

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php

AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL

PROF. F. F. BRUCE, D.D.

II. Jesus reveals Himself to the world (John 7:1—10:39)

(d) MINISTRY OF JESUS IN JERUSALEM (John 7:1—10:39)

(i) *The Feast of Tabernacles* (John 7:1-52), (continued)

Ch. 7, v. 31—*But of the multitude many believed on him; and they said, When the Christ shall come, will he do more signs than those which this man hath done?*—If the prophets of old gave proof that they were God's messengers by the signs which they performed, it was natural to believe that the Messiah would give even more conclusive evidence of His office and mission. But would the signs which the Messiah might be expected to perform be more (or greater) than those which Jesus was actually performing before their eyes? The multitude would include Galilaean pilgrims who had witnessed the feeding of the five thousand six months previously, as well as natives of Jerusalem who knew of the miraculous cure wrought at the pool of Bethesda.

v. 32—*The Pharisees heard the multitude murmuring these things concerning him; and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to take him.*—If, in spite of the rulers' refusal to admit His claim to be a teacher sent from God, so many of the common people were convinced that He was not only a teacher, but the Messiah in person, more drastic steps must be taken. The Sanhedrin (for so we should probably understand 'the chief priests and the Pharisees') sent members of the temple police to arrest Him. The chief priests (Gk. *archiereis*) were the members of the most wealthy and powerful priestly families, from whose ranks the high priest was regularly selected. They were the dominant elements in the party of the Sadducees, the majority party in the Sanhedrin. The temple police were responsible for the maintenance of law and order within the temple precincts. They were a picked body of Levites, and their commander (the 'captain of the temple') was an official wielding high authority, usually drawn from one of the leading chief-priestly families.

v. 33—*Jesus therefore said, Yet a little while am I with you, and I go unto him that sent me.*—After being told about the sending of the police to arrest Jesus, the readers are left in suspense regarding the outcome of their mission; before John tells how they fared, he relates further words spoken by Jesus at the festival. These words plainly refer to the fact that Jesus has but a short time left before the completion of His earthly mission and His return to His Father. But they are (as so often) misunderstood by His hearers.

v. 34—*Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, ye cannot come.*—If even during His ministry among them they found it so difficult to lay hands on Him before His hour had come, they would have still less chance of finding Him when once He had gone back to the Father.

v. 35—*The Jews therefore said among themselves, Whither will this man go that we shall not find him? will he go unto the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks?*—His hearers, however, and more particularly their leaders, fail to grasp His meaning, and talk (rather scornfully) as if He contemplated leaving Judaea for the lands of the Dispersion in the west, where Jewish colonies lived in a Greek-speaking environment. Is He planning a period of ministry among the Diaspora Jews? Or is He conceivably planning a mission among the pagan Greeks themselves? In recording this remark, the Evangelist probably anticipates deliberately the implied invitation conveyed to Jesus by the Greeks who attended the passover celebrations in Jerusalem six months later (John 12:20 ff). Little did the speakers know that, while Jesus was not to go in person among the Greeks, His followers would be numbered by tens of thousands in the Greek lands in a very few years' time. We may certainly trace here a further instance of Johannine irony.

v. 36—*What is this word that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, ye cannot come?*—His words are repeated from v. 34. Even now they may contain a hint of the implication which is more evident in Ch. 8:21 ff., that it is sin (and especially the sin of not believing in Him) that will make it

impossible for these people to come where He is going. With regard to those who did believe in Him He said on a later occasion: 'where I am, there shall also my servant be' (Ch. 12:26).

v. 37—*Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.*—The feast of tabernacles lasted eight days, and the eighth day was 'a holy convocation . . . a solemn assembly' (Lev. 23:36; cf. Num. 29:35 ff.; Neh. 8:18). The original purpose of the festival is made plain by its earliest designation: 'the feast of ingathering, at the end of the year, when thou gatherest in thy labours out of the field' (Ex. 23:16; cf. Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:13-15). It was the great harvest festival, when the people returned thanks to God for all the fruits of the past year, vine and olive as well as barley and wheat. Nor did they forget God's gift of rain, apart from which none of these crops could have grown. An association of the feast of tabernacles with adequate rainfall is implied in Zech. 14:16 f., and although the ceremony of water-pouring, well attested in connection with the feast for the two centuries preceding A.D. 70, is not mentioned in the Old Testament (with the possible exception of 1 Sam. 7:6), it was no doubt of very considerable antiquity. This ceremony, which was intended to acknowledge God's goodness in sending rain, and to secure a plentiful supply for the ensuing season, was enacted at dawn on the first seven days of the feast. A procession led by a priest went down to the pool of Siloam, where a golden pitcher was filled with water, and returned to the temple as the morning sacrifice was being offered. The water was then poured into a container at the side of the altar, and the temple choir began to sing the Great Hallel (Psalms 113-118).

If, as our evidence appears to indicate, the ceremony of water-pouring was not enacted on the eighth day (although a prayer for rain was recited then), there will be the more significance in John's statement that it was on that day that Jesus made His proclamation. If no material water was poured on the eighth morning, spiritual, life-giving water was available to all who would come to Him. The offer of this water had been made centuries before in the words of the prophet, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth,

come ye to the waters' (Isa. 55:1); but now it is repeated with a personal reference: 'He that is athirst, let him come to *me*'.

v. 38—*He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*—There are good reasons for recasting the traditional punctuation of Jesus' invitation, so as to read it thus:

'He that is athirst, let him come to me,
And let him drink who believes on me'.

Both the rhythm and the rhyme of the resultant couplet echo with remarkable faithfulness the rhythm and rhyme of the original Aramaic utterance, so far as it can be reconstructed from the Greek text. Jesus had already told the Samaritan woman of the superior qualities of the living water: '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 unto eternal life' (John 4:14). It is now shown that this upspringing well not only refreshes one's own soul but flows out to refresh the lives of others. 'As the scripture has said, From within him shall flow rivers of living water.' But where exactly does the scripture say this? In the passage of the book of Zechariah already referred to we read that in the day of the Lord 'living waters shall go out from Jerusalem' (Zech. 14:8); Ezekiel, giving further details about these waters (Ezek. 47:1 ff.), adds that 'every thing shall live whithersoever the river cometh' (v. 9). The fulfilment of these and other prophecies (cf. Joel 3:18; Isa. 33:21) is not to be sought in twentieth-century schemes to cut a rival to the Suez canal through Israeli territory or the like; it lies plain for all to read in John's description of 'a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb' (Rev. 22:1)—and in the words of Jesus which we are studying now. It is from no earthly Jerusalem that the living waters go forth; it is from the dwelling-place of God in lives that are consecrated to Him. And lest there should be any misunderstanding of Jesus' meaning, the Evangelist adds an explicit note for the guidance of his readers.

v. 39—*But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.*—It is noteworthy that some Jewish teachers connected the water-pouring ceremony with the promised outpouring of the Spirit. So, according to one rabbinical interpretation, the ceremony was called the festival of water-drawing 'because from there they drew the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as it is written: "Therefore with joy shall be draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isa. 12:3)'. John here makes it plain that the living water promised by Jesus was the gift of the Spirit, and he adds that this gift in its fulness could not be imparted until Jesus was 'glorified'. This is the first of many references in this Gospel to the glorification of Jesus; from some of the later references it becomes clear that His glorification was His crucifixion, His 'lifting up'—to use another characteristic phrase of this Evangelist. The release of the Spirit through the death of Jesus may even be in the Evangelist's mind when he tells how blood and water came forth from His side when the soldier pierced Him (Ch. 19:34). In the upper room discourse Jesus emphasizes that the Paraclete cannot come to His disciples until His own departure from them: 'If I go', He says, 'I will send him unto you' (Ch. 16:7). The fulfilment of the promise came on the first Christian pentecost, of which the 'insufflation' of John 20:22 may be regarded as an anticipation.

In the Revised Version of our present text, the word 'given' is italicized; the best attested reading is simply 'for spirit was not yet' (Gk. *oupō gar ên pneuma*). Later editors of the text added 'upon them' or 'given' to show that the passage does not mean that the Holy Spirit did not yet exist; these additions, although not part of the original text, bring out its sense well enough, and indeed one or the other of them is almost necessary in an English version to make the statement intelligible.

(To be continued)