

# 15. John 7 – Jesus on trial

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## Thinking about this study...

So far John has shown us a little more of who Jesus is (John 5) and what he has come to do (John 6). In John 7 the reactions of various groups of people are presented. The setting is the Feast of Tabernacles.

You have choice in this study as to what to focus upon. The first approach will be to read through the entire chapter and look at the various ways that Jesus' claims are assessed and responded to. This forms part of an overall 'trial theme' that pervades the Gospel.

The second approach is to focus on a very specific claim that Jesus makes in the midst of the feast in verses 37–39.

## Approach 1

### Getting Started

What are the main estimates of Jesus that you hear around the place? What evidence or reasons do people offer for their opinions?

### Observation and interpretation

Read through the chapter and collate the various responses to Jesus that John details. These will be both negative and positive and often there will be a reason given or a problem stated with Jesus and his claims. Occasionally there will also be a reply from Jesus or a defence of sorts offered. In the chart below collate the various options as you read through the text...

Verses	Character	Response/Assessment of Jesus	Reason (if any)	Reply/Defence (if any)
7:3-8				
7:14-19				
7:20-24				
7:25-29				
7:30-31				
7:40				
7:41				
7:41-43				
7:45-46				
7:47-49				
7:50-52				

## **Implications**

What has been helpful in this chapter in thinking through how to approach people and their (mis)conceptions about the person of Jesus?

The chapter has mainly focussed around the claim that Jesus is the Christ. What does this title mean and is it relevant for today?

The chapter has breathed the air of argument and sort of proof in discussion about Jesus. Some Christians are nervous about this suggesting that our responsibility is to proclaim the Gospel and not argue for it. How would you respond to that?

# Approach 2

## Getting Started

Read through John 7:1-36 in order to get some idea of the context in which Jesus speaks.

### Some Background: The Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles was a festival celebrating the harvest of grapes and olives around September/October. According to Josephus it was the most popular Jewish festival of them all. People flocked to Jerusalem and lived, for the week, in makeshift booths or tabernacles. While it was a harvest festival it also provided an opportunity to recall God's mercy to the Israelites as they travelled through the wilderness under the leadership of Moses. It was well known for both lamp lighting and water drawing ceremonies.

The water-pouring ceremony involved filling a golden flagon of water from the Pool of Siloam. This was then taken in a procession led by the High Priest to the Temple. As the procession approached the Watergate, there were three trumpet blasts. Inside the Temple there was then a parade around the altar with Psalms 113 – 118 being chanted. As Psalm 118 was chanted a palm branch intertwined with willow and myrtle twigs was shaken a citrus fruit raised in the left hand. Everyone would then cry 'Give thanks to the Lord' and the water would be poured into silver bowls and then poured out as an offering to God. The water was poured out into the shaft at the side of the altar and the altar, or more precisely the rock on which it rested, was said to mark the spot where the world's thirst was quenched.

The light ceremony involved the lighting of chandeliers or lanterns so that all Jerusalem seemed to be bathed in the light from the temple.

All of this of course occurred at the Temple, a place of major significance for the Jewish people. The Temple stands at the centre of the city that is at the centre of Israelite national and religious life. It is the place where God made his name or glory to dwell. The temple was in fact significant for the whole cosmos: it is likened to creation in its establishment in Ps 78; the Lord dwells there and from there of course the fate of the whole earth is decided. The temple and Jerusalem were central in prophetic visions of the final and universal salvation of the new age. Following the exile the temple was a central symbol of the hope for the restored nation, while Isaiah notes that it will also be a house of prayer for all peoples (Is 56:7 cf also Zech 14.10). According to Ezekiel 47, in the messianic age a river would flow from under the altar in the Temple and go out into the entire world.

### Read John 7:37–39

1. What significance has water had in John's Gospel so far? See John 2:1–11, 3:5; 4:7–15; 5:7.
2. How provocative are Jesus' actions here? How do they interact with the symbolism of the water pouring ceremony (see also Isaiah 12:16; Zech 14:1-8; Ezek 36:25–27)? What is being claimed here by Jesus in this action?
3. How does John interpret the symbolism?

## **Implications**

1. How would you apply the Gospel's teaching on Jesus and water to today? See Jeremiah 2:13
2. What are the implications of this passage for your own personal response to Jesus? What are the implications for thinking about your activities as a follower of Jesus?