

# The Gospel of John

## Part 9

Steve Thompson

UUCF

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# The Book of Signs

- The Book of Signs (John 2-11) include these stories
  - The turning of water into wine in Cana of Galilee (first sign, John 2)
  - The story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus and being told he must be “born again” (John 3)
  - The Samaritan woman at the well (John 4)
  - Healing the Gentile official’s son (second sign, John 4)
  - The man crippled for 38 years (third sign, John 5)
  - Andrew and Philip (John 6)
  - The feeding of the multitude (fourth sign, John 6)
  - Jesus walks on the water (fifth sign, John 6)
  - His brothers, arguments over who he is (John 7)
  - Adulterous woman, Abraham arguments (John 8)
  - The man born blind (sixth sign, John 9)
  - Lazarus is raised from the dead (seventh sign, John 11)

# Sukkoth

- In John 7 Jesus attends the Jewish holiday “Sukkoth”, aka Tabernacles or Booths
- Sukkoth is a fall harvest celebration, sort of a “Jewish Thanksgiving”; this holiday was observed with prayers of thanksgiving, prayers for the future abundance of water, the construction of a temporary dwelling place (a booth) which reminded the people of their ancestor’s Exodus journey through the wilderness as homeless nomads; Sukkoth is celebrated by making processions around the Temple in which the people carried and waved a “lulab” (a bunch of leafy branches) in their right hand, and, in their left hand, a sweet smelling spice called an “ethrog” (the leaves, fruit, and zest of a citron tree)
- While the people walked around the Temple, they either recited or heard someone read aloud parts of Psalm 118: “Save us we beseech Thee O Lord; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”
- The ethrog would then be placed in the booth and the people would eat a meal in their booth
- Over the decades, various elements of Psalm 118 were put by the Gospel authors into their stories about Jesus because they felt this Psalm referred to Jesus: the crowd waving branches when Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the tomb of Jesus could come from the Sukkoth booth (and likewise the dwelling and meal in Luke 24:13-35); and women bringing spices to Jesus’ tomb could come from the ethrog

# The Brothers of Jesus

- The brothers of Jesus appear in John 7; they appeared earlier in the books of Galatians, Mark, and Acts
- John has them act in a role similar to the mother of the Lord (not named as Mary) played earlier at the wedding where Jesus performed the first sign of turning water into wine
- John has both “the mother of the Lord” and the brothers of Jesus encourage him to act, but Jesus says his “hour has not yet come”; they are portrayed as rushing him
- Yet in both stories, after saying the time is too early, he nevertheless does what they want him to do: in Cana, he turns water into wine; here, his brothers tell him to go to Sukkoth, he verbally refuses, but then he goes
- When Jesus arrives, his presence causes a stir: the common people fall into two camps: some say Jesus is good, but others say he deceives people
- Jesus teaches in the Temple, and when challenged, says his teaching is not his own, but of the one who sent him (God)
- His message is rejected on the basis that he violates the Law of Moses, and his challengers claim they are on the side of the law; Jesus replies that they do not keep the law and asks his accusers why they seek to kill him

# Jesus and His Brothers (John 7)

After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. **2** Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. **3** His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. **4** For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." **5** For even His brothers did not believe in Him.

**6** Then Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. **7** The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. **8** You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come." **9** When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee.

## The Heavenly Scholar

**10** But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. **11** Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, "Where is He?" **12** And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, "He is good"; others said, "No, on the contrary, He deceives the people." **13** However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews. **14** Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. **15** And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?"

**16** Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. **17** If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*. **18** He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. **19** Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law? Why do you seek to kill Me?"

# The Brothers of Jesus

- Those who challenge Jesus are arguing about *religion*; Jesus is arguing about *life*; the argument then turns to whether he is the messiah
- Spong says the argument that follows is similar to the arguments the Johannine community had with “the Jews” as they got closer to being excommunicated
- Arguments continue between Jesus and the common people, concerning who Jesus is, where he comes from
- Then the Pharisees come to arrest him and more arguments ensue
- Jesus says that where he is going, they cannot come, and his challengers wonder if he is going to the Greeks; then there are arguments about where Jesus comes from, where the messiah will come from, etc.
- Eventually everyone goes home!
- Jesus says that only when you have lifted up the son of man (meaning lifted up on a cross to crucify him) will you know who the messiah is and who God is.
  - I still fail to understand the author’s belief that Jesus will come into his glory at the moment he is crucified. Clearly this is important to the author of John’s Gospel, but at least it is apparent to me that Jesus being crucified has nothing to do with his being a sacrifice to God for human sin, so this has nothing to do with the abominable doctrine of substitutionary atonement. My faith is in his life and teaching.

# Jesus and His Brothers (John 7)

**20** The people answered and said, “You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?”

**21** Jesus answered and said to them, “I did one work, and you all marvel. **22** Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. **23** If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? **24** Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

**25** Now some of them from Jerusalem said, “Is this not He whom they seek to kill? **26** But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ? **27** However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from.”

**28** Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, “You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. **29** But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me.”

**30** Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. **31** And many of the people believed in Him, and said, “When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this *Man* has done?”

## Jesus and the Religious Leaders

**32** The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him. **33** Then Jesus said to them, “I shall be with you a little while longer, and *then* I go to Him who sent Me. **34** You will seek Me and not find *Me*, and where I am you cannot come.”

# Jesus and His Brothers (John 7)

**35** Then the Jews said among themselves, “Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? **36** What is this thing that He said, ‘You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come’?”

## **The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

**37** On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. **38** He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” **39** But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

**40** Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, “Truly this is the Prophet.”

**41** Others said, “This is the Christ.” But some said, “Will the Christ come out of Galilee? **42** Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?” **43** So there was a division among the people because of Him.

**44** Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

## **Rejected by the Authorities**

**45** Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why have you not brought Him?” **46** The officers answered, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” **47** Then the Pharisees answered them, “Are you also deceived? **48** Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? **49** But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” **50** Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, **51** “Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?” **52** They answered and said to him, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.” **53** And everyone went to his *own* house.



# The Fourth Gospel (Chapter 8)

- The “mother of the Lord” appears twice in John’s Gospel: in the story of Jesus turning water into wine and at the foot of the cross; neither time is she called Mary!
- Spong says she is less important in the gospels than she was later given credit for by the church; Paul never mentions her or Jesus’ father
- In the Synoptics, Joseph is a midrashic name, having three things in common with the Joseph of Genesis:
  - Both have a father named Jacob, have important dreams and save people by fleeing to Egypt
  - And similarly, just as Moses was saved from being killed by a decree from Pharaoh, likewise King Herod decreed the “slaughter of the innocents”, which induced Joseph to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt to save his life (a story that is contradicted by Luke’s account, showing this is not literal history)
- Mary is barely mentioned at all until almost six decades after the crucifixion when Matthew writes his midrashic “virgin” birth story
- Matthew features Joseph much more than Mary, who does not play a central role until Luke wrote his gospel in the late 80’s and early 90’s
- Matthew says the announcement from the angel Gabriel regarding Jesus is made to Joseph but Luke changes the story to say it is made to Mary
- John 8 has the story of the woman caught in adultery, but Spong does not discuss it

# The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8)

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. 3 Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, 4 they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” 6 This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear.

7 So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” 8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?”

11 She said, “No one, Lord.”

And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

12 Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”

# John 8

- Much of the rest of John 8 is an argument about who Jesus is
- Jesus proclaims himself to be “living water”; the Jews considered water to be a symbol of the Holy Spirit; also, the words translated as “stood up” are the same words later used for the resurrection; from this, some Jews believed Jesus to be the messiah; but others objected based on their belief that the messiah must come from Bethlehem and be a descendant of David
- Jesus says where he is going, they cannot come
- Throughout this argument, Jesus and his accusers speak on two different levels; they are literal, he is speaking about human division; he says he is from above, they are from below; spirit versus flesh
- Jesus and his accusers get into a long argument about theirs and his relationships to Abraham
- They hint that he was born of fornication
- Jesus says that *glory* does not come from accumulating power, but from *being willing to give your life away* and then says that Abraham will rejoice that he has come; Jesus says “before Abraham was, I AM”, to which they strongly object

# John 8

- Jesus makes several claims contrasting himself to his accusers:
  - “I am from above, you are from below”
  - “I am not of this world, you are of this world.”
  - “I am spirit, you are flesh.”
- Jesus says that only when you have lifted up the son of man (meaning lifted up on a cross to crucify him) will you know who the messiah is and who God is.
- Spong says “Jesus is a doorway into a universal consciousness that no one can know until he or she steps into it. Only when you have lifted up the son of man, says Jesus, in a specific reference to the crucifixion, will you know who the messiah is and who God is — then ‘you will know I AM’ ” (John 8:28)
- In the argument over freedom, Jesus says he is “speaking of a different kind of bondage: the bondage of self-centeredness, the bondage of being motivated by survival, the bondage of insecurity and fear, the bondage of the struggle to become, which prohibits each of us from the celebration of our being.”
- Jesus argues that his accusers are unwilling to do what Abraham did, which was to *leave his zone of security and step out into the unknown* so that he could become all that he was meant to be
- Those who claim to know religious “truth” have to destroy anyone who challenges their religious security

# Jesus Predicts His Departure (John 8)

13 The Pharisees therefore said to Him, “You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.”

14 Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going. 15 You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. 16 And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I *am* with the Father who sent Me. 17 It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. 18 I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.” 19 Then they said to Him, “Where is Your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.” 20 These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come.

21 Then Jesus said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.”

22 So the Jews said, “Will He kill Himself, because He says, ‘Where I go you cannot come’?”

23 And He said to them, “You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. 24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins.”

25 Then they said to Him, “Who are You?” And Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. 26 I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.” 27 They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.

28 Then Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am *He*, and *that* I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. 29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.” 30 As He spoke these words, many believed in Him.

# Abraham's Seed and Satan's (John 8)

31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."  
33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* You say, 'You will be made free'?"  
34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, *but* a son abides forever. 36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

## **Abraham's Seed and Satan's**

37 "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38 I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father."  
39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father."  
Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. 40 But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. 41 You do the deeds of your father."  
Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God."  
42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. 43 Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. 44 You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it. 45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

# Before Abraham Was, I AM (John 8)

48 Then the Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”

49 Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. 50 And I do not seek My *own* glory; there is One who seeks and judges. 51 Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”

52 Then the Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’ 53 Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?”

54 Jesus answered, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. 55 Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.”

57 Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

58 Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”

59 Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.