

CHURCH *of* GOD

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THE LAST GREAT DAY

Study Paper

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The traditional teaching of the Church is that the Eighth Day (after the end of the Feast of Tabernacles) is appropriately referred to as the *Last Great Day*. It is true that our use of this term originated from John chapter 7. But there are questions as to which specific day John was referring to—the seventh (last) day of the Feast, or the Eighth Day. Putting these questions aside, the Church still considers the term *Last Great Day* appropriate when we refer to the Eighth Day, and it will continue to be our primary term of reference.

Based on the biblical and historical evidence, it is our current understanding that John 7:37 most likely refers to the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. This is based on the following: the historical evidence and the biblical inference to the water ceremony, which concluded on the seventh day, not the eighth; our belief that John chapters 8 and 9 occurred on a Sabbath day based on the Hebrew calendar and the scriptural evidence; the fact that major events took place on the seventh day (deconstructing booths, also called *Hoshana Rabbah*); and the fact that John 7 refers to this day as the “last day” of the Feast, while the Eighth Day is a *single* feast, lasting but one day.

It is also possible that John 7:37 and the verses that follow took place in the evening, after sunset. John 7:53 states, “And everyone went to his own house.” At the conclusion of the seventh day, and the beginning of the Eighth Day those who were attending the Feast would return to their “house” and not to a booth. Our doctrinal position on the Feast and our use of the term *Last Great Day* as interchangeable for the *Eighth Day* are not affected by either possibility.

John 7:37-38

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. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

Which day is the “last day, that great day of the feast” in this verse? It was one of the two following options (in chronological order): the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:34) or the ensuing annual holy day, the “eighth day” (verse 36).

John 7 doesn’t explicitly mention a *numbered* day. Therefore, Bible students tend to seek answers by weighing multiple factors, such as the context, audience, language, history and tradition. Then, a plausible conclusion can be reached based upon a *majority* of evidence. Let’s begin with early references in Scripture to the two days in question.

Scriptural origins

Which day is the *original* “last day” of the feast, according to a *literal* reading of Scripture? The Feast of Tabernacles is introduced as the “Feast of Ingathering” (Exodus 23:16; 34:22). However, the total number of days in this Feast is not mentioned until Leviticus 23:

Verse 34: “The fifteenth day ... shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for *seven days*” (emphasis added throughout).

Verse 36: “For *seven days* you shall offer an offering made by fire.”

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Verse 39: "... You shall keep the feast of the LORD *for seven days.*"

Verse 40: "... You shall rejoice before the LORD your God *for seven days.*"

Verse 41: "You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD *for seven days* in the year."

Verse 42: "You shall dwell in booths *for seven days.*"

Six times in Leviticus 23 alone, God repeated that this Feast is for "seven days." Therefore, literally speaking, the *seventh* day is the *last day* of this Feast.

Leviticus 23 also provides the first *explicit* reference to the next festival, the "eighth day" (verses 36 and 39). This is a *separate* festival. Otherwise, there would be only six annual festivals: Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles. Yet the "eighth day" is not the *last day* of the Feast of Tabernacles, which consisted of seven days, according to the command in Leviticus 23:39.

The next time that both the Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day are mentioned is in Numbers 29:12-13:

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. ...
You shall keep a feast to the LORD *seven days.* You shall present a burnt offering
... *thirteen young bulls*, two rams, *and* fourteen lambs in their first year.

Beginning with 13 on the first day, the number of sacrificial bulls decreased by one each day until the *last day* of the Feast. Verse 32 states: "On the seventh day *present* seven bulls." But on the Eighth Day, only "one bull" was sacrificed (verse 36).

The number of sacrificial rams and lambs was consistently "two" and "fourteen" respectively on each day of the Feast of Tabernacles. But the numerical pattern was *broken* after the Feast of Tabernacles, dropping to "one ram" and "seven lambs" on the Eighth Day.

The next record of the two festivals in question is in 1 Kings 8:65-66. Here, the Feast of Tabernacles is preceded by another seven-day festival, due to the dedication of the temple.

At that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a *great* assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt ... *seven days and seven more days—fourteen days.* On the *eighth day* he sent the people away.

The total of "fourteen days" is given for the two seven-day festivals. Within this context, they assembled each day of the Feast of Tabernacles, until the *last day*, the *seventh day*. But didn't they also assemble on Eighth Day? Yes, however this assembly is *separated* from the counting of "seven" and "fourteen" days. The omission of the Eighth Day from the total highlights its special and unique identity. Likewise, the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 7:8-9 says:

At that time Solomon kept the feast *seven days*, and all Israel with him, a very *great* assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt. And on the

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eighth day they held a *sacred* assembly, for they observed the dedication of the altar *seven days*, and the feast *seven days*.

Again, the “sacred assembly” of the Eighth Day is differentiated from the same or similar activities during the seven days. So, there was an “assembly” on each day until the *last day* of the feast, the seventh day, followed by a “sacred assembly” on the Eighth Day.

The next reference to the Feast of Tabernacles and Eighth Day includes the first reference to a “last day.” Nehemiah 8:18 reads:

Also day by day, from the *first day until the last day*, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast *seven days*; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

Nehemiah could have simply said that they read from the Book of the Law and kept the Feast “for eight days.” But this passage is consistent with previous *scriptures* that show activities during the “seven days” are *separated* from the same activities (e.g. sacrificial bulls, rams and lambs; assembling, etc.) on the Eighth Day.

So, if Nehemiah 8:18 is read through the lens of the previous examples, one would conclude that they read from the Book of the Law through the end of the “last day” of the Feast, the seventh day. Then there was a “sacred assembly” on the Eighth Day, the high day, when such reading was customary.

Evidently, it wasn’t customary to read this Book before *everyone* during the seven days. Notice Deuteronomy 31:10-11:

At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when *all Israel* comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall *read this law before all Israel* in their hearing.

Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament states, “The reading of the law was only ordered at that celebration of the feast of tabernacles which occurred during the sabbatical year, Deu. 31:10. The last day was the seventh, for the eighth ... *did not belong* to the feast of tabernacles” (note on Nehemiah 8:18).

If this Book wasn’t annually read before “all Israel” during the seven days, then this would explain the need to command them to do so “in the year of release.” And it would also shed light on Nehemiah’s note of it being read “from the first day until the last day.”

Regardless, of one’s preferred reading of Nehemiah 8:18, the “seven days” and the “eighth day” are mentioned *separately*, which is consistent with Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The “last day” in John’s Gospel

Interestingly, John’s Gospel is the only New Testament book to specify the “last day” of the Feast or of anything else. This is done seven times, often within the context of resurrection. The

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other six references are below. While reading these passages, consider how many of these pinpoint or include the first resurrection.

John 6:39: “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should *raise* it up *at the last day*.”

John 6:40: “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will *raise* him up *at the last day*.”

John 6:44: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will *raise* him up *at the last day*.”

John 6:54: “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will *raise* him up *at the last day*.”

John 11:24: “Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will *rise again* in the resurrection *at the last day*.’”

John 12:48: “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him *in the last day*.”

Additionally, most, if not all, of the following references begin after the return of Christ and the *first* resurrection and continue through the time period of the second resurrection. So should the Millennium be omitted from the context of the “last day” in John 7:37? Will not God’s Spirit also be offered to all humanity during the Millennium?

Isaiah 11:9: “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for *the earth shall be full of the knowledge* of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

Isaiah 44:3: “For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; *I will pour My Spirit on your descendants*, and My blessing on your offspring.”

Isaiah 49:6: “Indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; *I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles*, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

Jeremiah 31:33: “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will *put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts*.”

Ezekiel 11:19: “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a *new spirit within them*, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh.”

Ezekiel 36:26-27: “I will give you a new heart and put a *new spirit within you*; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will

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put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

Acts 2:17: “And it shall come to pass in *the last days*, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on *all flesh*.”

Imagine how many millions of people will be offered God’s Spirit during this 1,000-year period! This is just a sample of many related scriptures that apply to the time periods following *both* the first and second resurrections. Therefore, does the context of John 7:37-38 *exclude* the Millennium? Our conclusion is no.

Was it a “high” day?

The Greek word for “great” (*megas*) figures prominently in another well-known passage in John’s Gospel: “for that Sabbath was a high [*megas*] day [*hemera*]” (John 19:31). Therefore, should John 7:37 be rendered, “the last day, that *high day* of the feast”? If so, then this would clearly denote the last annual holy day, the Eighth Day.

In John 7:37 “day” is italicized in the phrase (“*great day*”), as it’s not in the Greek. Now if John were underscoring that it was a “high day” in John 7:37, would he have omitted the Greek for “day”? The phrase *great day* is translated differently in various translations:

- “And in the last day of the great feast” (Modern King James Version).
- “And in the last day of the great feast” (Green’s Literal Translation Version).
- “On the last day, the climax of the festival” (New Living Translation).
- “Now on the final and most important day of the Feast” (Amplified Bible).
- “On the last and most important day of the festival” (Good News Translation).
- “On the last day of the feast, the greatest day” (New English Translation).

Regardless of which rendering is best, these various translations demonstrate how this verse has challenged translators. Also, technically, the only *high day* that’s “of the feast” of Tabernacles is the *first* day. The Eighth Day is a separate feast.

The significance of the high day, or the lack there of, is also discussed in a word study commentary from the *United Bible Societies’ New Testament Handbook Series*:

Scholars differ as to what is meant by the **last ... day of the festival**. Originally it was a seven-day celebration. Later an eighth was added, but it was more a day of rest than of festive celebration. Did John mean the seventh day, the final day of the festival itself, or the added eighth day? Fortunately, the problem need not be resolved by the translator. It is even doubtful that John was aware that he would raise any problem by this phrase. **The last ... day of the festival** may be rendered in some languages as “The last day on which people celebrated” or “The final day when the people were celebrating.”

While noting common Hebrew or Greek words is part of good Bible study habits, sometimes more is needed to complete the process of exegesis. Definitions must harmonize with all the related passages, history and background information on a given subject.

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The phrase *great day* should be interpreted on a case-by-case basis, according to the context, rather than just plugging in a meaning. As noted earlier for the *last day*, every single prophetic “great [*megas*] day” of judgment does not equal the same resurrection period exclusively. For example:

Acts 2:20: “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great [*megas*] and awesome day [*hēmera*] of the LORD.”

Revelation 6:17: “For the great [*megas*] day [*hēmera*] of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

Revelation 16:14: “For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great [*megas*] day of God Almighty.”

Each “great day” in these verses will occur shortly before the *first* resurrection. However there’s also a “great day” of judgment that awaits Satan and his demons after the Millennium and before the Great White Throne judgment period.

Jude 1:6: “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great [*megas*] day [*hēmera*].”

This, indeed, will be the last great day of judgment for angels, who are implied in the statement “they will be tormented ... forever” (Revelation 20:10). This is supported by Matthew 25:41, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the *everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*” However, the Last Great Day, as we typically use the term, is about *human beings and their judgment* (Revelation 20:11-12). According to the Scriptures:

- The “great white throne” is introduced *after* Satan is cast into the lake of fire.
- The “great white throne” is a period of judgment that begins with the second resurrection—of “the dead, small and great.”
- The “books” and “Book of Life” are “opened” for the judgment of human beings, not angels.

The Great (*megas*) White Throne Judgment has two possible outcomes for *people*: life or condemnation (John 5:29). Fallen angels will have no part of this dispensation, as their judgment has *only one outcome*—eternal torment. So the “great day” of judgment upon fallen angels is separate from the Last Great Day of judgment upon human beings.

The water-pouring ceremony

John 7:37-38: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and *drink*. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will *flow rivers of living water.*”

It appears that these words alluded to the traditional Jewish water-pouring ceremony held each year during the Feast of Tabernacles. Therefore, it follows that the impact of these words would

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be most relevant around the time of this ceremony. Consequently, the timing of this ceremony is significant in helping identify which day is the “last day, that great day of the feast” (John 7:37).

Commentaries are torn between whether the water ceremony was held on the seventh day of the Feast or the Eighth Day. However, there’s more consistency among notable Jewish sources, which tend to be more familiar with this subject. Therefore, one should consider the overall weight of evidence from non-Jewish and Jewish sources (rather than just seeking one that matches his personal preference).

A highly authoritative Jewish source for this subject, among many others, is called the “tradition of the elders” (Mark 7:3), also known as the Talmud. Before delving into specific examples from this source, let’s briefly consider some additional background information to see why this source was, and still is, so important in the Jewish society.

These traditions are also known as the oral law, as Jews believe they were passed down *orally* from Moses through the rabbis. Jesus had to correct Jewish leaders for placing too high a priority on these traditions: “For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men” (verse 8).

Today the written version of this is often called the Talmud (“instruction”) or the Mishnah (“study by repetition”). The Talmud is “the collection of Rabbinic writings that make up the basis of religious *authority* for traditional Judaism” (*Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, “Mary”).

According to JewishHistory.org, “The Mishnah is the first written record of what was the Oral Law” (www.jewishhistory.org/the-mishnah/). Jesus attended God’s Feast of Tabernacles, but in John we have a reference to the “Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles” (John 7:2). The Jews of that day had several traditions that gave a unique Jewish flavor to the festival but were not in conflict with God’s instructions.

Now let’s consider the timing of one of those traditions, the water ceremony, during the time of Jesus Christ, in light of the Talmud. First, the duration is noted: “[The dwelling in a] SUKKAH AND THE WATER LIBATION SEVEN [days]” (Sukkah 42b, *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, London, The Soncino Press, 1990).

Their dwelling in booths and the water libation ceremony lasted for the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles. The specified time of day for this ceremony was “after the offering of the regular daily *morning* offering during the Feast” (footnote b5).

The activities of the seventh day were the most spectacular of the Feast. This is vividly described in the Babylonian Talmud (footnote comments in parentheses, lowercase):

Sukkah 51a: “ONE WHO HAS NOT SEEN THE REJOICING AT THE PLACE OF THE WATERDRAWING HAS NEVER SEEN REJOICING IN HIS LIFE. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST FESTIVAL DAY OF TABERNACLES. ...

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“MEN OF PIETY AND GOOD DEEDS USED TO DANCE BEFORE THEM WITH LIGHTED TORCHES IN THEIR HANDS, AND SING SONGS AND PRAISES. AND LEVITES WITHOUT NUMBER WITH HARPS, LYRES, CYMBALS AND TRUMPETS AND OTHER MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS WERE THERE UPON THE FIFTEEN STEPS LEADING DOWN FROM THE COURT OF THE ISRAELITES TO THE COURT OF THE WOMEN, CORRESPONDING TO THE FIFTEEN SONGS OF ASCENTS IN THE PSALMS.”

Sukkah 4:45a, footnote a15: “EVERY DAY THEY WENT AROUND THE ALTAR ONCE ... BUT ON THAT DAY (the seventh day of the festival) THEY WENT AROUND THE ALTAR SEVEN TIMES.”

This contributed largely to the reasons for which the seventh day was considered to be “great” (*megas*). Later, in the afternoon of the seventh day, they moved into regular festival housing, e.g. homes, inns, etc., as reflected below:

Sukkah 48a, footnotes b2-4: “WHEN A MAN HAS FINISHED HIS [LAST] MEAL (on the seventh day), HE MAY NOT DISMANTLE HIS SUKKAH (since he must still use it for learning, sleeping, or any occasional meal on that day). HE MAY, HOWEVER, REMOVE ITS FURNITURE (from the sukkah into the house where he is to have his meals in the evening and the following day) FROM THE AFTERNOON ONWARDS IN HONOR OF THE LAST DAY OF THE FESTIVAL”

Or, one could remove a portion of the roof (“four handbreadths”) to indicate that “it is no longer in use as a *Sukkah* but as an *ordinary hut*” (footnote b8).

Notice that his “last” meal is connected to the “seventh day” of the Feast, though he had meals on the Eighth Day. Likewise, his hut ceased being a Sukkah after the seventh day. So, within this context, it can be concluded that the *seventh day* is the “last day” of residing in a booth.

The *Louw-Nida Lexicon* discusses implications associated with the fact that He “stood” and cried out in John 7:37:

In the context of Jn 7:37 Jesus has been teaching and thus would be presumably in the seated position of a rabbi, but the unusual declaration which follows this introductory statement is made somewhat more emphatic not only by Jesus standing but by his proclamation in a loud voice.

It’s as if He had to shout for people to hear Him over surrounding noise of a *crowded temple*. Imagine the outrage of the Pharisees, especially if this were done around the time of the *morning* offering and climactic water ceremony.

The *New English Translation* adds the following study note for John 7:37:

There is a problem with the identification of this reference to the last day of the feast, the greatest day. It appears from Deu 16:13 that the feast went for seven

days. Lev 23:36, however, makes it plain that there was an eighth day, though it was mentioned *separately* from the seven. It is not completely clear whether the seventh or eighth day was the climax of the feast, called here by the author the ‘last great day of the feast.’ Since according to the Mishnah (*m. Sukkah* 4.1) the ceremonies with water and lights *did not continue after the seventh day*, it seems *more probable* that this is the day the author mentions.

Naturally, much of this water would have *dried up* during the ensuing hours, when the temple was *less crowded*, as Feastgoers prepared for the Eighth Day. Ironically, this *absence* of water caused some to equate John 7:37-38 with the Eighth Day. For example:

“The impact of this challenge is lost unless one understands the water-drawing ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles. . . . Having daily drawn water from the Pool of Siloam, then pouring it on the *morning* offering, while shouting, ‘Save us Lord,’ the *absence* of the water-drawing ceremony on the eighth day would have been profound. Hence, on the day when *living water was not drawn* from the spring, and only a *prayer for rain* was offered—a day that perhaps symbolized Israel’s dependence upon God for water that sustains life—the Savior declared that if any thirst, they should come to *him* for living waters” ([John 7-9 in Light of the Feast of Tabernacles](#), Bruce Satterfield, Department of Religious Education, Brigham Young University—Idaho).

This support for the Eighth Day nevertheless maintains that the timing of the water ceremony was on the morning of the seventh day. So, regardless of whether this theory is right or wrong, it maintains that the water ceremony was on the morning of the seventh day. The question is whether there’s *compelling* evidence for placing John 7:37 *the day after* the water ceremony.

On the other hand, the association of John 7:37 with this ceremony points to the *morning* of the “seventh day” of the Feast. Consequently, the placement of John 7:37 around the time of the water ceremony typically points to the *morning*, when the ceremony was held.

Customarily, such busyness, celebrations, activities and work are not carried out on a holy day when there’s a holy convocation. This type of scenario on the seventh day is vividly noted by Alfred Edersheim in *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*:

“The festivities of the Week of Tabernacles were drawing to a close. ‘It was the last day, that great day of the feast.’ It obtained this name, although it was *not one of ‘holy convocation,’* partly because it closed the feast, and partly from the circumstances which procured it in Rabbinical writings the designations of ‘Day of the Great Hosannah,’ on account of the *sevenfold circuit of the altar* with ‘Hosannah,’ and ‘Day of Willows,’ and ‘*Day of Beating the Branches,*’ because all the leaves were shaken off the willow boughs, and the palm branches beaten in pieces by the side of the altar. *It was on that day,* after the priest had returned from Siloam with his golden pitcher, and for the last time poured its contents to the base of the altar; after the ‘Hallel’ had been sung to the sound of the flute, the people responding and worshipping as the priests three times drew the threefold blasts from their silver trumpets—just when the interest of the people had been raised to its highest pitch, that, from amidst the mass of worshippers, who were

waving towards the altar quite a forest of leafy branches as the last words of Psa. 108 were chanted—a voice was raised which resounded through the Temple, startled the multitude, and carried fear and hatred to the hearts of their leaders. It was Jesus, who ‘stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink’” (The References in John 7:37, p. 280).

Same festivals, different understandings

We’re not obligated to adopt Jewish terms and applications. They obviously rejected Jesus Christ as the Son of God: “But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). Yet one of the rules of Bible study is the consideration of the *immediate* context of a given verse.

John 7:37 was understood on a *limited* level by the *immediate* audience in this verse. They didn’t understand God’s plan of salvation for all mankind, according to the holy days. Later, this would be understood on a higher level by God’s Church. But it’s helpful to also consider how they could have used the term *the last day, that great day of the feast*.

The *Complete Jewish Bible* says, “Now on the last day of the festival, *Hoshana Rabbah*, Yeshua stood and cried out, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him keep coming to me and drinking!’” (John 7:37). This is one of the few translations that reflects the *ongoing* aspect of the verbs, that is, “keep coming” to Christ and “drinking” of His Spirit. The Jews called this last day *Hoshana Rabbah*. This title is discussed in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*:

The popular name for the *seventh day* of the Feast of Booths (Sukkot); the day on which the exclamation “Hosha’na!” (save now!) is *often repeated*, while on the other days of the feast it is used but sparingly (www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7900-hosha-na-rabbah).

The cry which the people of Jerusalem were accustomed to raise [Hosha’na!] while *marching in procession* and waving branches of palm, myrtle, and willow in the joyous *Sukkot festival*, especially on the *seventh day* ... called “Day of Hosha’na” or “Hosha’na *Rabbah*.” It was a popular festival ... connected with the *prayer for the year’s rain* (Zech. xiv. 8-17); the multitudes accompanied the priests each night of the Sukkot feast to the spring of Shiloah, where the water for the libation ... was drawn amidst *great solemnity and rejoicing* (www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/7893-hosanna).

The seventh day was the *last day* for this joyous celebration that was done “sparingly” during the previous six days. Notice, too, that this pivotal water ceremony was *concluded* on the seventh day.

This phrase *living water* (John 7:38) springs from the Old Testament and closely ties in with the water ceremony during the Feast. The Hebrew word for “running” (*chay*) is also rendered as “living” 99 times in the King James Version, not to mention similar renderings over 200 times. The Jews referred to drinking water, i.e. from streams, to be “living water.” And the source of the water for the ceremony was from the Gihon Spring, which gathered at the Pool of Siloam.

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The phrase *as the Scripture has said* (John 7:38) points to an Old Testament quote or principle. His audience understood the healing principle of running or living waters. For example, Isaiah 58:11: “You shall be like a watered garden, and *like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.*” Also Numbers 19:17: “And for an unclean *person* they shall take some of the ashes of the heifer burnt for purification from sin, and *running* water shall be put on them in a vessel.”

So it appears that Christ used the water ceremony as a powerful object lesson for what He would do for mankind. Zechariah 14:8 says, “And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem.” A few verses later we have the most descriptive prophecy of the Feast of Tabernacles (verse 16). Jeremiah twice spoke of God in this context:

Jeremiah 2:13: “For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (KJV).

Jeremiah 17:13: “O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed ... because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters” (KJV).

Jeremiah wrote about “living waters.” It would be easy to connect the waters from the pool of Siloam taken during the Feast of Tabernacles with the concept of “living waters.” And even though the Jews knew of this reference in Jeremiah they would not accept that Christ was the source for this water.

Earlier we covered the number of bulls sacrificed during the seven days (Numbers 29:12-32). Now consider the symbolism that Jews associated with these bulls:

Sukkah 55b, footnote b9: “R. Eleazar stated. To what do these seventy bullocks [that were offered during the seven days of the Festival] correspond? To the seventy nations (Seventy is the traditional number of Gentile nations, and the seventy bullocks are offered to make atonement for them).”

By the end of this seven-day period, there were a total of 70 sacrificial bulls (13 + 12 + 11 + 10 + 9 + 8 + 7 = 70), which Jews believe are symbolic of gentile nations. Of course, in the Bible sacrificial animals represent the crucifixion of Christ on behalf of “all nations” today, as well as during the Millennium and Last Great Day (Mark 11:17).

As for the one sacrificial bull on the Eighth Day, to the Jews this represents “the unique nation (Israel)” (footnote b10). On this day, in lieu of a water ceremony, there was only a prayer for rain.

Accordingly, Jews wouldn’t have understood the concept of a “Last Great Day” for all mankind from the time of Adam and Eve. *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* says, “The Jews believed that the wicked should have no resurrection; and that the principle that led to the resurrection of the body, in the righteous, was the indwelling Spirit of God” (John 6:36).

None of this undermines the reasons for which we call the Eighth Day the “Last Great Day,” as future Christians would have a complete understanding of His words. Nevertheless, if the

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terminology in John 7:37-38 is affiliated with the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles, then we also need to understand it from the standpoint of *His audience at that time*.

Timing of John 7-9

John 7 ends in this manner: "And everyone went to his own house" (John 7:53). Several hours had probably transpired from the morning ceremony through the debates among the Jewish authorities (verses 45-52). The language in verse 53 fits an afternoon scenario on the seventh day, having completed seven days in a booth (Leviticus 23:42).

Now in preparation for the Eighth Day, certain modifications to the booth were allowed to show that it no longer served as a festival booth. As noted earlier (see page 8), furniture was transferred into a house where they would eat meals on the Eighth Day. Or, "four handbreadths" of the roof were removed, making it just an "ordinary hut" (Sukkah 48a, footnotes b8-11). This activity fits the setting at the close of John 7.

Then, John 8 opens with Christ returning to the temple "early in the morning" (verses 1-2). So this would have been a *new* day, i.e. about 24 hours after the water-pouring ceremony that had occurred during the *morning* of the seventh day (John 7:37). The remainder of chapters 8 and 9 appear to be the same day, as there aren't any significant markers of a transition to a new day.

Why is this significant? Since we place the crucifixion of Christ in the spring of A.D. 31, this unique scenario occurred in the fall of A.D. 30, during the last Feast of Tabernacles that Christ attended. According to the Hebrew calendar, the Eighth Day fell on the weekly Sabbath in A.D. 30. Consequently, it was the Eighth Day (which was also the weekly Sabbath, according to John 9:14) when Christ forgave the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11), stated that He is the "light of the world" (verse 12), and healed the blind man (chapter 9).

But *if* Christ's message in John 7:37-38 is a direct reference to the water ceremony and *if* this ceremony is placed on the Eighth Day, it would go contrary to the majority of historical writings, which place the ceremony *only* during the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles. Also, if we place the water ceremony and Christ's statement about "living water" on the Eighth Day, the next "morning" (John 8:2) could not be a weekly Sabbath. This is according to our understanding of the timeline for John 7-9 and the structure of the Hebrew calendar, which does not allow a weekly Sabbath to immediately follow the Eighth Day (or, to put it another way, the Eighth Day to fall on a Friday).

Therefore, when John 7 through 9 is taken in totality, we believe this key benchmark of Jesus' message of John 7:37 is a better fit when placed on the seventh day. We can't know the exact timing of when He spoke these words—whether He spoke them in the morning, at the same time as the water ceremony, or in the afternoon, within a few hours of it. We just are not told. As stated previously in this paper, it is also possible, that portions of John 7 occurred in the *evening*, at the beginning of the Eighth Day.

Broad terminology

Over time, original words and phrases might be used in a nontechnical sense. This is not necessarily wrong or confusing when intended meanings are generally understood within a given language. Societal and cultural norms heavily contribute to expanded usage of words. Such

occurrences are found, perhaps more than we realize, in our everyday language and even the Bible.

- Luke 22:1: “Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover.” The *entire* seven-day feast is called Passover. Of course, the literal Passover is on the 14th of Nisan, exclusively. Yet this didn’t prevent John from using the broad language of that day, apart from doctrinal details (also Ezekiel 45:21).
- Josephus wrote, “We keep a feast *for eight days*, which is called the feast of unleavened bread” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book 2, chap. 15, sec. 1). His audience knew that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was seven days literally.
- Our Excused Absence Form has stated, “The Church selects regional sites for the Feast of Tabernacles, an eight-day Festival.” This adequately communicated with employers and schools, without getting into too many details. Members understood the general meaning, without confusion over the *literal* duration of this Feast.
- Our Young Adult Bible Study is called Friday Night Live, taking place on the sixth day of the week (according to Roman timing). However, according to biblical timing, it’s part of the seventh day, the Sabbath. Church members clearly understand this as we regularly transpose the intended meaning in our minds.

There are many examples of how names for closely related events are broadly interchangeable. So, when someone happens to say that he keeps the Feast for “eight days,” it’s understood that he’s broadly speaking of eight consecutive days of *feasting*, all combined together. For the most part, we’ve been able to separate language used *loosely* from *technical doctrinal definitions*. So, there’s no need to correct someone who loosely speaks of taking off eight days for the Feast.

Summary

Based upon the *majority* of research from reliable sources and, most importantly, Scripture, a morning water ceremony on the seventh day is the probable timing of John 7:37-38. This is based upon a *crowded* altar setting that was *most saturated* with water, as opposed to when the altar area was *less populated* and approaching *dryness*. This understanding should only affect our explanation of the timing of this passage and not our use of the title Last Great Day for the Eighth Day.

Is it appropriate for the Eighth Day to be referred to as the Last Great Day? Yes, according to *our* understanding of God’s plan of salvation for all mankind, as revealed in the holy days. There is no historical evidence to prove that the Jews ever used this as a *title* for the seventh day (e.g. *Hoshana Rabbah*) or the Eighth Day. In John 7:37, the phrase *the last day, that great day of the feast* is a description—not a title that should be capitalized.

Additionally, the Jews did not understand the second resurrection or the opportunity for salvation that will be offered to all those who never had such an opportunity from the time of Adam and Eve. So the Jews never had a “Last Great Day” for *all* mankind. They viewed the Eighth Day as a special day for God and Israel only. In fact, most Jewish writings openly acknowledge that they don’t know why the Eighth Day even exists! This is made even more difficult by the fact that there is no connection to a historical event, nor is there any clear explanation in Scripture as to why it is observed. Here is what Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin wrote in his book *To Be a Jew*:

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The concluding eighth day of the Succot festival is not technically called Succot, but rather Shmini Atzeret (the Eighth Day of Solemn Assembly). It is independent of Succot. Although its purpose is to conclude the festival of Succot, and it is commonly regarded as simply the final day of the Succot festival, Shmini Atzeret reflects none of the special observances related to Succot. The Sages described the reason for the eighth day in terms of the following parable ... God is like a king who invites all his children to a feast to last for just so many days; when the time comes for them to depart, he says to them: My children, I have a request to make of you. Stay yet another day; your departure is difficult for me. Like Succot, Shmini Atzeret is also referred to in the prayer book as *zman simhatanu*, “the season of our rejoicing.”

However, for us, “Last” applies to the Great White Throne Judgment period and the *final* opportunity for salvation. “Great” is applicable to the innumerable number of people—that will be resurrected for this final opportunity. The vast majority of all human beings who ever lived will stand before the Great (*megas*) White Throne (Revelation 20:11-13). Also, a prophetic “day” can cover a period of multiple days, as it does for those in the second resurrection, e.g. “it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the *day of judgment* than for you” (Matthew 11:22-24).

This period will culminate with the “day of judgment” upon unrepentant sinners (2 Peter 2:9; 3:7). This includes the time when “the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). Also, “Death and Hades” are symbolically thrown into the lake of fire, as there will no longer be any human beings who can experience *death* and enter graves (Revelation 20:14-15). For biblical reasons such as these, the Eighth Day remains, for the Church, the “Last Great Day.”