

7:37-52 The Last Day of the Feast: Living Water

The Festival of Tabernacles comes to its climactic moment, the "great day of the feast," with Jesus' promise to give living water and his revelation of himself as the light of the world. Both images—water and light—play a role in the celebration of Tabernacles. Earlier, John has drawn on key institutions (temple), holy days (Sabbath), and persons (Moses, Jacob) to explicate who Jesus is and what he brings. Here the pattern continues. The ceremony of drawing water from the pool of Siloam and then pouring it over the altar (see below) provides the backdrop for Jesus' claim to give living water; the lighting of golden candlesticks in the precincts of the temple becomes the backdrop for Jesus' claim to be light of the world. John has drawn from some elements of Tabernacles that particularly fit the themes of these chapters in order to show that what was hoped for and commemorated in the celebration of the Feast is now being realized and given through the person of Jesus.

7:37 On the last great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 The one who believes in me, even as the Scripture says, 'Out of his belly will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 He said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for the Spirit had not yet been given,^a because Jesus was not yet glorified.

40 When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This is truly the prophet!" 41 But others said, "This is the Messiah." And others said, "But the Messiah doesn't come from Galilee, does he? 42 Doesn't the Scripture say that he is from the seed of David and that he comes from the village of Bethlehem, where David was?" 43 So there was a division among the crowd about him. 44 Some of them wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

45 The servants went to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said, "Why didn't you bring him?" 46 The servants answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" 47 And the Pharisees answered, "Are you also deceived? 48 Has any one of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? 49 This crowd, which doesn't know the law, is cursed."

50 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier, and who was one of them, said to them, 51 "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" 52 And they responded, "Are you also from Galilee? Search, and you will see that no prophet^b arises from Galilee."

a. The Greek reads "the Spirit was not yet [*oupō gar ēn pneuma*]." Several textual variants sought to alleviate the embarrassing implication that the Holy Spirit did not

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exist at this time, including these: (B and many others); and (2) "T difficult reading in the text best rightly by the variants in B and b. Here Φ^{66} reads *ho prophētē* Galilee"); but this reading is not of 7:52 (*prophētēs*) to the read

[7:37-39] The action on the last day of the celebration of the seven days of Tabernacles from the pool of Siloam (4:9-10).¹⁴⁴ Although John the water ceremony of the Feast of Jesus' invitation to all will never thirst (4:13-14).

A quotation from Sirach 48:1-2 on how one punctuates the Feast (as in the present translation) correspond to any known Testament passages that refer to the temple with well as from the rock of living water (Exod 17:6; Num 20:11). But no biblical text of water flowing from the living water" flow?¹⁴⁵

Some translation of one who is thirsty comes from the Scripture has said

143. According to Ezek 45:25); but it was 23:36, 39) so that it is *m. Sukkah* 4.8). In the for eight; since the day as the "last day"

144. The water li

145. In several places gives water and spir

146. On *koilia* in waters in the pool o

147. E.g., NRSV Lincoln 2005, 254

exist at this time, including these: (1) "The (Holy) Spirit was not yet given [*dedomenon*]" (B and many others); and (2) "The Holy Spirit was not yet upon them" (D*). The more difficult reading in the text best explains the origin of the others, but it is understood rightly by the variants in B and elsewhere.

b. Here $\mathfrak{P}^{66}$ reads *ho prophētēs* ("Search and see that the prophet is not to arise from Galilee"); but this reading is not widely attested and may be due to scribal assimilation of 7:52 (*prophētēs*) to the reading *ho prophētēs* at 7:40.

[7:37–39] The action now moves from the middle of the feast to the last day of the celebration of Tabernacles.¹⁴³ According to the Mishnah, on each of the seven days of Tabernacles the priests filled a golden vessel with water from the pool of Siloam (cf. 9:7) and then poured it over the altar (*m. Sukkah* 4:9–10).¹⁴⁴ Although John makes no explicit mention of this water libation, the water ceremony of Tabernacles provides a backdrop for the introduction of Jesus' invitation to all who are thirsty to come to him and drink so that they will never thirst (4:13–14; 6:35).

A quotation from Scripture explains Jesus' invitation (7:38). Depending on how one punctuates the sentence, the quotation could be attributed to Jesus (as in the present translation) or to the narrator. But the citation does not correspond to any known Scriptural text (so also John 6:31). There are Old Testament passages that speak of water flowing out of a sanctified Jerusalem and/or the temple within it (Zech 13:1; 14:8; Ezek 47:1–12; Joel 3:17–18) as well as from the rock in the wilderness given to quench the thirst of the Israelites (Exod 17:6; Num 20:8–11; Pss 78:16, 20; 105:41; Isa 48:21; Neh 9:15, 20). But no biblical text has the phrase "rivers of living water" or pictures the water flowing from within a person.¹⁴⁵ From whose "belly" do the "rivers of living water" flow?¹⁴⁶

Some translations and interpreters render Jesus' invitation thus: "Let the one who is thirsty come to me, and let him drink, whoever believes in me. As the Scripture has said, 'Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'"¹⁴⁷

143. According to some sources, the festival lasted seven days (Deut 16:13, 15; Lev 23:34; Ezek 45:25); but it was followed by a "holy convocation," a day of rest, on the eighth day (Lev 23:36, 39) so that it is also called a festival of eight days (2 Macc 10:6; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.245, 247; *m. Sukkah* 4.8). In the Mishnah, some rites of Tabernacles are celebrated for seven days, and some for eight; since the water libation is performed seven days, John apparently identifies the seventh day as the "last day" of the feast.

144. The water libation is not mentioned outside rabbinic sources.

145. In several passages in Isaiah, God gives water to the thirsty (43:20; 44:3, in which God gives water and spirit; 55:1).

146. On *koilia* in 7:38, Levison (2009, 372–78) compares the cave of Gihon, the source of the waters in the pool of Siloam, and the "cavity" of the human body from which the living water flows.

147. E.g., NRSV, CEB, NEB; Beasley-Murray 115–16; R. Brown 1966, 319; Keener 1:728–29; Lincoln 2005, 254–57; D. Moody Smith 1999, 174.

While in this translation it remains ambiguous whether Jesus' words end with "believes in me" or include the Scriptural citation, that citation provides the explanation why people may drink and be satisfied: living water flows from Jesus (cf. 19:34; 20:22). But in the translation offered here—"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, even as the Scripture says, 'Out of his belly will flow rivers of living water'"—the one who is thirsty, who drinks, and who believes is the one from whom flow the "rivers of living water."¹⁴⁸ On this reading, the passage has a clear parallel to Jesus' promise in John 4:14: "Those who drink from the water that I will give to them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (see also Isa 58:11). Both passages in John 4 and 7 assume that Jesus gives the "living water," which becomes a "never-failing, self-replenishing stream" within the believer.¹⁴⁹

Water serves as a figure of the Spirit, which those who believed in Jesus were going (*emellon*) to receive at a future time; they could not receive the Spirit because (1) the Spirit "had not yet been given" (lit., "was not yet"), and (2) Jesus had not yet been glorified. These statements point forward to the time of the giving of the Spirit, the Paraclete (14:26), after the death of Jesus and his glorification.¹⁵⁰ Since the Old Testament speaks of the Spirit of God active in the world, John's statement that "the Spirit was not yet" must refer to the particular giving of the Spirit as the Paraclete to bear witness to Jesus, call him to remembrance, and to teach the disciples after his departure (14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). For those reading the Gospel, the passages about the Spirit are statements of their present reality: after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Spirit has been given, and all that the Gospel has promised would happen through the Spirit is now coming to fruition.

[40-44] Once again, Jesus' teaching and claims lead to a "division" (7:43). There are different assessments of him (prophet, Messiah), opposing responses of belief and unbelief, and efforts to arrest and to defend him. Oddly, here the crowd raises an objection to Jesus' messianic status—he comes from Galilee rather than Bethlehem—that seems flatly to contradict their earlier contention that "when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from" (7:27). But these objections share one thing: in neither case do the people know that Jesus comes ultimately from God. Therefore, any attempt to deny who he might be by means of appeal to geography or his

148. In 7:38, the disputed sentence reads: "The one who believes [*ho pisteuōn*] in me [*eis emē*], . . . out of his belly [*ek tēs koilias autou*] will flow rivers of living water." This reading takes the pronoun *autou* in the phrase *ek tēs koilias autou* as referring to the subject of the sentence, "the one who believes," not to the object of belief (Jesus); see KJV, RSV, TNIV, ESV; Barrett 327; Carson 1991, 322-25; Fee; Michaels 463-65; Talbert 148.

149. Michaels 465.

150. See Excursus 9: "The Holy Spirit in John."

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origins "from below" fails to grasp his identity, which in John is known with respect to Jesus' ultimate origins.

If Jesus is from Bethlehem¹⁵¹ in Judea, the village of David, that would allow him to be the Messiah who is to come from the house of Judah (Rev 5:5; Heb 7:14; Gen 49:9-10; *T. Jud.* 21.2; 24.5; the Targums on Gen 49:9-10). But that, for John, would not explain the kind of Messiah that Jesus is; he is the Messiah and "King of Israel" as the Son of God (1:49; 11:27; 19:7-9, 14-15; 20:31). Those who followed in the line of David were reckoned by God as "sons" and knew God as "father" (2 Sam 7:12-14). In John, Jesus is not like a son of God; he is the (only) Son of God (3:18) who comes from above and who knows God as his "own Father." John's citations of and allusions to various passages of the Old Testament regularly show how Jesus can be understood by analogy with various biblical figures or entities, even if he surpasses what is promised in or through them.

Since it is clear that those who dispute that Jesus is the Messiah do not judge with right judgment (7:24), they have not assessed the matter of Jesus' origins rightly either. Earlier they had claimed to know where he comes from (7:27) but in fact do not know that he actually comes "from above," from God (3:31; 7:28). Here they claim to know that Jesus is from Galilee and so cannot be the Messiah. But they err in that judgment as well, and so there is a "division in the crowd."

[44-52] Such division also runs through the ranks of the "chief priests and Pharisees" (cf. comments on 1:24; 7:32; 11:47). These authorities send servants to arrest Jesus, who return without him, all the while marveling at his teaching. At least one Pharisee, Nicodemus, defends Jesus, desiring to hear and learn what he does (v. 51). Nicodemus had first come as an eager but uncomprehending inquirer (v. 50; 3:1-21); now he appears as Jesus' advocate, contending that the law demands for Jesus to be heard (v. 51). According to Deuteronomy, judges appointed by God are to "judge justly" (*krinate dikaiōs*, Deut 1:16 LXX; cf. 19:16-18), even as Jesus has exhorted the people to judge with "right" or "just" judgment (*tēn dikaian krisin krinete*, 7:24). But it is precisely on the basis of the law that the Pharisees spurn Nicodemus's suggestion, claiming that those who believe in Jesus are not the authorities who know the law, but the crowd that does not (vv. 48-49). In their ignorance of the law, these crowds are led astray or deceived (7:12, 47) by a man who himself has never studied the law (7:15). As careful observers of the law, the Pharisees know it well, assuming that it will speak for them and against

151. The likely reference here is Mic 5:2, speaking of the one who will come from Bethlehem to "rule in Israel"; the Targum on Micah specifically names the Messiah; cf. Matt 2:1-6. Although the tradition of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem is not found elsewhere in John, it may be alluded to here; it is unlikely that John would introduce an objection from the Scriptures if he did not think it could be answered, since the Scriptures bear witness to Jesus.