

## The third temple

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Unlike the synoptics, the evangelist John reports a three-year ministry for Jesus, marking his time through the passage of three Passovers. But Jesus also observes three other Jewish feasts in the course of John's Gospel.

The first is an unspecified feast in chapter five. The second is the Feast of Booths, or Sukkot, a traditional time for pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In chapter seven, Jesus' brothers encourage him to head for Judea and show his works publicly in front of the expected huge crowd. Jesus refuses, saying his time is not yet at hand, but then goes anyway. He teaches in the temple and tangles with the chief priests and Pharisees, resulting in an exchange of mounting nonsequiturs that plays like a comedy of errors. On the last day of the seven-day feast, Jesus offers rivers of living water, but the result of his preaching is a division, as the assembled can't decide whether the scriptures confirm or deny Jesus' claims.

The religious folks of Judea remain preoccupied with Jesus' identity; disputes continue through the next three chapters. By the time we get to chapter 10, this week's lesson, so much time has been spent puzzling out the problem that another feast has rolled around again: it's winter and the Feast of Dedication. Here's a case where an accurate translation conceals an interesting detail: the Feast of Dedication is what we now call Hanukkah. With our own cultural associations, it's a jarring reminder that Jesus was a Jew. You can almost imagine him eating latkes with sour cream and applesauce.

So, during Hanukkah, while Jesus strolls through the Colonnade of Solomon, he is confronted point blank by the frustrated locals. "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus points out the difficulty: "I told you, and you do not believe." His works of healing, feeding, teaching and so forth should be sufficient evidence to support what otherwise seems to be a blasphemous claim: ["I and the Father are one."](#)

After all these months of debating in Jerusalem, this is the sentence that finally puts the temple folk over the edge. They pick up stones to throw at him, then try to arrest him—but Jesus escapes, finally moving on from the city to the Jordan, where John the Baptist’s disciples receive him in faith and joy.

Why should this final blowup happen at Hanukkah? It is part of the whole book’s project of reassigning the locus of God’s dwelling place from the temple in Jerusalem to Jesus’ body. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”—so Jesus has said already at the first Passover in chapter two.

Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the new temple, purified after its desecration by the armies of King Antiochus IV Epiphanes following the Maccabean revolt. In Jesus the third and final temple is dedicated to God. And this temple is not merely a house for God but actually is God: “I and the Father are one.” No more feasts in Jerusalem lie ahead for Jesus after this Hanukkah, except the final Passover. The third temple will also be torn down—but in three days it will be raised up, rededicated to the ministry of life and light.

*Additional lectionary columns by Wilson appear in the April 20 issue of the Century—click [here](#) to subscribe.*