

# Rivers of Living Water

*John 7:25-52*

<sup>25</sup> Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill?"

<sup>26</sup> And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ?

<sup>27</sup> But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from."

<sup>28</sup> So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know.

<sup>29</sup> I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me."

<sup>30</sup> So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because **his hour had not yet come**.

<sup>31</sup> Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?"

<sup>32</sup> The **Pharisees** heard the crowd **muttering** these things about him, and the **chief priests** and Pharisees sent **officers** to arrest him.

<sup>33</sup> Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me.

<sup>34</sup> You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come."

<sup>35</sup> The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?"

<sup>36</sup> What does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'Where I am you cannot come'?"

<sup>37</sup> On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

<sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

<sup>39</sup> Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

<sup>40</sup> When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet."

<sup>41</sup> Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee?"

<sup>42</sup> Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"

<sup>43</sup> So there was a division among the people over him.

<sup>44</sup> Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

<sup>45</sup> The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?"

<sup>46</sup> The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!"

<sup>47</sup> The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived?"

<sup>48</sup> Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?

<sup>49</sup> But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed."

<sup>50</sup> Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them,

<sup>51</sup> "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?"

<sup>52</sup> They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

## The Feast of Booths and Water

Imagine yourself a first century Jew going down to Jerusalem during the most exciting, well attended feast of the year: [The Feast of Booths](#). It is fall and harvest has just been completed. You have travelled a great distance with your family. The journey has taken many days. You arrive outside the city to find thousands of temporary huts having been erected by your fellow Israelites. There are so many people that the homes are as closely knit as honeycomb, and the people are as busy as bees. You send the family to begin gathering sticks and branches with which to make booths for them as you join the nation in celebration for the fall harvest and God's provision.

God instituted the Feast to help later generations like you remember Israel's (your) deliverance from Egypt, the subsequent wandering in the wilderness for forty years, and the arrival into the Promised Land. Your living in a temporary booth is a symbol of the middle part of that journey from long

ago. As such, the festival looks backward to the many deliverances of God in the wilderness and forward to entering the Promised Land. It is symbolic of history and eschatology. The purpose of the temporary tabernacles that you will live in for the next eight days is to join your soul with your fathers who went before you as they were led by God in the wilderness.

After building your booth, you head into Jerusalem with an *etrog* which is a piece of citrus fruit like a lemon. The fruit symbolizes the fruit of the Promised Land. You also carry a *lulav*, the branches of palm, myrtle, and willow trees tied together with a golden thread. You will wave it as certain times during the week long service. Each day you come into the Temple courtyard with your fruit and branches and make a circular procession around the altar during which time you pray for God's blessing, and with the ending each petition shout with all the people *hoshana* ("Please save" or "save now"; from **Ps 118:25**). Like the march of Israel around the city of Jericho, you march around the altar one time each day for six

days. On the seventh day you march seven times around it singing Psalm 27 with the temple choir and orchestra in the background.

Because it is a festival of harvest, **water** is one of two central images, **the other being light** (the sun). Every morning during the feast, the procession comes to the fountain of Gihon, which supplies water for the pool of Siloam. Gihon is an interesting name. It is **one of the four rivers that came from Eden** to water the world (**Gen 2:13**). Our fountain has an ancient history. Outside of the main city on the west, Solomon was brought to this spot and anointed king (**1 Kgs 1:33, 38**). During the assault of Jerusalem by Assyria many years later, it was stopped by Hezekiah who then built a 1,750ft subterranean tunnel that brought the water into Jerusalem so the people could never be forced out of the city (**2 Chron 32:30**). The Targums sometimes call it Shiloah (cf. **Isa 8:6**), and the ancient commentators consider it (spiritually?) to be the Gihon River of Eden. These little details will become important in a moment.

At any rate, the priest fills his golden pitcher with water at the spring and suddenly you hear the choir sing, “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isa 12:3). The procession then arrives back at the altar at the time of the sacrifice where the priest pours the water into a silver funnel through which it flows to the ground, symbolizing fertility. On the seventh day, everyone circles the altar seven times as a celebration of God’s gift of water when Moses struck the rock in the wilderness at Meribah.<sup>1</sup> On the eighth day of the feast, after all the rituals and symbolism have come to an end, a holy convocation is held and all Israel is in attendance.

Today we finish in John 7. This chapter takes place during this Feast of Booths. The beginning of the Feast is John 7:1-13. The middle of the Feast is John 7:14-24. Today we are looking at the last day of the Feast in John 7:37-52.<sup>2</sup> We read in vv. 37-38, “On the last day of the feast, the great

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<sup>1</sup> See Roger L. Fredrikson and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, vol. 27, *John*, The Preacher’s Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1985), 145 and the information on the Feast of Booths as <http://bible-truth.org/Feasts-Tabernacles.html>.

<sup>2</sup> On this division see Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 221. It is not known if this “last day” is the last day of the rituals (seventh day) or the last day of the feast (eighth day).

day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" As you are now good first century Jews, you quickly realize the obvious proclamation that Jesus is claiming to be the fulfillment of the water symbols so prevalent in this OT Feast. Jesus is not making some random statement, but is making direct prophetic ties between himself and that which was promised in the Feast.

### **“As the Scripture has said”**

Jesus makes the statement that “the Scripture has said ...” Yet, you will look in vain for any specific textual reference. That doesn't mean Jesus is mistaken. So how shall we understand him? Rather than one verse, he is saying that the whole Scripture teaches this. Let's spend some time on this to see what a major theme of the OT this in fact is.

Let's start with one of the last predictions, but among the most important, because the context is the Feast of Booths.

“On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter ... Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths” (Zech 14:8, 16). Another minor prophet, Joel, says, “And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD” (Joel 3:18). Because of what Jesus says, we ought to capitalize “Fountain.”

Ezekiel 47 refers to this river in a whole chapter as it flows from the eschatological temple and runs out to water the whole land of Israel. The imagery is reminiscent of Eden’s river that flowed out and watered the earth—a tie with the Gihon. At the beginning of his book, Isaiah sings, “This people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently” (Isa 8:6), yet later he predicts, “With joy you will draw water from the wells



of salvation” (Isa 12:3). “For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert” (Isa 35:6). “I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people” (Isa 43:20). “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters” (Isa 55:1).

As I told you a moment ago, at the Feast of Booths, they remembered Meribah and the water that came out of the rock (Ex 17:1-6). So we have this early on in Exodus too. The Psalms remember this episode more than once. “He split rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock and caused waters to flow down like rivers” (Ps 78:15–16). “They asked, and he brought quail, and gave them bread from heaven in abundance. He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river. For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant” (Ps 105:40–42). “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her;

she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns” (Ps 46:4–5).

A prophecy was made about the Messiah early on, “Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters; his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted” (Num 24:7). Now, Jesus is claiming to be the fulfillment of this prophecy and of all these water prophecies made throughout the OT. This is what he means by “the Scripture says.”

Of course, this is not the first time Jesus has said this very thing in the Gospel of John. It has been hinted at. At the [wedding at Cana](#), he turned [water into wine](#), showing that he is the fulfillment of the symbolic water rites ([John 2:6-11](#)). He told [Nicodemus](#) rather cryptically that you must be “[born of water and spirit](#)” ([John 3:5](#)). Appropriately, he told the [woman at the well](#), “[Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life](#)” ([John 4:14](#)).

What Jesus does now is make these private signs and sayings **public**. Each of these earlier water scenes are now confirmed in Jesus' public ministry. Jesus is telling all of Israel at the Feast of Booths that he is fulfilling the water symbols of the OT. This turns the local Cana water miracle into a national public declaration.

The **Nicodemus** story is important for two reasons. First, **Nicodemus is also in our passage here**. As the Pharisees are seeking to find a way to kill Jesus for what he is saying and doing, it is Nicodemus who rises to defend him saying to them, **“Does our law judge a man without first given him a hearing and learning what he does?” (John 7:51)**. Jesus' earlier talk with this particular Pharisee is now beginning to work its power in his heart as the gospel is being confirmed to him and he is being brought from death to life. There is a second important connection with the Nicodemus story. It is **the Holy Spirit**.

Jesus told him that he needed to be **born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5)**. Now John tells us that Jesus' statement

about the water was “said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). Thus, as you read these water predictions or see the water rituals throughout the OT, you are not only to think of Jesus, but also the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. So you see, water is not an end to itself, but it a physical sign pointing to a spiritual reality. It has been this way from the very beginning when the Spirit of God hovered over the waters, and God’s Word spoke out of the darkness, “Let there be light” (Gen 1:2-3).

Learning to read the Scripture with Jesus, with these heavenly Actors as the focus, keeps the book from becoming a dead book of letter and law, or a puzzling book of riddle and parable. The key to unlocking the mysteries is understanding and believing what Jesus says out it. Use the NT as your commentary on the OT. Let me give you a NT example that demonstrates this.

Paul is talking to the Corinthians. He is reflecting upon the OT, and he seeks to make the things that happened to Israel in the wilderness relevant to Greeks living a thousand miles away a thousand years later. He has been talking about many important things: The work of pastors and the need to support them financially (ch. 9); the relationship of food to idols (ch. 8); rules for living in a happy marriage (ch. 7); lawsuits among believing (ch. 6); church discipline (ch. 5); and so on. Each of his arguments have been rooted, not in the culture of his day or some arbitrary moral ethic that people happen to buy into at that hour, but in the OT. But to keep it all from becoming legalistic, dead obedience, Paul introduces us to [the life-giving principle](#). He tells us about Christ. He tells us that we obey him even as they were to obey him, “**We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents**” (1 Cor 10:9). And we must not do this, because Christ was there supplying their every need in the OT (this becomes a bridge to his discussion of the Lord’s Supper). Here is the passage related directly to what Jesus teaches at the

Feast of Booths, “All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:2-4).

“The Rock was Christ.” Out of that rock flowed a river of water. Jesus says at the Feast that if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink for “out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” In the desert, the people thirsted greatly. So Moses came to the Rock and when the water poured out, “The water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock” (Num 20:11).<sup>3</sup> Paul believes Jesus and says the water they drank a thousand years earlier was Christ. It was a sacramental union, a wedding of a physical sign and a spiritual reality. Now Christ is offering himself to the people at the Feast of Booths, telling them that if they will believe in him, they will have a river flowing out of their own hearts (or more technically, from the belly).

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<sup>3</sup> This is, of course, the second water-rock episode in which Moses struck the rock and for his unbelief was not allowed to enter into the Promised Land.

## Response of the People

So this is the teaching of our Lord and of his Apostles. This is how they understood the OT—not as an end unto itself, but as something that points forward to a great fulfillment in a person called Messiah, of whom the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets speak. But **how did the people respond to the Lord**, how did the leaders respond, and what did they do as Jesus spoke to them? Here we want to survey the rest of our passage and you need to beware that your response is not the same as many of theirs. Do not harden your heart against Christ.

Jesus' words about the water come on the heels of more Exodus like **grumbling**. **John 7:25** shows us that the people of Jerusalem began to think that maybe Jesus was the man the Pharisees were seeking to kill. As they are wondering whether or not the authorities know that he is the Messiah and just don't want to tell anyone (**26**), a curious discussion begins over something that may seem to you irrelevant. They say, "**But we**

know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from" (27).

Let us return to the Nicodemus story for a moment. Just a couple verses after telling him he must be born of water and spirit, Jesus says, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). What was said about the Holy Spirit now becomes the ironic focus of discussion over Jesus. John's reason for bringing this up is to point out that both Jesus and the Holy Spirit have the same heavenly divine origin. But there is a problem. The people do not understand this at all. They cannot see spiritual truth, only natural, physical phenomena. They begin discussing prophecy. As should have been the case then, so it should still be the case today, when discussing prophecy, be very careful that you don't claim to know it all. Such thinking is delusional and as many false prophets have shown, can lead to spiritual ruin. They argue over where it says the Christ will come from. Jesus interrupts their



discussion and says sarcastically, “You know me, and you know where I come from.” In reality they don’t know at all for he says, “But I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me” (John 7:28-29). Jesus is claiming that he came from heaven, but because the leaders do not know the heavenly Father, they do not believe him. But they did *understand* him, which is why they sought to arrest him (vs. 30). But Jesus escapes them, as happens frequently in the Gospels, “because his hour had not yet come.” This statement shows the power of God over human evil.

Yet, as he speaks, the gospel goes out and in fact, “Many of the people believed in him” (vs. 31). What kind of belief is it? It is not at this point based on knowledge of Christ. Rather, as we saw at Cana, it is a shallow belief based on signs, “When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?” Jesus did say that if you won’t believe his words, at least believe upon the signs. Yet, we want to go deeper than

the signs, so that we might know our Savior for who he actually is. We want to believe what he tells us about himself.

Hearing the muttering, the Pharisees sent officers to arrest Jesus (**vs. 32**). Jesus, knowing that he will escape says, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come” (**33-34**). These words reveal the great lack of understanding from the crowds. “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean saying, ‘You will seek me and you will not find me,’ and ‘Where I am you cannot come?’” (**35-36**).

Instead of answering them directly, Jesus tells them about the living water. John tells us that this refers especially to the Holy Spirit who had not yet been sent. The point is, the people will continue in darkness until Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit will come in power to some of these same people here in Jerusalem. Then they would understand, because the Holy Spirit would teach them and would demonstrate the power of God in

objective, tangible ways through the Apostles for the next few decades.

As we are seeing more and more of in John's book, all of this talk about going somewhere is also a foreshadowing of **Jesus' death and resurrection**. "Jesus was not yet glorified." But the people were blinded, even though they believed he might be the Messiah, for they really did not understand who exactly Messiah was supposed to be. They continue to focus on the physical origin of Jesus. While arguing about whether he is the Prophet (**vs. 40**; see **Deut 18**) or Messiah, the wonder how either could **be from Galilee (vs. 41)**.

They actually knew that Messiah was to be the offspring of David and to come from **Bethlehem** (both are OT prophecies the focus on Messiah as King (**vs. 42**), but no one understood how this *Galilean* could be the Messiah. Divisions begin setting in among the people (**43**), as we have seen many times before and still see today. At this point, the officers had arrived and were listening to Jesus. No one touched the Lord (**44**) and when questioned by the Pharisees as to why they

wouldn't arrest him (45), they responded that “no one ever spoke like this man” (46).

The Pharisees are furious and wonder if even the military has been deceived (vs. 47). They wonder if anyone of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in Jesus (48). Then they blame anyone in the crowd who has been bewitched by Jesus as being utterly ignorant of the law and therefore accursed (49). If the Pharisees don't approve of him, since they are the experts in the law, then anyone who does believe in Jesus is by default cursed of God.

It is at this point that Nicodemus stands up (vs. 50) and says, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” (51). This is important, because Nicodemus is himself a Pharisee, a ruler, a learned scribe, and one well respected at that. But now the madness that Christ drives unbelievers to sets in so that they even begin to doubt *his* credibility. “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee” (52). Remember that Nathaniel said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth” (John 1:46)

which is a city in Galilee. Prejudice against the north was universal.

## Need for Faith

As we have gone quickly through the passage now, let's think about what we have seen. John spends a lot of time in one chapter focusing on the physical origins of Jesus Christ. Obviously, he is quite aware that Messiah comes from Bethlehem, even though he doesn't mention it in his Gospel. The fact that he brings it up here is ironic. As they quarrel about his Galilean origins, the fact of the matter is that Jesus is from Bethlehem, but **they aren't concerned with that at all**. They don't ask Jesus anything about this. Because the truth is, they don't care.

What are you to make of all this Galilean emphasis? Perhaps you are tempted to find some reference that supports the fact that Messiah will in fact come from Galilee. If you do, you have fallen into the trap the people have fallen into. **All of this quarreling is completely besides the point**. Their talk about

Galilee is just a ruse to stir controversy. Galilee is besides the point because Jesus came from Bethlehem. But they wouldn't believe him.

At this point, I want to return to the water from the rock episode. Actually there are two, and it is the second episode I want you to think about. On that occasion, Moses, you will recall, “**struck**” the rock (**Num 20:11**). For this act, he was not allowed entrance into the Promised Land. Why such a harsh punishment for what seems such a minor detail—speak to the rock vs. hitting the rock? What was the problem? The problem Moses had at that moment, was the same problem the people have in John 7. He didn't believe God. His faith in Christ was lacking. Notice, he did have faith that God would perform the miracle, but he struck Christ to do it. That is what you and I did too. He was stricken for our sins.

While Moses certainly, ultimately had faith in Christ, God uses him as an example here for anyone, even the most religious among us, who stubbornly refuse to believe God and have faith in Jesus. Faith is something that continues on

throughout your whole life, not something that occurs once and then you get a free pass to heaven.

To have faith in Jesus from this passage, you must believe what Jesus says, not what the people are discussing. Note, their emphasis is on Galilee, but Jesus' emphasis is on heaven. They wonder where Jesus comes from, he answers that he comes from heaven, but that they don't understand or care because they don't believe in God the Father in the first place.

Jesus' emphasis is on spiritual things; the people are interested, still, only in physical things. They want a Messiah they way they want a Messiah. Jesus yet again confounds their expectations and confronts them with the stunning reality that he is himself from heaven. There are three that testify: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three testify in our passage today. But unless you know then, you will not even know that they are here. Are you so interested in physical problems, temporary troubles, a Jesus that is made in your image that you can't see him any better than the people of those days? If so, then perhaps you have not received the Holy Spirit.

John tells us that the Spirit would be sent after Jesus was glorified. Well, Jesus has been glorified. What does that mean? It means, first, that **Jesus died**. It is no accident that when he died, the spear was thrust through him and out spilled blood and water (**John 19:34**). Second, it means that he was **raised from the dead**. But Lazarus was raised from the dead and he was not glorified. So third, it means that he was given **a new eternal body**. Lazarus has still not received his eternal body. Fourth, it means that Jesus **ascended into heaven** in his new body on the clouds in the sight of his disciples.

This ascension brought two things about. It brought about the Lord's **victory** over the powers of heaven and earth. He now sits enthroned above every name and awaits only that final moment when the Father shall put all things into his hands, and he shall return to judge the living and the dead. Second, it means that he has **done as he promised**. He has **sent the Holy Spirit** to lead you into the truth about Himself. Both Son and Spirit originate in heaven. The Father sent the Son, and the Son has sent the Holy Spirit.



The good news in our passage is that anyone who thirsts may come to Jesus and drink freely. Jesus defines this “coming” as “believing” in him. Those who believe in him “**Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.**” As I mentioned, this theme is in some of the very first verses of Holy Scripture. The Spirit was hovering over the waters, and God’s Word spoke all things into existence. This is such a powerful theme to Jesus’ beloved friend John that he sees fit to end the Bible in some of the very last verses of it, with a nearly identical phrase. Here Jesus says, “**If anyone is thirsty let him come to me, and let him drink who believes in me.**” Revelation **22:17** says, “**Let him who is thirsty come, let him who wishes take the water of life freely.**” Come to Christ that your dried up soul may have everlasting refreshment. He is a stream in a wilderness, a cold drink in a parched land. Ask him to forgive your sins of rebellion and unbelief, and trust in him by the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver you safely to God in heaven.

Then know that our message must be taken to the thirst people among us. One commentator writes, “**One cannot help**

but be aware of the restless, parched multitudes all about us. They desperately seek to quench their thirst in a constant round of parties or in one sexual escapade after another or in feverishly struggling to keep up with the crowd, and at the end, always being left more hopeless and disillusioned. And often the church, so busy with its little institutional business, has no living water to share.”<sup>4</sup> Only when you yourself are filled, will there be an overabundance of water from your soul. But if you have it, and if you know that it will never run out, how then can you help but give unto others a cold drink of the gospel in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord?

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<sup>4</sup> Roger L. Fredrikson and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, vol. 27, *John*, The Preacher’s Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1985), 146.