



## **John 1 – 7**

Leaders' notes and sample studies

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## Background notes

This booklet includes 10 sample Bible Studies from the Gospel According to John (focusing on chapters 1 – 2 and 5 – 7).

After a really positive opening in chapters 1 – 4 of John's Gospel where the person and work of Jesus is outlined, things turn decidedly darker in chapters 5 – 12. Jesus is challenged by his opponents – the Jews – as to whether his claims are correct. He in turn challenges his opponents as to whether they have understood who he is and what he came to do.

In chapter 5 – 7 of the Gospel According to John we see a build up of action as Jesus moves closer to Jerusalem and his crucifixion. There is much dialogue about who he is and what he came to do.

- Chapter 5 gives a deeper insight into who Jesus is.
- Chapter 6 gives a deeper insight into what he came to do.
- Chapter 7 records the controversy that raged and still rages today about Jesus.

## How these sample studies work

- The first couple of questions in *Getting started* raise some general issues to think about.
- *Observation* is about getting the detail – reading the passage and seeing what it is about. *Interpretation* aims to take you to some issues in and behind the passage – to help us to think at a little more depth. Sometimes *Observation* and *Interpretation* are combined in the form of interviews, role plays, questions, charts, etc.
- *Implications* seeks to help us think about applying this section of Scripture.
- Each study finishes with suggestions for prayer.

**For Your Information** will provide a little background to some verses with some additional references to look up from time to time. There will also occasionally be a section called **Did You Notice?** which will also make some comments on various verses and themes.

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# 1. John 1:1-18

## Getting started

When people want to know about God where will they go to find out – what people, experiences etc?

Where would you advise people to look, and listen if they wanted to find out about God?

## Observation

1. According to verse 1&2 what is the relationship between God and the word?
2. According to verses 3-4 what is the word responsible for?
3. What was John's role according to verses 6-9?
4. According to verses 5,10-11 what is the relationship between the word and the world?
5. How does one become a child of God according to verses 12-13?
6. According to verse 14 what did the word do and what did this mean?
7. Who is the word?
8. According to verse 18 what are the consequences of the word, Jesus Christ, becoming flesh and dwelling amongst us?

### For your information

The 'word' or 'logos' as John uses it in John 1:1 would have been a significant 'title' for both Jews and Greeks. For Jews it would have reminded them about God's activity in the Old Testament - God works through his word - in creating etc.

Greeks saw the 'word' or 'logos' as the organising principle of the universe, it was the logos that gave order to everything.

Both Jews and Greeks would have been shocked to think that the word became flesh.

In verse 14 John uses language which has its background in Exodus 34 and 40 – God shows Moses his glory and makes his dwelling with Israel in a tent – the word John uses for dwelling literally means 'pitched his tent' amongst us.

## **Interpretation**

1. Why do you think it took John so long to say that Jesus was the word?
2. From what you know of John's gospel why do you think John has written 1:1-18? How does this passage 'set up' the rest of the gospel?
3. Who do you think the 'we' are mentioned in v 14?
4. What are the benefits of Jesus coming into the world?
5. What are the implications of this passage for those who want to say that Jesus is one of many ways/people to knowing God?

## **Implications**

1. "If anyone tries to talk about what God is like and does not refer to Jesus Christ then they can be ignored as not really knowing what they are talking about. It may be interesting but ultimately futile."

How do you respond to this statement? What are the implications of John 1:1-18 for the truth claims of other religions and philosophies that claim to speak about God?

2. How would you explain to someone what it means to receive, to believe in the name of Jesus?

## **Prayer suggestions**

- Thank God for sending Jesus to accurately reveal who he really is
- Ask that we might better understand how Jesus can be both identical to and distinct from God
- Ask that God will help us to receive Jesus and to believe in his name, living this out in our daily lives

## 2. John 1:19-34

### Getting started

What do you know about John the Baptist?

What was his role in the story of Jesus?

### Observation

1. What do we know already about the role of John from John 1:1-18?
2. What three people does John say that he is not first of all?
3. Who does John say he is (verse 23)?
4. What is John's explanation of his purpose in coming to Israel?
5. How did John know that Jesus was the one he was to announce?
6. Read 3:27-30. What is John's attitude to his role in announcing Jesus?
7. According to 3:31-36 why can Jesus be trusted as telling the truth when he speaks about God?
8. Also according to these verse what are the consequences of accepting and believing Jesus? What happens if you do not accept Jesus?

### For your information

The Christ (v 20) was the long expected saviour of Israel who would bring in the final, triumphant rule of God and his people. Elijah (v 21) was an Old Testament prophet who was expected to appear on Earth in advance of the coming of the Christ, while the Prophet (v 21) refers to a figure promised by Moses in Deut 18:17)

It is not clear what John the Baptist meant when he called Jesus the Lamb of God. It could mean that he thought Jesus was the Lamb of God of certain Jewish writings who was a fierce warrior who would 'take away the sins of the world' in judgement (cf Revelation 5:8, 7:9-10).

Of course as the gospel goes on we see more clearly what it means for Jesus to be the lamb of God - see Exodus 12 and Isa 53 for some background.

## **Interpretation**

1. What is the role of John the Baptist in the plans of God?
2. How will the Lamb of God take away the sin of the world?
3. What does it mean when it says that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit?

(Hint – read Ezekiel 36:24-27, Joel 2:28-32 & Acts 2:1-21)

4. What sort of a person do you think John the Baptist was based on these passages of Scripture?

## **Implications**

1. One of the key words of John's gospel is witness or testimony (see 1:32). From what you have seen of John the Baptist what constitutes a good witness to Jesus? What sort of testimony to Jesus do you bear? What are the situations you have opportunity to bear witness to Jesus?
2. What sort of attitude does John the Baptist display in 3:31 onwards? What does a person need to know in order to be this humble? In what situations do you find difficult to be humble?

## **Prayer suggestions**

- Thank God for the faithful testimony of John the Baptist in his plan to save the world.
- Ask that God might give us opportunity to bear witness to Jesus and that we might be faithful as we do so.
- Ask God to humble us so that we can see ourselves rightly in relationship to God and to other people.

### 3. John 1:35-51

#### Getting started

See if you can name ten different titles for Jesus mentioned in the New Testament.

If someone asked you why they should consider following Jesus what would you say to them?

#### Observation

Notice how this passage begins with John still performing his role as a witness to Jesus.

1. What is the consequence of John bearing witness to Jesus in verses 35-6?

2. What do the two fellows call Jesus when they first speak to him?

3. What is the first thing that Andrew does after hearing Jesus speak?

4. What does Philip do when he follows Jesus?

5. Who does he refer to Jesus as in verse 45?

6. Why does Nathanael have trouble believing Philip?

7. Why does Nathanael believe in Jesus?

8. What titles does Nathanael give to Jesus?

9. What are the even greater things that Nathanael will go on to see?

### **For Your Information**

The background to 1:47-51 is found in the story of Jacob in the Old Testament. Jacob is described as a deceitful or guileful one in Gen 27:35. Nathanael is not like Jacob – one translation of this verse runs “An Israelite in whom there is no Jacob” – Nathanael was all that an Israelite should be and he recognises Jesus as the King of Israel.

The heavens being opened also has its background in a Jacob story – see Gen 28:10-22.

### **Interpretation**

1. Why do you think John has gone into such detail and told this story the way that he has?
2. What sort of an impression do you have of Jesus at the end of chapter 1?
3. What do you think it means for the heavens to open and for angels to ascend/descend etc?

### **Implications**

1. Notice that each person in the chapter that bears witness bears witness to their testimony to Jesus. If someone asked you for your testimony to Jesus what would you say – how would you explain his significance?
2. The disciples could say ‘come and see’ to the people that they talked to about Jesus – in the light of v 51 in what sense can we still say come and see to those who inquire after Jesus?

### **Prayer suggestions**

- Thank God that he has chosen to reveal himself in Jesus, he Son of Man
- Ask God to help us to catch the biggest possible view of Jesus
- Ask God to help us to be clear and accurate in our testimony to Jesus.

## 4. John 2:1-11

### Getting started

What difference does it make to your life being a Christian?

What changes have you had to make to your lifestyle and attitudes because of your allegiance to Christ?

### Observation

1. Why was Jesus at the wedding?
2. What do you think of Jesus' reply to his mother in verse 4? What 'time' do you think he is referring to?
3. What kind of jars was the water contained in?
4. Who knew about this miracle?
5. What was the quality of the wine like?
6. What was the disciples' response to this miracle?

### For Your Information

Running out of wine at a gathering like this constituted a major social embarrassment – there is even the possibility that the groom could have been sued for this happening.

Jesus' address of his mother is simply the word "woman" – it sounds a little more harsh to our ears than it perhaps was though it is certainly a formal and 'distancing' form of address for a son to address his mother.

Notice also that Mary is not named throughout the story – there is no attempt to draw attention to her and she is in no way the 'master' of her son as some varieties of theology that venerate Mary would suggest.

### Interpretation

1. What is the significance of the third day do you think? (think of other third days in the Christian story, and also check back through 1:29 and following to count the days)

2. What effect do you think Jesus' reply to Mary in verse 4 would have on her – what would she have been caused to consider?

3. How would you classify or describe this miracle?

4. What do you think is the significance of the fact that it was Jewish ceremonial jars that were used to hold the water?

5. This is the first of Jesus' miracles, in some ways the 'basic' miracle – what does it tell us about Jesus' mission and its effects?

### **Implications**

How do you see your relationship to Jesus? Are there things that you might be tempted to 'trade on', that mean Jesus 'has to' favour you?

The old structures of Judaism had to be transformed to receive the good news of Jesus. What old structures, ways of thinking about life, religion, pleasing God might you need to rethink in the light of Jesus' coming?

#### **Did you notice?**

The abundant quantity and quality of the wine that Jesus created is remarked upon in this account – while not the main point it shows that what Jesus will do will be of the highest quality and will be abundant, generous, gracious as you would expect God to be.

John calls this the first of the signs – this is his special word for Jesus' miracles – they are signs pointing towards something. The fact that he labels this as the first suggests that there is something foundational or programmatic about this miracle.

### **Prayer suggestions**

- Thank God for his miracle of new creation in bringing you to be his child.
- Ask that you will always trust Jesus and never try and 'trade' your way into his favour
- Ask God to show you areas of your life that need to be renewed and then for his power to make those changes.

## 5. John 5:1-18

### Getting started

What is the most memorable/successful experience that you have had reading the Bible? Why did it 'work'?

### Observation and interpretation

#### Thinking about this study...

This study has a lot of questions to be answered or at least considered as you read through verse by verse. It is trying to replicate a close reading approach and ask some questions of you as a reader as you move through each verse. Some questions will seem trivial and others unanswerable (either not enough information in the text or too hard). Don't spend too much time discussing a particular question and also don't worry too much if you have to leave a question 'unresolved' along the way. Perhaps a way to do this would be for one person to have the questions and everyone else simply have their Bibles open in front of them.

#### *Read verse 1*

What feast is in mind?

Have any other feasts of the Jews been mentioned in the Gospel so far? (see John 2:13)

What happened last time Jesus was in Jerusalem and met 'the Jews' (see 2:12–23, especially verse 20)? What is the effect of calling it a 'feast of the Jews'?

#### *Read verses 2-3*

Read the following brief excerpt of material about the pool. What is the effect of the amount of detail in the description of the pool and surrounds in the passage in John?

#### **Some Background: The Pool**

External evidence confirms the existence of the pool that John writes about. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls mentions the pool's title 'by Bethesdatayin, in the pool where you enter is a smaller basin'. The pool is near the 'sheep gate'. The Sheep Gate is a gate in the north-eastern wall of the Temple. Sheep for the sacrificial offerings were probably led through this gate into the temple. Excavation beneath St Anne's monastery in the early twentieth century revealed twin pools that most identify as the pool in John 5. The pools were approximately as big as a football field and 6 m deep. The five porticoes made up a porch on each of the four sides of the pool and one separating them.

### *Read verses 5-6*

What happened to verse 4?

How would you explain this 'phenomenon' in a Parish Bible study?

What is your response to the information given about the man?

Does the number 38 resonate with any other biblical numbers?

What do you think of Jesus' question to the man?

Is there any reason a sick person might not want to get well (both then and now)?

### *Read verse 7*

What does this verse suggest about the man's illness?

What do you think of his answer to Jesus' question – is it a yes or no?

How does this answer help to explain the riddle of the missing verse 4?

### *Read verses 8, 9*

What do you think of the 'miracle'?

What is missing if you compare this to a similar kind of healing in the other Gospels?

What does this tell us about Jesus' power in this kind of situation?

What did you think/how did you feel when you were told that this incident took place on a Sabbath?

Why do you think John holds this piece of information back so long?

### *Read verses 10-13*

What do you think of the Jews' statement in verse 10?

Who do you think 'the Jews' are?

Why do you think the man doesn't know Jesus' name?

Why do you think Jesus is described as having 'slipped away' into the crowd?

What impression do you have of Jesus at this point?

### *Read verses 14, 15*

Why do you think Jesus finds the man again?

What do you think Jesus means by what he says to the man, what are the possibilities?

What do you think was the man's 'sinning'?

Did it cause his illness or is he doing something wrong now as well?

Do you think bad things can happen to people because they sin?

What other evidence is there in the Bible for thinking about this?

How do you feel about the man who has been healed at the end of verse 15?

The word translated 'told' in this verse is also used in John 4.25 (NIV: 'declared', 16.13 'tell you', 14, 15 'make known to you'): does this suggest anything about the man's statement?

*Read verses 16 -18*

**Some Background: The Sabbath and God 'working'**

Behind Jesus' statement in verse 16 is a long running discussion amongst Jewish Rabbi's concerning God's work on the Sabbath. According to Gen 2.2-3 God finished his work of creation and rested. He then keeps the Sabbath law. But if he rests entirely from his work then who keeps the universe running while he rests? If he 'works' on the Sabbath then has he in fact broken his own law? A number of different solutions were offered including the fact that the universe is God's domain and that he therefore never carries anything outside of that is therefore free to do what he likes; God's work of creation ceased but his work of judging continued. However it was worked out, all agreed that God works continuously.

Note the escalation in the Jews response to Jesus in these verses. What causes this escalation?

What is the thrust of Jesus' reply to the Jews?

What is the Jews' problem with Jesus apparently making himself equal to God?

*Summing up:*

Choose three words that describe Jesus, the man who was healed, and the Jews after reading this account. (You could do this as a group on a larger piece of paper)

Jesus

The man who was healed

The Jews

What questions remain unanswered for you at the end of this particular narrative?

## **Implications**

1. What insights could you use from this passage in a pastoral ministry setting?
2. How do you respond to questions about the healing power of Jesus today?

## 6. John 5:16-47

### Getting started

What problems have you run into when trying to explain to others (neighbours/children) that 'Jesus is God'?

### Observation and interpretation

#### 1. Read verses 19-27

Under the headings Father and Jesus, chart the relative roles and actions of each.

Father

Jesus

#### 2. Why can Jesus do what he does? (verses 20, 23, 27)

#### 3. Why is this important information to know? (verses 24-27)

#### Some background

In the second half of this passage Jesus speaks about the reliability of the information he is giving. In a Jewish legal setting at least two witnesses were required to substantiate a claim and a person could not testify on their own behalf. It is in this framework that Jesus' next speech ought to be read.

#### Read verses 31-47

#### 4. What is Jesus' point in verse 31?

5. List the testimonies to Jesus in verses 33-40. How do the different 'testifiers' relate to each other?

<b>Verse</b>	<b>Testifier</b>	<b>Jesus' comment (if any)</b>
John 5.32		
John 5.33		
John 5.36		
John 5.37		
John 5.39		

6. What is Jesus' point in verses 41-44? What problem does Jesus identify with his opponent's response to himself?

**Going deeper**

When Jesus speaks about how he can claim to be equal with God he speaks of his total obedience and submission to the Father.

Obedience and submission aren't very popular words these days. What does the fact that these qualities appear to be at the very heart of the divine Father Son relationship mean for a Christian's understanding of these ideas?

What areas do you find it difficult to be obedient and submissive, where perhaps you ought? Eg. Work, parents, etc. How does this picture of the relationship between Father and Son help or hinder your thinking in these areas?

OR

One of the key themes in John is that of 'testimony'. We are reliant on the testimony of others for what we know about the Father and his son Jesus. How well accepted is the concept of 'testimony' in our world today? Are there problems with this idea in people's minds? Some suggest that we should witness to Christ through our own testimony to him, what do you think of this evangelistic strategy?

## 7. John 6:1-29

### Getting started

Have you ever witnessed a miracle? Discuss.

### Observation and interpretation

#### Thinking about this study...

For this part of the study you will need to ask for participants a week in advance so they can think about their response. You may like to have a reporter as well.

Some background to help you assume a character in the interviews...

Jesus and the disciples cross the lake and come to a mountain where they see the large crowd that has followed on land. Jesus goes up on the mountain and teaches the crowd in the context of the impending Passover Feast. The context of the mountain, teaching and Passover recalls the experience of Moses and Israel. This is reinforced with the action of the crowd at the end of the account. They ask if this might be the prophet (the one promised by Moses in Deuteronomy 18) and then seek to make him King.

There are some unusual details recorded in Jesus' testing of his disciples with his request of Philip. Jesus' foresight and sovereignty is contrasted with the disciples' helplessness and uncertainty. The size of the crowd means the task is impossible for the impoverished disciples as Philip acknowledges in a detail that also serves to amplify the magnitude of what is about to happen. Andrew finds a young boy with his lunch. The loaves are the low quality bread of the poor and the fish are most likely some small sardine like fish to give a bit of taste to the bread. The details in the account, green grass, the amount of money is about right to feed a group like that, the poor quality of the boys lunch, the collection of uneaten food at the end etc again breathe the air of an eyewitness account that sits well within what we know of the social and historical context.

At the end 12 baskets of leftovers are collected recalling the twelve tribes of Israel. It looks like Jesus directs his own 12 as a renewed or reconstituted Israel feeding and providing for them.

The desire to make Jesus King fits in with what we know of the volatility of the times with revolutionary movements and figures around. The desire of many to rebel and break free of Roman rule was strong and Jesus' actions, so reminiscent of Moses, the great liberator of Israel makes him a likely candidate to lead and rule. Jesus will be presented as king in the Gospel but it will be on his own terms.

The sea walking incident follows next. The whole incident must have been terrifying for the disciples; first the storm and then this person walking effortlessly towards them. His words I am do not be afraid could only recall the name of the Lord in the OT and the appearances of the mysterious angel of the Lord. Walking on water was recognised at that time as a sign of divinity in a variety of religious contexts. There appears to be a second miracle as the boat arrives immediately on the shore once Jesus enters the boat. This appears to be a private manifestation to the disciples and may well be important for their own staying with Jesus at the end of the chapter. It is clearly an important moment along with the feeding as these two incidents are recorded in all Gospels. It is curious then that so little is made of the incident by John.

The journey of the crowd to find Jesus is a little confusing. The crowd that had been fed remained 'on the other side', where the feeding took place. They realise that there had only been one boat and that Jesus was not on it. Perhaps they are meant to work out that something extraordinary has happened. In any case it seems that while many might have gone home a number also stayed perhaps in the hope that Jesus might still be around. Some boats from Tiberias came across the lake to where the crowd was. Perhaps they were blown by the storm or perhaps they had come to fetch friends and neighbours. Realising that

Jesus was not around they then take off to Capernaum to try and find him. At this point Capernaum was the home base for Jesus and his disciples (2:12). The rest of the talking takes place in the synagogue at Capernaum. They do find him but their question shows they do not even conceive of the possibility of Jesus' actual mode of movement. They address him as Rabbi (teacher) although they will soon dispute his teaching. The crowd is generally confused through the Fourth Gospel. Jesus discerns their true motives for searching for him: they want more food and perhaps him to lead them in a liberation movement with no real idea of the meaning of what he has done in view. Once again an action with symbolic/spiritual significance is taken on a purely earthly level by Jesus' hearers.

### *Questions for Philip*

Describe the situation as you saw it.

How did you feel when Jesus first approached you about getting food for the crowd?

What did you think when Andrew suggested the boy's lunch might be used?

Tell us about the events that night.

Putting the two incidents together what do you think about Jesus?

### *Questions for Andrew*

Why did you suggest the boy and his food?

What did it look like when Jesus made the bread and fish multiply?

How did the people respond when you distributed the food?

Did the 12 baskets of leftovers mean anything do you think?

### *Questions for a person in the crowd*

What did you think when Jesus fed the crowd?

Who did you think he might be?

What did you want him to do?

How did you feel when you couldn't find him?

### *Questions for a person in the crowd the next day*

Take us through the sequence of events the next morning

What do you think happened during the night?

How did you feel when Jesus spoke to you at Capernaum?

What do you think about Jesus?

### **Implications**

'If only Jesus were here today and could do some more miracles, then people would really find it easier to believe in him' What do you think of this statement on the basis of what you have been reading in John's Gospel?

What 'bread' of the world tempts to you to fill your belly and ignore the 'bread from heaven'?

Jesus' statements about eating and drinking are, amongst other things, allusions to his violent death. We do not have a saviour without the offence of the cross. In what ways do people find the cross offensive these days and how would you respond to their comments?

## 8. John 6:25-59

### Getting started

How do you explain to other people what it means for you to follow Jesus and identify with him? What images and metaphors do you use to illustrate this and help them understand?

### Observation and interpretation

Introduction: read verses 25-31 to establish the context

#### *Bread from heaven (verses 32-51)*

##### **Some background**

A particular teaching technique in Judaism was to take a text and then pick out individual words within it and expand and explain these. The text was usually taken from the Torah (first 5 books of what we call the OT). The teacher would often bring in another supplementary text from either the prophets or the writings to make a supplementary point.

This is what Jesus appears to be doing from verse 32 onwards. Jesus takes the scripture the crowd quotes in verse 31 and then his 'sermon' expands on ideas from the text, the ideas of 'bread' and 'from heaven'.

In verse 45 he introduces another text from Isaiah and expands on that until in verses 48-51 he summarises his point so far.

In response to the Jews question in verse 52 the final part of his sermon focuses on the word 'eat.'

1. In verse 32, how does Jesus correct the crowd's understanding expressed in verse 31?
2. According to verses 35-40, 48-51 what does it mean for Jesus to be the bread of life?
3. What is the Jews problem with Jesus' teaching in verse 41-2?
4. What is Jesus' point in verse 43-47 as he replies to the Jews grumbling?

#### *Eating the bread of life (verses 53-59)*

1. What do you think Jesus means by these words? If he is not speaking literally why do you think he speaks in such graphic terms?

## **Implications**

How would you answer the Jews' question in verse 52?

While this passage is not about the Lord's Supper we do use similar language when celebrating it: take and eat, take and drink... How do you respond emotionally to this language (either in the Lord's Supper or as a metaphor for relationship with Christ)?

How useful are graphic metaphors like these in 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia? Do they clarify or confuse?

If you were going to use a metaphor for helping people understand that they need to rely only on Jesus what would you use?

## 9. John 6:60-70

### Getting started

Who have you known that has fallen away from the Christian faith? Why did it happen? How did you react?

### Observation and interpretation

1. Who is doing the grumbling here (verses 60-61)?
2. Where in the Bible does the mention of 'grumbling' take you?
3. What do you think Jesus is referring to in verse 62?

There are two main options that have been suggested for understanding the verse. First, Jesus is saying that there will be further offence when he is raised up on the cross. Second, Jesus is suggesting that there will be surprise and vindication of his words when Jesus returns to the Father via the cross and therefore everything he said is true. What do you think?

4. What is Jesus' point in verse 63?
5. Why don't the twelve leave?
6. What is your response to Jesus' teaching in verses 64-65 and verse 70? How do these verses help in understanding the story of Jesus?

### Implications

See John 8:32: the true disciple abides in Jesus' word. This is immediately tested when Jesus speaks to those who had believed in him and suggests that they are sinful. Many find it hard to 'abide' in this word of Jesus.

What 'hard teachings' are there in the Christian faith that you find difficult to accept? How do you deal with this?

How do/will you respond to people who come up to you and express doubts about some Christian truths? Perhaps two members of the group could role play a conversation along these lines. (If you have time perhaps you could get two pairs to show a good way and a poor way).

## 10. John 7 – Jesus on trial

### Thinking about this study...

So far John has shown us a little more of who Jesus is (John 5) and what he has come to do (John 6). In John 7 the reactions of various groups of people are presented. The setting is the Feast of Tabernacles.

You have choice in this study as to what to focus upon. The first approach will be to read through the entire chapter and look at the various ways that Jesus' claims are assessed and responded to. This forms part of an overall 'trial theme' that pervades the Gospel.

The second approach is to focus on a very specific claim that Jesus makes in the midst of the feast in verses 37–39.

## Approach 1

### Getting Started

What are the main estimates of Jesus that you hear around the place? What evidence or reasons do people offer for their opinions?

### Observation and interpretation

Read through the chapter and collate the various responses to Jesus that John details. These will be both negative and positive and often there will be a reason given or a problem stated with Jesus and his claims. Occasionally there will also be a reply from Jesus or a defence of sorts offered. In the chart below collate the various options as you read through the text...

Verses	Character	Response/Assessment of Jesus	Reason (if any)	Reply/Defence (if any)
7:3-8				
7:14-19				
7:20-24				
7:25-29				
7:30-31				
7:40				
7:41				
7:41-43				
7:45-46				
7:47-49				
7:50-52				

## **Implications**

What has been helpful in this chapter in thinking through how to approach people and their (mis)conceptions about the person of Jesus?

The chapter has mainly focussed around the claim that Jesus is the Christ. What does this title mean and is it relevant for today?

The chapter has breathed the air of argument and sort of proof in discussion about Jesus. Some Christians are nervous about this suggesting that our responsibility is to proclaim the Gospel and not argue for it. How would you respond to that?

# Approach 2

## Getting Started

Read through John 7:1-36 in order to get some idea of the context in which Jesus speaks.

### **Some Background: The Feast of Tabernacles**

The Feast of Tabernacles was a festival celebrating the harvest of grapes and olives around September/October. According to Josephus it was the most popular Jewish festival of them all. People flocked to Jerusalem and lived, for the week, in makeshift booths or tabernacles. While it was a harvest festival it also provided an opportunity to recall God's mercy to the Israelites as they travelled through the wilderness under the leadership of Moses. It was well known for both lamp lighting and water drawing ceremonies.

The water-pouring ceremony involved filling a golden flagon of water from the Pool of Siloam. This was then taken in a procession led by the High Priest to the Temple. As the procession approached the Watergate, there were three trumpet blasts. Inside the Temple there was then a parade around the altar with Psalms 113 – 118 being chanted. As Psalm 118 was chanted a palm branch intertwined with willow and myrtle twigs was shaken a citrus fruit raised in the left hand. Everyone would then cry 'Give thanks to the Lord' and the water would be poured into silver bowls and then poured out as an offering to God. The water was poured out into the shaft at the side of the altar and the altar, or more precisely the rock on which it rested, was said to mark the spot where the world's thirst was quenched.

The light ceremony involved the lighting of chandeliers or lanterns so that all Jerusalem seemed to be bathed in the light from the temple.

All of this of course occurred at the Temple, a place of major significance for the Jewish people. The Temple stands at the centre of the city that is at the centre of Israelite national and religious life. It is the place where God made his name or glory to dwell. The temple was in fact significant for the whole cosmos: it is likened to creation in its establishment in Ps 78; the Lord dwells there and from there of course the fate of the whole earth is decided. The temple and Jerusalem were central in prophetic visions of the final and universal salvation of the new age. Following the exile the temple was a central symbol of the hope for the restored nation, while Isaiah notes that it will also be a house of prayer for all peoples (Is 56:7 cf also Zech 14.10). According to Ezekiel 47, in the messianic age a river would flow from under the altar in the Temple and go out into the entire world.

### **Read John 7:37–39**

1. What significance has water had in John's Gospel so far? See John 2:1–11, 3:5; 4:7–15; 5:7.
2. How provocative are Jesus' actions here? How do they interact with the symbolism of the water pouring ceremony (see also Isaiah 12:16; Zech 14:1-8; Ezek 36:25–27)? What is being claimed here by Jesus in this action?
3. How does John interpret the symbolism?

## **Implications**

1. How would you apply the Gospel's teaching on Jesus and water to today? See Jeremiah 2:13
2. What are the implications of this passage for your own personal response to Jesus? What are the implications for thinking about your activities as a follower of Jesus?