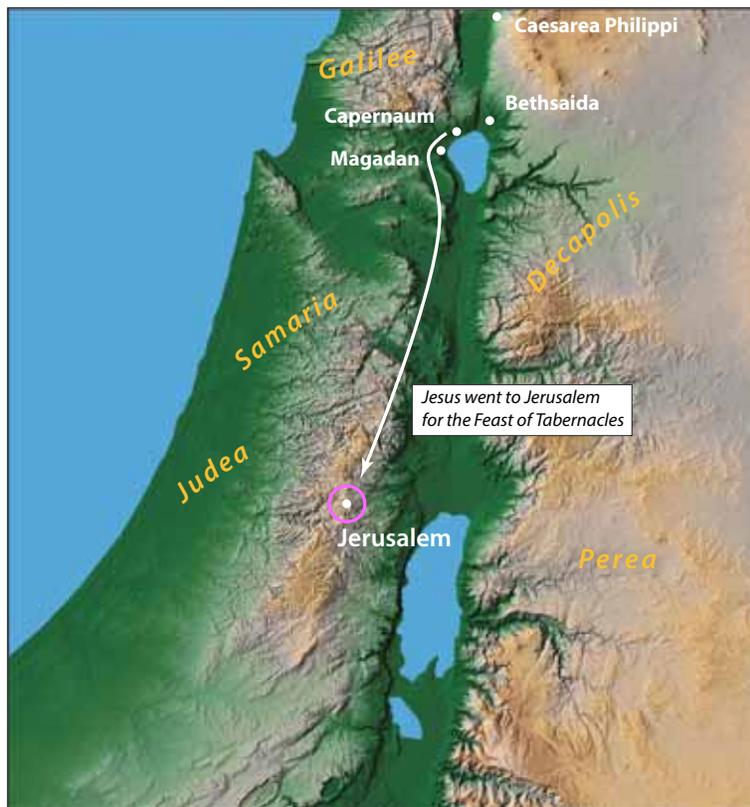


Division About Who Jesus Is

William F. Barker tells a story about a student who was walking by a church in a small town in Tennessee. The church sign read “Left Foot Baptist Church.” The student had been walking by the church day after day and finally asked why the church had this name. Someone explained that a church split had occurred. That is, people had left and formed another church and some remained. They had split over what some consider to be the sacrament of foot washing. But this church split was over which foot to wash - the left foot or the right foot. They named the church accordingly. Divisions are common everywhere. They occur in every nation, culture, government, church and in homes. There are men and women who are offended if someone simply disagrees with them, that is, someone has a different point of view. Consequently, they argue hoping to change the person’s viewpoint. Our study comes from John 7:40-53 and its focus is about conflicting opinions about Jesus Christ. The religious leaders and crowds argued about Christ. Who was He?

DIVISION WITHIN THE CROWD. This is the fifth study about the events that occurred at the Feast of Booths while Jesus was there. At the beginning of the feast the religious spread the word that they were seeking Jesus (John 7:11). Consequently the crowds were speculating about Him (John 7:12, 25-27, 31).

So some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is this not the man whom they are seeking to kill? Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they?” . . . But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, “When the Christ comes, He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?” John 7:25-27, 31 (NASB)



The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to seize Him. John 7:32 (NASB)

On the last day of the feast Jesus made a dramatic announcement,

. . . If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, “From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.” John 37-38 (NASB)

This offer of living water fueled even more speculation among the people about the identity of Jesus as we are going to discover. The first verse of our study, verse 40 reveals that the people were wondering if Jesus was the prophet that

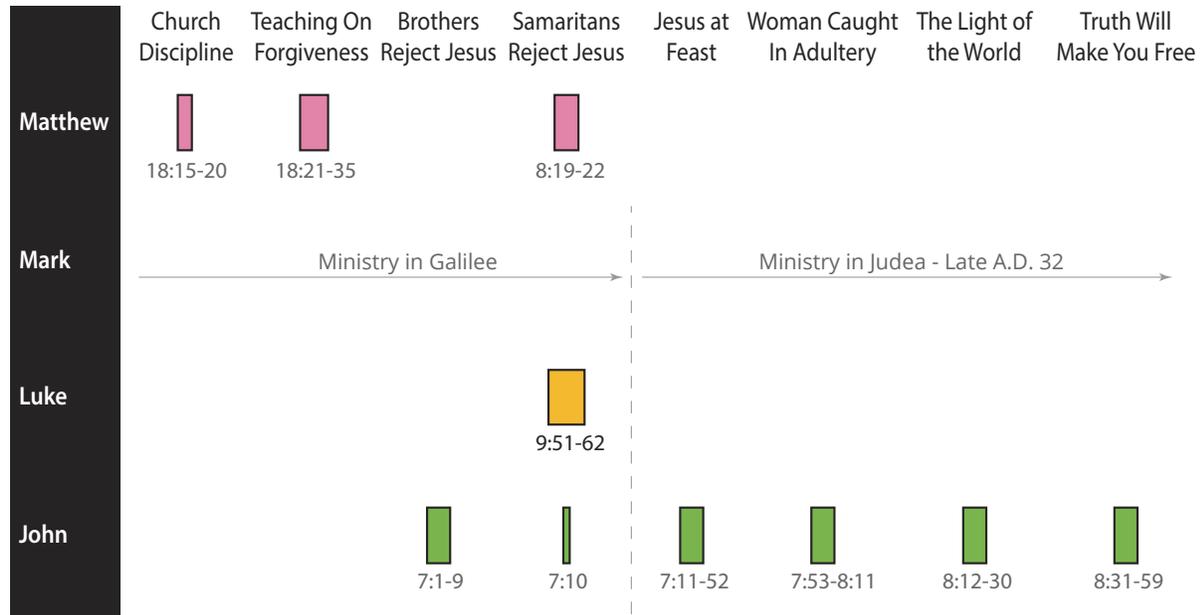
Moses predicted would come.

Later we were told that the religious leaders tried to arrest Him (John 7:30, 32).

Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were

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saying, “This certainly is the Prophet.” John 7:40 (NASB)

The tense of the Greek word that is translated as “saying” is in the imperfect. This implies that the crowds were repeatedly asking if Jesus was the prophet. The one that Moses referred to is in Deut. 18:15-18.

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him . . . The LORD said to me, “They have spoken well. I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” Deut. 18:15-18

John the Baptist was asked the same question at the beginning of his ministry. The people wondered if John was the prophet (John 1:20-21). The crowds even asked John if He was the Christ or the Messiah or maybe Elijah (Malachi 4:5-6). The book of Malachi prophesied that Elijah would come before the “great and terrible day of the Lord.” The

Jews understood that Elijah would come before the Messiah defeated the nations of the world and established His earthly kingdom. They wondered if John was Elijah or the Messiah. Each time John was asked those questions he said, “No!”

Verse 41 tells us that the crowds were asking one another the same question that they had asked John, that is, was Jesus the Christ or the Messiah?

Others were saying, “This is the Christ.” Still others were saying, “Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?” John 7:41 (NASB)

One can almost feel the excitement in the crowds. From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry the crowds were amazed by His teaching, the miracles and the signs and wonders. He was an incredible teacher who spoke with authority (Mark 1:27-28). Matthew 4:24-25 says that the news about Him spread throughout all Syria, Galilee, the Decapolis and Judea. As a result some believed He was the coming Messiah - the Christ.

Just as some were wishing that Jesus was the Messiah, there were some who disagreed. They objected because they knew that Jesus had lived as a youth in the region called Galilee and they could not find any scriptures that said the Messiah would come from Galilee. They knew that the scriptures taught that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and be a descendant of David. The scriptures repeatedly prophesied that the Messiah would sit on the throne of King David and reign forever.

[Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was? John 7:42 \(NASB\)](#)

Isaiah 9:6-7 prophesied that a child would be born for the nation of Israel. He would be their God and reign on the throne of King David forever. Verses 6 and 7 make perfect sense since no one can reign forever but an eternal God.

[. . . Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. Is. 9:6-7 \(NASB\)](#)

Isaiah 11:1-10 also prophesies that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David and His kingdom will be glorious.

Micah 5:2 predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The Jewish leaders understood this verse to refer to the Messiah, the king of the Jews (Matt. 2:1-6). Micah 5:2 prophesied that a child would come from Bethlehem who would become their ruler and He would be from “long ago” and “from days of eternity.” Only God exists forever. The prophecy was about Jesus Christ.

The doubters in the crowd were correct that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David and be born in Bethlehem, but they did not stop to think that maybe - just maybe - Jesus was born in Bethlehem. One wonders if they knew that Jesus’ parents were descendants of King David (Matt. 1:6, 16; Luke 3:23, 31) and consequently Jesus was a descen-

dant of King David also. We do not know the answer to our question. The historical records of the gospels simply reveal that a division had occurred.

[So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. John 7:43 \(NASB\)](#)

What else is new? Christ has always divided the crowds. Jesus said that He would divide people (Matt. 10:34) and He was correct. In fact, the division was so strong that even some in the crowds wanted to seize Him.

[Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him. John 7:44 \(NASB\)](#)

DIVISION WITHIN THE PHARISEES. Next we are told that the officers that the chief priests and Pharisees had sent to arrest Jesus in verse 32 finally return.

[The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, “Why did you not bring Him?” John 7:45 \(NASB\)](#)

Since we are not told what the officers did after being ordered to arrest Jesus, one wonders what they did. The next verse tells us that they listened to Jesus speak, most likely along with individuals within the crowds. It must have been an unbelievable experience. Here is their report.

[The officers answered, “Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks.” John 7:46 \(NASB\)](#)

The Greek word that the officers used for “never” is a strong, emphatic word. The word is *oudepote* and it means “never, not ever, at no time.” That is, not even a Pharisee, King Herod, a chief priest or anyone else was as eloquent and powerful as Jesus. They were so amazingly stunned by what they heard they were intimidated and could not arrest Him.

[The Pharisees then answered them, “You have not also been led astray, have you? No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in](#)

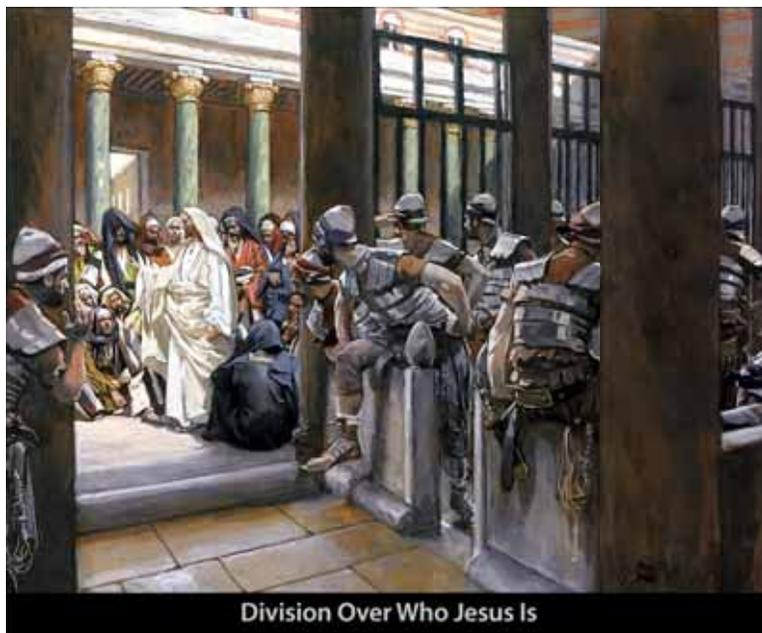
Him, has he?" John 7:47-48 (NASB)

The Pharisees wanted to know why the officers did not bring Jesus. Their accusation was that the officers were "led astray." What an insult. The Greek for the phrase "led astray" is *planao* which means "to stray away, go astray; be mistaken; be deceived, misled or wander about."¹ That is, the officers were accused of being deceived by a silver-tongued and gifted orator. The Pharisees' proof was that they claimed none of the Pharisees believed in Jesus, but they were wrong. Their words dripped with arrogance and condescension. The Pharisees were thinking that they were above deception and that they were superior to the officers. Maybe they meant to imply that the officers were stupid. The Pharisees did not realize that their own hearts had already deceived them. The prophet Jeremiah captures their problem with these words,

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? Jer. 17:9 (NASB)

On the one hand, we can rejoice that they were deceived because that resulted in the death of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it is sad because they missed the Messiah that they had been teaching about all their life. What a sad situation. Their pride got in the way and they missed a tremendous joy. What stinging words the Pharisees uttered. "No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he?" The message was the officers were really stupid.

The next stinging indictment was that the crowd was ignorant of the Law or the scriptures. So, the accusation was



the at the officers were just like the crowd, easily deceived and uneducated when it came to the scriptures. Then they added they were "accursed." The Greek word for accursed is *eparatos*, which means "to call down a curse." It is a judgmental statement wishing them a curse.

Vincent explains that the rabbis had disdain for the people because they considered themselves more knowledgeable about the scriptures,

As specimens of Rabbinical utterances concerning this class may be cited the expressions vermin, people of the earth, and the saying, "The ignorant is impious; only the learned shall have part in the resurrection."²

That reminds us of the last part of 1 Corinthians 8:1,

... we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. 1 Cor. 8:1 (NASB)

The first part of the verse tells us that we all have knowledge. Everybody has knowledge. It is not possible to live life and not have some knowledge. So God is not saying that we should not have knowledge. But some people become proud because of their knowledge. Are you

focused on your knowledge and not preoccupied with loving others? The Pharisees were preoccupied with their knowledge. Love was missing. They loved themselves. Maybe they talked about their academic degrees, honors and awards. Somehow they thought that people would give them honor. My experience has been that people are respectful toward the individual, but they are unimpressed with the person.

1. Newman, B. M., Jr. (1993). A Concise Greek-English dictionary of the New Testament. (p. 143). Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies.

2. Vincent, M. R. (1887). Word studies in the New Testament. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. vol. 2, p. 165

They see the pride. That describes the Pharisees. This truth becomes clearer in the next verse.

But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed. John 7:49 (NASB)

They view the crowd with contempt and they do not realize that it is also an indictment of themselves. If their statement was true, then it revealed their own failure as teachers of the Law. They were not effectively teaching the people. This is a reminder that the education level of a congregation reflects on the quality of the teaching of a church's pastors and teachers. Hebrews 5:11-14 provides a guideline for effective teaching of the Word of God. The teaching of the Word of God must contain more meat than milk. Newborn Christians do not grow whose diet is filled with milk.

These proud Pharisees were wrong in their statement to the officers. Apparently they did not know that one of their own, Nicodemus, believed that Jesus Christ was the Messiah.

Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them, "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" John 7:50-51 (NASB)

This was the same Nicodemus who had visited Jesus earlier in John 3:1. In John 3:10 Jesus tells us that Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel. This means that Nicodemus was an important Pharisee. John 19:39 reveals that Nicodemus must have been a Christian since he helped bury Jesus' body after his crucifixion. Therefore, it appears that Nicodemus was trying to defend Jesus in John 7:50-51.

Nicodemus reminded them that the Law required justice and not unilateral self-condemnation. He was probably thinking about Deuteronomy 1:16-17 which encouraged the leaders to judge impartially.

Then I charged your judges at that time, saying, "Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the

small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it." Deut. 1:16-17 (NASB)

The passage warned every Jew to treat everyone as equals and not play favorites. They were not to be biased toward the rich and powerful and biased against the poor and powerless. This reveals a great characteristic of God. God desires justice. He requires that we be objective in our evaluation of others. This is an important principle for us to remember the next time we have a negative thought of someone. More than likely if we knew more about them, we would have a different opinion of them. Nicodemus encouraged them to be like God - be just.

They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee." John 7:52 (NASB)

Their response to Nicodemus revealed their ignorance, lack of wisdom and injustice. Their ignorance was revealed by the fact that the prophet Jonah came from Galilee. 2 Kings 14:25 tells us that Jonah who was the son of Amittai (Jonah 1:1) was a prophet from the city of Gath-hepher. This city was in the land given to Zebulun which was in Galilee according to Joshua 19:13. That is, Jonah was from Galilee. Later Rabbi Eliezer stated that a prophet had arisen from every tribe of Israel.

There was no tribe in Israel which did not produce a prophet, and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin appointed their kings based on the words of the prophets.³

It is possible that the Pharisees lied in an attempt to be convincing.

Their lack of wisdom is revealed by concluding that Jesus had lived His entire life in Galilee. Apparently, they did not consider that maybe He was born in Bethlehem of Judea from which prophets did arise. Their injustice is clearly on display. They wanted to eliminate Jesus Christ.

3. Babylonian Talmud. Sukah 27b

Kent Hughes writes,

When snow descends upon the Continental Divide, it melts and flows off either to the west or to the east, never to meet again. Christ is the continental divide in our lives. We will either go up with the morning stars or, to use Eliot's phrase, join the valley of the dying stars. Christ brings division to everyday life. We all have experienced this. Maybe we are at the store, in school, or at work, and we are talking animatedly with someone about any number of things - maybe politics or education or sports or the weather. Then someone says something like, "My life has been really different lately because of Christ." Suddenly there is a silence and a shuffling of feet. Someone coughs. Someone else looks at his watch and says, "I've got an appointment to get to or I'll be late." Another says, "Oh, yes I have to go feed the dog. I must be going." But in reality the man who said he had to feed the dog did not have a dog to feed, and the other person's appointment was the next day.⁴

CONCLUSION. The crowds were divided and the religious leaders were divided over Jesus Christ. That was true in Jesus' day and it is still true today. Recently, a woman visited our

church as part of a school assignment. Her professor wanted her to visit various religious groups in order to be exposed to different "faiths." She called the church and we welcomed her. We were teaching from one of the minor prophets that evening and we touched on the death of Jesus Christ during the service. At the end of the service she wanted to talk about what she had heard. It was obvious that she was upset. When I asked why she was upset, she shared that she was offended by our discussion about Jesus' death on the cross for our sins. I did my best by the Holy Spirit to help her see that God loved her and died for her sins. But she was offended and did not want to listen.

Jesus is an offense and the gospel of salvation is an offense to Jews and Gentiles. We need to pray for this dark world. It is looking for something better. They do not realize that who they want is Jesus Christ, our God, Savior and Lord. Jesus said,

Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me. Luke 7:23 (NASB)

4. R. Kent Hughes. John. Crossway Books. 1999. p. 222.