes and joys, whose faithful obedience to the Father is the source of true brotherhood in the family of God. In Jesus, the good things of God are being expressed as grace replacing grace.⁴

Leon Morris (1914-2006) expressed this same truth in different words:

The Feast of Tabernacles was a feast of thanksgiving primarily for the blessings of God in the harvest, but it was observed with special reference to the blessings received during the wilderness wanderings, the time when God was pleased to manifest Himself in the tabernacle. It may be this which gives significance to John’s recording of the happenings in this chapter. Neither in the tabernacle in the wilderness, nor in the temple which replaced it, was God fully manifested. The final and perfect manifestation of God was in Jesus, whose ministry would result in God’s dwelling neither in a tent nor in a temple, but in men’s hearts. By His Spirit.⁵

⁴ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 350. What he meant by “grace replacing grace” is that in Jesus Christ, God was replacing His gracious presence and action shown to Israel in the OT with His gracious presence and action shown in Jesus Christ.

⁵ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 392.

Let us now begin to work through these verses before us.

I. Jesus purposed initially to remain in Galilee (7:1-3)

We first read of the increasing danger to which Jesus was subject. In **verse 1** we read, “*After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him.*” The verse opens with a vague reference to time: “After these things.” These things refer to all the events previously, particularly the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 and His discourse on the bread of life and the resultant dereliction of many who had purported to be His disciples.

Jesus did not want to walk in Judea, not because He was afraid to do so, but because it was not wise for Him to do so. Our Lord was never characterized by fear, “but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7), as we should be. “It is not said, He *durst* (dared) *not*, but, He *would not*, walk in Jewry; it was not through fear and cowardness He declined it, but in prudence, for His hour had not yet come.”⁶

The verb translated “walked” is in the imperfect tense in Greek. This conveys the idea that He continually walked about or traveled about Galilee rather than in Judea. He did so because He knew that His life was in danger in Judea to the south. There is no suggestion that the events of chapter 5 occurred immediately after those of chapter 4. The bulk of our Lord’s Galilean ministry should be understood as taking place before this juncture. He taught and performed many miracles upwards to a year in time before once again setting out for Jerusalem. **D. A. Carson** argues that this Feast of Tabernacles was probably 6 months after the feeding of the 5,000.⁷ He is probably right in his assertion.

What we have is a record of increasing hostility toward Jesus that will eventually reach its zenith in Jerusalem of Judea. Back in John 5:18 we read of the murderous intention of the Jewish leaders. “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.” The Gospel reveals that the hostile opposition to Jesus was increasing as Jesus ministered among His people. His greatest opposers were the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin, the leading body of seventy men, which Rome allowed to have some measure of authority over Jewish affairs. Galilee was a great way off, separated from Judea by the region of Samaria. And so, our Lord continued His public ministry in Galilee. But here we read that He made an excursion into Judea to Jerusalem, because the Feast of the Tabernacles was at hand.

We read this in **verse 2**, “*Now the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles was at hand.*” This Feast was one of three annual feasts that the Law of Moses stipulated every Jewish male “appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses.” Jewish males (and their families) made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem in obedience to God’s Law. We read of this in **Exodus 23:14-17**.

¹⁴“Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: ¹⁵You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); ¹⁶and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. ¹⁷Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD.”

There is more detail of their observance in **Leviticus 23:39-43**.

³⁹“Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD for seven days; on the first day there shall be a sabbath-rest, and on the eighth day a sabbath-rest. ⁴⁰And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice

⁶ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721), p. 961.

⁷ Donald A. Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 305.

before the LORD your God for seven days. ⁴¹You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a statute forever in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month. ⁴²You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, ⁴³that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.’ ”

We also read of this feast in **Deuteronomy 31:9-11**.

⁹So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. ¹⁰And Moses commanded them, saying: “At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, ¹¹when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

When Moses first gave this instruction to Israel, the nation was in the wilderness. After the nation occupied the Promised Land, the males who would “appear before the Lord” would travel to wherever the tabernacle had been pitched. After their initial entrance into the Promised Land, the tabernacle was pitched at Shiloh and then later at Gibeon, until it was eventually replaced when Solomon built and then dedicated the temple in Jerusalem. Thereafter the pilgrims would make their three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem in order to observe these three major feasts.

II. Jesus’ brothers urge Him to travel to Jerusalem to advance His cause (7:3-4)

Now in that this feast required all Jewish males to make their journey to Jerusalem, we read in **verses 3 and 4** that the brothers of Jesus saw this as a great opportunity for Jesus to promote His name and cause. John wrote,

³His brothers therefore said to Him, “Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. ⁴For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.”

And then we read John’s explanation for them speaking to Jesus in **verse 5**: *“For even His brothers did not believe in Him.”* We would understand Jude and James, the authors of two of our New Testament epistles, were our Lord’s half-brothers, who were among these “brothers” (if there were more than two).

And so, John wrote of the “brothers” of Jesus. This verse is a problem for Roman Catholicism. Their official doctrine is that Mary was a perpetual virgin, that though she was married to Joseph, they remained celibate throughout their married life. Of course the Bible does not teach this. In Matthew 1, after Joseph was informed by the angel of the condition of Mary his betrothed, we read, “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: *he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son*. And he called his name Jesus” (Matt. 1:24f). But Rome teaches that Mary remained a perpetual virgin. However Rome is not alone in this belief. Eastern Orthodoxy teaches it, as do high church Anglicans and some Lutherans and Methodists. The teaching may be found quite early in the Christian era. The famous preacher, **John Chrysostom** (347-407) believed and taught the doctrine. **Augustine** (354-430) gave a number of arguments supporting the doctrine. It became established teaching throughout Christendom in both the west and the east through many centuries. It was only with the Protestant Reformation when a return to the Scriptures alone resulted in the doctrine was called into question. Interestingly, however, **Martin Luther** held to the perpetual virginity of Mary throughout his life, as did **John Wesley**. Although in some of his writings **John Calvin** (1509-1564) seemed sympathetic to the idea of the perpetual virginity of Mary, he did give a number of arguments why she would not have remained celibate in her marriage to Joseph after the birth of Jesus. In his commentary of Luke 1:34, Calvin declared that it was an “unfounded and altogether absurd” belief that Mary had made a vow of perpetual virginity. He wrote:

The conjecture which some have drawn from these words, that she had formed a vow of perpetual virginity, is unfounded and altogether absurd. She would, in that case, have committed treachery by allowing herself to be united to a husband, and would have poured contempt on the holy covenant of marriage; which could not have been done without mockery of God. Although the Papists have exercised barbarous tyranny on this subject, yet they have never proceeded so far as to allow the wife to form a vow of continence at her own pleasure. Besides, it is an idle and unfounded supposition that a monastic life existed among the Jews.

What, then, do these people do with verses like the one before us and others like it? Here are several of them:

John 7:3. "**His brothers** therefore said to Him, 'Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing.'"

John 2:12. "After this He went down to Capernaum, with His mother **and His brothers** and His disciples, and they stayed there for a few days."

Luke 8:19f. "Then his mother **and his brothers** came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, 'Your mother **and your brothers** are standing outside, desiring to see you.'"

Matt. 13:55f. "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? **And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?** ⁵⁶**And His sisters, are they not all with us?** Where then did this Man get all these things?" (i.e. His knowledge and insight).

Some argue that these were children of Joseph from a previous marriage, before Joseph married Mary. Others say that these were cousins of Jesus, not his actual half brothers and sisters, who were born to Joseph and Mary after Jesus was born. The point is this, there is no biblical reason that Mary must have remained a virgin after giving birth to Jesus. The doctrine is born out of the perceived need to elevate Mary beyond the status of a godly and pure virgin whom God chose to be the mother of the Savior in His human nature. Joseph and Mary had a normal, healthy, and probably model marriage after their first-born son, Jesus, was born into the world. They had sons and daughters, born into a family in which Jesus was the elder half-brother.

Now, what was it that Jesus' brothers wanted Him to do, which is explained by John by the fact that they were "unbelievers?" Again, **verses 3 and 4** read,

³**His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. ⁴For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world. For even His brothers did not believe in Him."**

First, let us consider the nature of their request. They said to Him, "**Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing.**" The question might be asked: But had not His disciples already seen the miracles that Jesus had performed?

Actually, there are several ways that interpreters have sought to explain this situation. (1) Some argue that these brothers of Jesus had witnessed the defection and departure of the "many disciples" referred to in John 6:66, and that they were wanting Jesus to win them back to Himself through their witnessing Him performing more miracles. (2) Others say that His brothers were urging Him to assume the role of the Messiah that was popularly expected and anticipated by the people.

One explanation of their advice to Jesus is that there is a spirit of revolt in the air, in Galilee as well as Jerusalem. The brothers were aware of it, and expected that it would manifest itself in Jerusalem during

the festival. They therefore urged Jesus to go to Jerusalem to take charge of the revolt and turn it into a liberation movement. If He was indeed the Messiah, that was the kind of action which was popularly expected from the Messiah.⁸

But then F. F. Bruce went on to say of this position, “But there is insufficient support for this idea in the present context.”⁹ It would seem that the best explanation is that (3) His brothers were urging Him to promote Himself through performing miracles in order to gain a following in Jerusalem, the center of the Jews’ religion and national identity. This seems to have been their motivation for urging Jesus to go to Jerusalem at this time. Jews from all over the world would be present, surely through His ability to perform miracles, this is the way to establish and advance His kingdom.

However, our Lord Jesus was opposed to this kind of thinking and this manner of working. In fact the prophecies regarding Him reveal that promoting Himself would not be His method of accomplishing His messianic mission. We read in Isaiah 42:2

He will not cry out, nor raise His voice,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.

This is quoted in Matthew’s Gospel to describe the nature of His public ministry. Here is **Matthew 12:15-21** in which Isaiah 42 is quoted:

¹⁴Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

¹⁵But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. ¹⁶Yet He warned them not to make Him known, ¹⁷that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

¹⁸“Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen,
My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!
I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.

¹⁹***He will not quarrel nor cry out,
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.***

²⁰A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench,
Till He sends forth justice to victory;

²¹And in His name Gentiles will trust.”

But besides this, Jesus had just purged His large band of followers who would have forced Him to become their King. Their fascination with Him was built upon the very faulty foundation that His brothers wanted Him to build in Jerusalem.

What the brothers did not realize was that those disciples’ faith was imperfect precisely because it was based on the outward signs without proper appreciation of the inward truth they were intended to convey; that kind of faith would not be strengthened by the sight of greater or more numerous miracles.¹⁰

They would have Him go to Jerusalem and do the opposite of what He had just done before the multitude as recorded in John 6.

III. Jesus dismissed their request and discredits their reasoning (7:6-7)

⁸ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 170.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 171.

⁶Then Jesus said to them, “My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. ⁷The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. ⁸You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.” ⁹When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee.

The Lord Jesus first declared that it was not in God’s timing for Him to go to Jerusalem. **Verse 6** reads, **“Then Jesus said to them, ‘My time has not yet come...** Here, when Jesus used the word, “time”, He was saying that it was not the time according to God’s agenda for Him to go up to the feast. But His brothers could go up to the feast at any time for they were not under the same agenda set by the Father. “Jesus’ brothers are free to go up to Jerusalem for the feast any time they like, while Jesus is under special constraint.”¹¹

Yes, there would come the time when Jesus would go up to Jerusalem to be manifest before all. But His manifestation would be of an entirely different form than what His brothers envisioned. He will be manifest through hanging on His cross, not by promoting Himself to become their king. He will later declare, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). But when He made that statement, it was to indicate the manner in which He would die, that being lifted up on His cross (Cf. John 12:33). But at this point in His ministry, it was not time, that is, it was not in accordance with God’s divine plan and timing that He go up to Jerusalem to be manifest in the way that would one day occur.

But then Jesus added to His words of refusal, saying to His brothers, **“but your time is always ready.”** They had no restraint placed upon them for they were not called to fulfill a prescribed agenda. Besides, Jesus argued in **verse 7**, **“The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil.”** The Lord was speaking of the fallen world, of which His brothers were a part. Interestingly, “this is the first time in the gospel where ‘the world’ is spoken not as the object of God’s love (cf. 3:16, 17; 4:42; 6:33, 51) but as God’s enemy.”¹²

His brothers need not expect the populace of Jerusalem to be hostile toward them. They would be welcomed there because they were of that fallen world system of which all are a part, except for Jesus Himself. Jesus said, “The world cannot hate them, for they belong to it, and the world loves its own (cf. John 15:19).”¹³ His brothers would be able to go up to Jerusalem and move about in the streets and mix it up with the people and blend in quite well, for they are all of the same stock, all are members of this fallen world system.

But in contrast to the world not hating His brothers, it cannot but help to hate Jesus. The reason? He exposes their sin as sin. Jesus said, **“but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil.”** We may be reminded of King Ahab who many centuries spoke to King Hezekiah of a prophet he knew:

“And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, ‘There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, **for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil.**’” (1 Kings 22:8)

The world could say this of Jesus and His teaching ministry. Jesus was always reproofing the world of sin. And if those in the world fail or refuse to believe what He says, they react with anger toward Him.

Jesus says of the fallen world, **“its works are evil.”** You and I are evil, apart from the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ and due to the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. Unless the things we think, the things we feel, the things we do, are done by us in obedience to God in order to be conformed to His law to which each of us are bound, we are evil for our deeds are evil. Evil is a common word in Scripture. In our NKJV it occurs 482 times in 454 verses. Jesus Christ came to save evil people from their evil unto Himself. He came to save us from this present evil age. Of Jesus Christ Paul wrote, “who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Gal. 1:4).

¹¹ Carson, p. 308.

¹² Klink, p. 355.

¹³ Ibid.

We then read of Jesus dismissing His brothers to leave for Jerusalem to observe this Feast of Tabernacles. **Verse 8** records, ***“You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.”*** There is an interesting textual variant in this verse. Apparently a scribe at some point in history inserted in His copying of the text the Greek word that is translated, “not yet”: “I am ***not yet*** going up to this feast.” In the modern English translations, they record Jesus simply saying that He is not going up to the feast. The problem is verse 10. After He tells His brothers He is not going to Jerusalem, in verse 10 we read that he goes to Jerusalem: “But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.” A scribe intentionally inserted “not yet” in order to make Jesus seem not to be forthright in His statement to His brothers that He was not going to go to Jerusalem.

The Lord Jesus was very precise in His statement. Again, the verse reads, “I am not yet going up to ***this*** feast.” It is here that the wrongly perceived problem of our anonymous scribe is resolved. What Jesus was implying was that He would go up, but not for the chief purpose to commemorate ***this*** Feast of the Tabernacles of which all were traveling to Jerusalem to observe. He would go up, but in doing so He would declare to the assembled Jews in Jerusalem the true meaning of the Feast, that it foretold of Him and the true life that He would bring and the very real presence of God that He Himself would be in their midst. In effect Jesus will go up to present Himself as the true tabernacle in whom God dwells with His people. When the water is drawn from the pool of Siloam and ceremonially carried into the temple where it was poured out before the Lord, Jesus would stand and declare to them,

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” ³⁹But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:37-39)

And when the lamp was ceremonially lit during the feast, He will declare Himself to be the true light that God had sent into the world. In John 8:12 we read His words, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

IV. Jesus secretly went to Jerusalem to the Feast (7:10-13)

¹⁰But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. ¹¹Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, “Where is He?” ¹²And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, “He is good”; others said, “No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.” ¹³However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.

Jesus chose to go up separate from His unbelieving brothers. He did not want them to bring undue attention to Him or certainly He did not want to be subject to their uninformed and misguided promotion of Him. He went up secretly. “The time when it would be proper for Him to make a public entry into Jerusalem had not yet come; six months later it came (cf. John 12:12ff).”¹⁴ There is no mention of His disciples, which is interesting. We can probably assume that His disciples traveled with Him, even though they are not mentioned.

But we read that though no one saw Him so as to recognize Him, He was the talk of the town. In **verse 11** we read that “the Jews” sought Him at the feast. ***“Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, ‘Where is He?’”*** We should probably understand this term, “the Jews”, as it was used earlier in John’s Gospel, to refer to the hostile Jewish leaders in Jerusalem who were intent on murdering Him.

If, as usually is the case in St. John, the “Jews” here mean the rulers and the Pharisees, there can be little doubt that they sought Jesus in order to kill Him, as the first verse tells us they wished to do. They naturally concluded that, like all devout Jews, He would come up to Jerusalem to the feast.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bruce, p. 173.

¹⁵ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 13.

We read in **verse 12**, “*And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him.*” Just as there had been disputing about Him in the synagogue of Capernaum, now the conflict is growing and expanding. People throughout the city of Jerusalem were complaining and arguing about Him.

There was division in opinions of Him. “*Some said, ‘He is good’; others said, ‘No, on the contrary, He deceives the people’*” (v. 12b). Our Lord was a cause of great dissension and division among the people. When He was but an infant, a prophecy was given over Him that this would be one aspect of His legacy. It was aged Simeon in this same temple, perhaps thirty years before, who took the baby Jesus in His arms, foretold what would occur. Here is the account:

²⁵And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, ²⁸he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

²⁹“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,
According to Your word;
³⁰For my eyes have seen Your salvation
³¹Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
³²A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel.”

³³And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “*Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel*, and for a sign which will be spoken against ³⁵(yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:25-35)

We see this being realized in John’s description of the people of the city, who did not see Him, but could not but speak of Him, either in favor or against Him.

But then we read lastly in **verse 13**, “*However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.*” The very ones that should have sought Him to welcome Him and to whom they should have lent their support, silenced the people through fear to even speak of Him openly.

Let it be noted that Christ is, and always has been, the cause of division of opinion, wherever He has come or has been preached. To some He is a savor of “life,” and to others of “death” (2 Cor. 2:16). He draws out the true character of mankind. They either like Him or dislike Him. Strife and conflict of opinion are the certain consequences of the Gospel really coming among men with power. The fault is not in the Gospel, but in human nature. Stillness and quiet are signs not of life, but death. The sun calls forth miasma¹⁶ and malaria from the swamps it shines upon; but the fault is not in the sun, but in the land. The very same rays call forth fertility and abundance from the corn field.¹⁷

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God,
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17)

¹⁶ Miasma: a highly unpleasant or unhealthy smell or vapor.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 14.