

# Jesus Teaches at the Feast of Booths

## John 7: 11-36

**DIG:** Given the risk, why does Yeshua go to the festival of Booths? How do the people react to the Lord's teaching? Why? What do Christ's responses reveal about His authority? About the authority of the religious leaders? The objections to His healing? Their judgments? What one point are the members of the Sanhedrin missing? What is causing the confusion? Why does Messiah's teaching in John 7:14-29 provoke the response of John 7:30? Who wanted to kill Jesus? Why didn't they attempt to do it at the feast? Who tried and didn't succeed? Why were the people divided?

**REFLECT:** Have you ever been really impressed with the Lord one moment, only to turn from Him the next? Why does that happen? When have you defended Jesus lately? When have you seen religious rules put ahead of love? How can you tell if someone is speaking or living in the flesh rather than the spirit? What is the biggest struggle in your life between *knowing* what the Bible says, and *living* a holy life that is pleasing to God? How do you get to where Yeshua ha-Mashiach is?

The festival of Booths (**Sukkot**) that came on the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of Tisri (September-October), was at hand. It was one of **the three the feasts of the Jews**, intended to commemorate the wilderness wanderings of **the Israelites** in the desert for forty years. During those days, millions of **Jews** lived in **booths** made of the thick branches of the olive, palm, pine and myrtle trees, and carried in their hands small boughs of palm, willow, peach and citron. **Sukkot** followed five days after the great day of Atonement, when sacrifices were made for all the sins of the people. Consequently, it was celebrated with great joy.<sup>929</sup> **The Torah** was read daily and every night multitudes of pilgrims would gather on the Temple Mount and celebrate the lighting of the lights in the court of the Women (see **Nc - The Court of the Women**).

The healing of the invalid at the pool of Bethesda the year before (see **Cs - Jesus Heals a Man at the Pool of Bethesda**) had produced a bitter controversy concerning Jesus' identity. This debate was continued now at this **festival of Booths**. Both **the religious leaders** of the Sanhedrin and **the common people** were interested in knowing who **He** was.

**Christ** remained in constant danger of assassination in **Judea**. So long as **He** remained hidden where no enemy could find **Him** or in front of a crowd where the religious authorities dared not touch **Him**, **Messiah** could teach in **Jerusalem**. So **He** entered the **Holy City** without attracting much attention, perhaps even blending in with the crowd. Meanwhile, a hushed anticipation stirred much debate among the common people in **Yerushalayim**. Some favored **Christ** while others condemned **Him**.<sup>930</sup> It was common knowledge by the **Jews** that the feast of the **Sukkot** was to be fulfilled by the Kingdom (**Zechariah 14:16-21**). So the **Jewish leaders** were particularly interested in **His** actions. Now at the festival the **Jewish authorities** were watching for **Yeshua** and asking: **Where is He (Yochanan 7:11)?**

Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about **Him**. Some said: **He is a good man**, indicating an awareness of **His** character but not **His Person**. To say the **Meshiach** was merely a great teacher is fanciful enough and not in keeping with what **He Himself** taught. It is similarly impossible to regard **Him** as simply a good man. Others replied, **"No, He deceives the people."** So there was a division among the people. But no one who believed in **Him** would say anything publicly about **Him** for fear of the **Jewish leaders (John 7:12-13)**. The crowds were divided in their opinions, but it was not safe for believers to speak up about **Jesus**, so they kept their voices low and their opinions among their friends. Most wanted to do the right thing, but they were not sure what it was.<sup>931</sup>

**John** uses the term **Jews** seventy-one times. When he does so, he uses it in four different ways. First he means **Jews** in general, or all the descendants of **Abraham, Isaac** and **Jacob**. Secondly, he uses **Jews** as **Judeans**, as opposed to **Galileans**. Thirdly, he means the **Jewish leadership, Jewish authorities, or the Sanhedrin**. Fourthly, he uses the **Jews** as an expression of the enemies of the **Good Shepherd**. I have substituted the appropriate term each time in order to provide more clarity.

The festival of **Sukkot** was a weeklong celebration (**Deut 16:13-15**). Not until halfway through the festival, on the third or fourth day, did **Jesus** go up to the **Temple courts and begin to teach** - not unusual for a rabbi. The teacher's credibility, however, depended heavily on his educational pedigree. Who trained him? Which school was he associated with? **Gamaliel? Shammai?** The religious authorities there were amazed because **He** didn't seem to have any religious training and asked: **How did this man get such learning without having been taught (Yochanan 7:14-15)?** **Christ's** authority was being questioned because **He** never attended any of the rabbinic schools. The Bible shows us that **He** had not only wide knowledge of both biblical and traditional materials, but wisdom from **God** transcending any academic credentials. However, the people knew the **Jewish leadership, or the Sanhedrin, had rejected Him, now they start to question Him** on a larger scale.

Jesus answered with a stinging rebuke, and assured them that the origin of His message was divine, saying: **My teaching is not My own. It comes from the One who sent Me. The rabbinic method was to cite authority for all-important statements.** But the Lord's message does not come from any earthly source. It comes from **the Father** who sent **the Son (Isaiah 50:4-7)**. Those of faith, who desire to do the will of **ADONAI** will have the spiritual discernment necessary to understand this. **Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own.** The Master's hearers had raised the question about His competence as a teacher, now He raises the question of their competence as hearers. The members of the Sanhedrin could verify Christ's statement simply from what they heard Him say: **Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory.** The man whose message originates within himself seeks his own advancement. **But He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is a Man of truth. There is nothing false about Him (Yochanan 7:16-18).** Notice that Jesus does not say that He **speaks the truth**, but that He is **the Truth (John 18:37)**.

The Israelites were very proud of the fact that they were the recipients of **the Torah**. Yeshua, however, points out that there's a big difference between *receiving the Torah* and *keeping it*: **Has not Moses given you the Torah? Yet, not one of you keeps the Torah (see Dg - The Completion of the Torah).** The religious leaders were furious with Him for not following the Oral Law, but they themselves had merely substituted **the traditions of men** for **the Torah**. Far from keeping **the Torah** they were **trying to kill the Son of God (John 7:19)?** The people were not obeying **the Torah** that **Moshe** gave them, even though they thought they were. For if they did, they would have welcomed Jesus (Yochanan 5:45-47). He knew what they felt in their hearts, but did not want to admit.<sup>932</sup>

"You are demon-possessed (see Ek - **It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, that This Fellow Drives Out Demons**) some in the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you" (John 7:20)? Obviously some of the people there didn't know that the members of the Sanhedrin were trying to kill Jesus (see Lg - **The Great Sanhedrin**). Jews came from all over the world for **the festival of Booths**. These were probably pilgrims from afar, not the **Jerusalem mob** who was being turned against **King Messiah** by the **Pharisees and Torah-teachers**. These visitors didn't understand the local politics within **Jerusalem**.

Ignoring the people who followed their leaders like thoughtless sheep, Christ directed His ire at the source of the problem - **the Pharisees and torah-Teachers**. Referring to the healing of the invalid at Bethesda the year before, Jesus said to them: **I did one miracle, and you are all amazed**, even though at the same time you are out to **kill Me** because I healed someone on **Shabbat (John 7:21)**. He was not violating **the Torah**, but completing it.

Then He said: **Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision** (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), **you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath** (John 7:22). **The rabbis themselves taught that the commandment of circumcision superseded the Sabbath.** Jewish boys were to be circumcised on the eighth day (Genesis 17:12). But if **the eighth day** happened to land **on the Sabbath**, the boy was still circumcised although it was technically classified as work. Yeshua said: **Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the Torah of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath?** Christ's point was that if it was permissible to **circumcise on the Sabbath**, why wasn't it permissible to make a man's body whole by healing on **the Sabbath**. The Lord finished by describing His continual opposition to the Oral Law (see **Ei - The Oral Law**) when He said: **Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly** (John 7:23-24). In other words, **Sabbath** rest included being healed.

**The Sanhedrin members** couldn't do anything to quiet the Prophet from Nazareth, but neither could they eliminate Him. They believed that trying to seize Him publically would only make a scene and probably cause a riot. But the local mob that had turned against **Messiah** grew impatient with their so-called leaders. At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?" Evidently they were in on the "secret" plans of the Pharisees as the group of pilgrims had not been. With sarcasm they teased the Sanhedrin members: **Here He is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to Him.** Continuing to mock their timid leaders, they said: **Have the authorities really concluded that He is the Messiah** (Yochanan 7:25-26)?

Then boldly asserting their own opinion, the mob continued defiantly: **But we know where this man is from**, that is, Nazareth and from completely ordinary human parents. **When the Messiah comes, no one will know where He is from**" (John 7:27). **The rabbis taught (and still teach today) that the word suddenly in Malachi 3:1 meant that the Meshiach would appear mysteriously and perhaps even magically with the anointing of Elijah, or drop from the skies into the Temple as suddenly as a scorpion** (Sanhedrin 97a). But this expectation that the origins of the **Messiah** must be shrouded in mystery contradicts Micah 5:2, which simply predicts the **Anointed One's** birth in Bethlehem. Nevertheless, many of the **common people** began to believe in Yeshua as the **Meshiach**, even though they found it hard to overcome many of the traditional beliefs about **Christ** that they had come to expect.

In reply to their interpretation of popular Jewish mysticism, **Messiah** claimed knowledge that they did not possess. Then Jesus, still teaching in the Temple courts, cried out in a clear voice so everyone could hear: **Yes, you know Me, and you know where I AM from.** They knew His human origin, but they did not accept His divine mission. **I AM not here on**

**My own authority, but He who sent Me is true.** But His enemies couldn't understand this because they didn't know ADONAI. You do not know Him, but I know Him because I AM from Him and He sent Me (John 7:28-29). Had they really known Ha'Shem they would have recognized the One whom God sent. Throughout all of His conflicts with pharisaic Judaism, Jesus continually claimed to be the One true prophet of the Father's message.

Enraged by Messiah's bold claims, and not wanting to wait a second longer for any action from their timid leaders, the mob tried to seize Jesus. But no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come (Yochanan 7:30). His appointed time to die was on the Passover by crucifixion, not on the festival of Booths by stoning. In addition, Yeshua would give up His own life, no one would take it from Him. He would say to the Pharisees: **I lay down my life . . . no one takes it from Me** (John 10:17a-18a).

The outcome of the whole confrontation was that many in the crowd believed in Him. As a result of this discussion, some were openly and repeatedly saying: **When the Messiah comes, will He perform more signs than this Man? So there was a division among the people of Jerusalem, some accusing and others defending Jesus.** Earlier, the Sanhedrin accused Jesus of being demon possessed (see Ek - **It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, that This Fellow Drives out Demons**), but now the mob of dissenters was also accusing Him of the same thing. Slowly the Sanhedrin was turning the people against Him.

Once again the scene changes. The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about Him. Then emboldened, the Sadducees and the Pharisees sent Temple guards to arrest Him (Yochanan 7:32). From the beginning the Pharisees were more active in opposing the Prophet from Nazareth. Now, to their heart-warming glee, they had heard the growing swarm of dissent against the Rabbi from Galilee rising like the hum of bees. But do to the fact that no arrest was made, it seems probable that their instructions were not to arrest Jesus on the spot, but rather, to watch for a favorable moment.

Then Jesus hinted at His imminent departure. But according to His new policy of putting things in symbolic language so the masses could not understand, He said: **I AM with you for only a short time, and then I AM going to the One who sent Me. You will look for Me, but you will not find Me; and where I AM, you cannot come** (Yochanan 7:33-34). Confused, the Judeans said to themselves, "Where is the man about to go, that we won't find him? Does he intend to go to the Greek Diaspora and teach the Greek-speaking Jews (John 7:35 CJB)? When the Israelites were taken captive to foreign countries they assimilated into those cultures after several generations. Because of this, the Judeans called them Hellenists. The enemies of Yeshua, therefore, falsely concluded that He had decided to leave Judea and teach the Greek-speaking Jews abroad.<sup>933</sup>

What did He mean when He said: **You will look for Me, but you will not find Me,**” and **“Where I am, you cannot come”** (John 7:36)? The Judeans repeated the same exact words that **Jesus** spoke in **verse 34** above. It is clear that this saying puzzled **them** greatly. But it not only puzzled **them**. It made **them** uneasy. Was there perhaps some meaning in it that still eluded **them**? Was **the Nazarene** mocking **them**? Should **they** have known more?<sup>934</sup>

The confusion about **Messiah's** divine and human origins points to one of the primary distinctions vital for all of us - the difference between the flesh and the spirit. In the flesh, we rely on our human reasoning and senses. We can know quite a lot about **the Lord: His** ancestry, **His** movements, and maybe even why **His** friends liked **Him** and **His** enemies hated **Him**. But it is only in the spirit - **the Spirit of God** - that we can learn truths about **Jesus** that can change our lives. This type of knowledge, spiritual knowledge that transforms, comes to us as we humbly search the Scriptures daily and ask **the Ruach** to speak **His** words of truth to our hearts. It is in these times of prayer and mediation (**Psalm 119:97**) that we learn about **Messiah's** true origins and we begin to desire to be with **Him**.

**The Lord of Life** promised **His** talmidim that **the Spirit** would remind them of everything **He** taught while **He** was with them (**John 14:26**). Let us seek this same **Ruach HaKodesh** and ask that **Yeshua's** words would be written on our hearts.

***Holy Spirit, come into my heart today and transform me. Raise me above the tendencies of my flesh so that I can see the reality of Jesus and embrace Him in love and humility.***<sup>935</sup>