

Main Idea: In John 7:1-13 we see the Lamb of God as He begins to talk right into the lion’s den. There are two scenes and both teach us much about the Savior.

- I. Scene one: Jesus faced opposition (1-5).
  - A. The Jews wanted to kill Him (1-2).
    - 1. It wasn’t fear that kept Jesus in Galilee.
    - 2. For Jesus, it was always about timing.
  - B. His brothers wanted Him to be a hero (3-5).
    - 1. They thought they knew Jesus.
    - 2. Their words indicate they did not.
- II. Scene two: Jesus responded to the opposition (6-10).
  - A. Here’s what He said (6-8).
    - 1. He told them He had a different agenda (6).
    - 2. He told them He had a different view of the world (7).
    - 3. He told them to go without Him (8).
  - B. Here’s what He did (9-10).
    - 1. By staying, He said no to their agenda.
    - 2. By going, He said yes to His Father’s agenda.
  - C. Here’s what He faced (11-13).
    - 1. The critics were waiting (11).
    - 2. The crowds were whispering (12-13).
    - 3. The cross was coming.

Take Inventory: Some questions to consider...

- 1. Do you believe in the real Jesus?
- 2. Do you want what the real Jesus wants?

A couple of years ago our eight pound cat attacked an eighty pound black Labrador. The dog belongs to one of our neighbors who happened to be walking her pet in front of our house at the time. Our cat, Chloe, was perched at her outpost, safe and secure on the front porch, when all of a sudden she did the unthinkable. She took off, not back into the house, but right toward the road and the ten-times-her-size canine, Tilley. She went nose to nose with the dog and then headed for home.

I don’t know why she did it. I don’t know why this former stray kitten that our daughter brought home does a lot of things. She’s just an adorable and loveable (my daughter’s choice of adjectives) and crazy (my adjective) cat.

That’s what we say about a creature that does unthinkable things like running headlong right into a dangerous situation. It doesn’t make sense. It’s *crazy*.

So what would you think if I told you another story, a story about a lamb that purposefully and intentionally left a secure location and walked right into a den of lions? Would you call that lamb crazy?

Lambs don’t do that, do they? Lambs stay away from lions. A lamb knows that a lion could shred it to pieces in a matter of seconds and that it would be absolute folly to initiate such contact.

Yet that’s precisely what one lamb did. There is a lamb that lived in a far off country many years ago that walked right into the mouth of a lion’s den. And this lamb wasn’t crazy, either. He knew exactly what he was doing, and what the result would be, and in fact, we are here today because of what that lamb did.

You’ll find this true story in John 7. The lamb, of course, is Jesus the Messiah of whom John the Baptist said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).”

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

You'll meet the lions in a moment. It's in John 7 that Jesus the Lamb started walking down the path that led to where the lions lived. The apostle John devotes the rest of His Gospel account, from John 7 through John 21, to trace the steps of that Lamb, and what happened to Him in the lion's den, and then how that Lamb in the end left that lion's den as a fully alive conqueror!

We're going to look at the first steps of the Lamb's journey towards the lion's den this morning. There are two scenes in John 7:1-13 and both teach us much about this amazing Lamb, who He is, why He came, and why we give Him our total trust and allegiance.

### I. Scene one: Jesus faced opposition (1-5).

We're given the context in verses 1-3, "After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, 'You ought to leave here and go to Judea...'"

So as the story begins, Jesus is facing opposition which came from two very different sources.<sup>1</sup> One was "the Jews," a title that refers specifically to the Jewish leaders, and the other source was His "brothers." How were the Jews treating Jesus? John says...

**A. The Jews wanted to kill Him (1-2).** Here we meet the lions. They're living in their den down south in Judea, they're actually waiting for the right moment to devour the Lamb.

So what did the Lamb do? He stayed up north in Galilee. Smart Lamb, right? He knows He's no match for those lions, so He's hiding from them, petrified at what they might do to Him. Wrong, my friend.

1. *It wasn't fear that kept Jesus in Galilee.* There is no fear in love, as 1 John 4:18 states. This is a very different kind of Lamb. He's not afraid of lions. It's not fear that prompted this Lamb to stay out of Judea. Why then?

2. *For Jesus, it was always about timing.* He's going to walk right into that den. That's why He came to earth. But not yet. For Jesus, timing was everything as He emphasized over and over in John's Gospel. Remember His words to His mother back in John 2:4? "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come."

So what time is it for Jesus? John gives us an important timing indicator at the beginning of verse 1, "*After this*, Jesus went around in Galilee..." After what? After the events of John 6, namely, Jesus' miracle of feeding five thousand up in Galilee, the Jews attempt to make Him king by force, and Jesus' Bread of Life sermon that resulted in offending the Jews and turning away many disciples. It was *after this* that Jesus avoided Judea and traveled around Galilee

There's actually a six month gap between the events described in chapter six and those we're about to see in chapter seven. Chapter six happened at Passover (6:4)—that's in the spring. Chapter seven describes the Feast of Tabernacles—that's in the fall. What happened during that interim period of six months? John simply says, "Jesus went around in Galilee."<sup>2</sup>

And what did Jesus do during these six months in Galilee? John doesn't tell us since his intent isn't to write an exhaustive biography (20:30). However, if you want to know the details of those six months, just visit the synoptic accounts. Look at Matthew 15-18, Mark 7-9, and Luke 9, and you'll discover that during these six months Jesus traveled the length of Galilee, from Tyre and Sidon in the northwest to the Decapolis in the southeast. He healed the sick, cast out demons, and fed a multitude of four thousand people with seven loaves and a few small fish.

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<sup>1</sup>There's a shift in chapter seven. As MacArthur observes, "Chapters 7 and 8 usher in a new, more volatile section of John's gospel." MacArthur, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup>I should mention, in another six months, at the next Passover, Jesus will head to Jerusalem again, and this time He will go to the cross.

But something else happened during those six months. Jesus shifted His focus from the ministering to the masses to building into the lives of the Twelve. That's significant. The Gospel accounts indicate that Jesus spent the majority of His time making disciples of Peter, James, John, and the others. He engaged in intensive teaching sessions with them. He told them for the first time about His coming crucifixion and resurrection (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23). He even let three of them see the unveiling of His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-13).

Don't miss this. The closer Jesus got to the cross, the more time He spent with His disciples. While He reached out initially to the multitudes, the focus of the bulk of His ministry, particularly the latter part of it, was on making disciples. And then He told those men to *go and do likewise*.<sup>3</sup>

My friend, here's the Savior's heart. He's not into entertaining masses. He's into making disciples. Is discipleship important to you? It obviously is to Jesus, so if we're in tune with Jesus it will be for us.

Before Jesus left the earth, He set in motion a mission and a strategy to make disciples. He disciplined twelve men and then told them to do likewise. The church's mission isn't simply to attract crowds on Sunday mornings, but to *make disciples* (Matt. 28:19), and that's a 24-7 venture.

Are you taking advantage of the provisions the Lord has put in your life to help you grow as a disciple, like Bible study, getting connected to a Sunday School class, and carving out time for church prayer times, just to mention a few. And are you investing your time and effort for the purpose of discipling others? The principle of 2 Timothy 2:2 is clear. The things you have received you are to pass on to others so they can pass them on to others.

So Jesus wasn't hiding in fear up in Galilee. He was on task, making disciples, waiting for the right time to make His move.

At this point He faced another kind of opposition, a more subtle one, *His brothers*. Notice again the context, "But when *the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near*, Jesus' brothers said to him, 'You ought to leave here and go to Judea...'"

So it's time for the Feast of Tabernacles. In fact, the rest of chapter seven has to do with that feast. You'll notice three sections in John 7. John tells us what happened *before* the Feast (1-10), then what happened at the *halfway point* of the Feast (11-36), and finally on the *last day* of the Feast (37-52). As Wiersbe points out, we also see three different responses to Jesus in those three sections, first *disbelief*, then *debate*, and finally *division*.<sup>4</sup>

The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Booths, was one of the Jews top three annual holidays. It was a harvest festival (sort of like our Thanksgiving) and a joyous time. Every Jewish male living within ten miles of Jerusalem (and many from beyond) traveled to the capital city for the he Feast which lasted seven days and occurred in September or October. During those seven days the Jews would live in little shelters made of branches (see Lev. 23:42), just like their ancestors did when God delivered them from bondage in Egypt. Josephus said this was the most popular of the three major Jewish feasts.

Keep this in mind. During this feast the Jews are remembering the pivotal time in their history when their forefathers lived in little tabernacles, at a time when God manifested His presence to them in *the Tabernacle*. And here is Jesus. Who is He? He's the fulfillment of this holy-day, as John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and *made His dwelling (i..e tabernacled) among us*."

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<sup>3</sup> I'm indebted to John MacArthur's helpful insights at this point, p. 279.

<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, p. 314.

Now let's take a look at Jesus' brothers in verses 3-5, "Jesus' brothers said to him, 'You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.' For even his own brothers did not believe in him."

The Jews wanted to kill Jesus. His brothers?

**B. His brothers wanted Him to be a hero (3-5).**

By the way, it's news to a lot of people that Jesus had brothers. A few years ago Sherry and I were with a dozen or so people in an evangelistic home Bible study. During the discussion time a man from a strong Roman Catholic background objected when I mentioned that Jesus had siblings. "No way," he insisted. So I took the group to Mark 6:3 and read the passage, "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" I'll never forget the man's response as he muttered out loud, "Well, my eyes see it but I don't believe it!"

Jesus did have brothers, and sisters too, half-siblings born later to Joseph and Mary. Two of these brothers, of course, later became key leaders in the early church. James became the head of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9), and Judas, or Jude, wrote the epistle that bears his name.

But that was later. It wasn't until *after* Jesus' resurrection that they believed in Him (Acts 1:14). As verse 5 indicates, at this point they *did not believe in Him*. Amazing, isn't it? They grew up with Him. They saw His perfect life lived out before them. And once His public ministry started, they saw the miracles He did, heard the sermons He preached, observed the love He demonstrated. But they didn't do what Peter and John and James and Matthew did. They didn't put their trust in Him and become His disciple.

1. *They thought they knew Jesus.* After all, they had firsthand knowledge. But...

2. *Their words indicate they did not.* Listen to what they said...

"*You ought to leave here and go to Judea...*" What's that? They'll telling Jesus what He *ought to do*? Kind of out of line if you're His disciple. But they're not. They're siblings giving their older brother some unsolicited advice.

You should go, Jesus, "*so that your disciples may see the miracles you do.*" But He had already done miracles in Jerusalem, like when He went to the Passover Feast there back in 2:23.

"*No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret.*" You see, that's what these brothers thought Jesus wanted, to become a *public figure*. And that's because that's what *they* wanted, for their big brother to become, not a Savior, but a *public figure*.

And they wanted it because that's what *the world* wants, more of this world. And so they told Him, "*Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.*" That's the sinner's problem, my friend. He thinks wrongly about the world. He needs to heed the warning of 1 John 2:15-16, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world."

Let this sink in. A person will never believe in Jesus with saving faith if he's thinking wrongly about who Jesus is and why Jesus came. Jesus' brothers are a classic example. They think they know who He is, but they don't. And they think they know why He came, but they don't. It's not until they're gripped by the truth concerning His identity and His purpose for coming that they put their faith and allegiance in Him.

Perhaps you can relate. You know Jesus—that's what you've told yourself. But do you really know Him? Look at how you've treated Him. When He does things that don't make sense to you, do you submit to His wisdom, or do you question Him and find yourself telling

Him what He ought to be doing? Friends, the way we treat Jesus is the revealer for whether we really know Him.

So ends scene one. How did Jesus respond to the opposition? That's scene two.

## II. Scene two: Jesus responded to the opposition (6-10).

He responded in two ways, with words and with action.

**A. Here's what He said (6-8).** "Therefore Jesus told them, 'The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come.'"

Interesting response, isn't it? Basically Jesus clarified three issues for His brothers.

1. *He told them He had a different agenda (6).* "It's not the right time," He says, and He says it twice (in verse 6 and again in verse 8). There are two Greek words for time. One refers to chronology (*chronos*), the other to opportunity (*kairos*). The first is quantitative. The other is qualitative. It's the latter that Jesus uses here.

You want Me to go with you right now to the Feast in Jerusalem. For you, any time is right. You could go today, or tomorrow, or the next day. It doesn't matter. But not for me. This isn't the opportune time for Me to go to Jerusalem.

Why not? Why not go right now? Why isn't it the right time for You, Jesus? Here's why...

2. *He told them He had a different view of the world (7).* "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil." There's the problem. There's why I can't go with you to Jerusalem, not today. *The world hates me.*

But why would the world hate Jesus? He tells us. There are two reasons. One, because it's evil, and two, because I tell it so.

I've been working with a young man recently who's hurting big time. I told him about Jesus and he started getting some hope. But then I let him hear what Jesus had to say about his life, specifically about the evil in his life. And then he resisted. We all do. Jesus loves sinners enough to confront their sin. He did it in the Gospels again and again, and He does the same today when His Word is opened. Is it necessary? Yes! We'll never experience His saving power until we admit we're wicked sinners who desperately need it.

I can't go right now, said Jesus. I've taken the scab off of their religious security system, and they hate Me for it. People always do. They love you until you tell them they need to change. That's the way the world is. At that point...

3. *He told them to go without Him (8).* "You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast." The word "yet" doesn't appear in some of the early manuscripts, but the sense is certainly there, as evidenced by what Jesus did next.

**B. Here's what He did (9-10).** Notice verse 9, "Having said this, he stayed in Galilee." So Jesus didn't go as requested with his brothers to the Feast. They went *at the beginning*. That's significant. They set their travel plans to insure they would arrive in Jerusalem at the start of the weeklong festivities. That meant they traveled the roads south along with thousands of other Jewish pilgrims heading to Jerusalem.

But Jesus didn't want to travel with that crowd. He knew what would happen if He arrived in Jerusalem the same day fifty to one hundred thousand others Jews arrived. If He had walked into Jerusalem with that multitude, it would have been like Palm Sunday with all its frenzy. But it's not time for Palm Sunday, not for another six months. Nor for what happened the Friday after Palm Sunday. It's not time yet. There's no way Jesus is going to let them kill Him at the Feast of Tabernacles. That must happen at Passover.

So He stayed. A day passed. Then another day passed. Then a third. And then He did something that's caused Bible scholars to scratch their heads for centuries...

Verse 10 says, "However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret." Some look at Jesus' actions and conclude that He was deceptive. He said He wasn't going, and then He went. That's deception.

Not so. It's impossible for the One who defines what truth (John 14:6) is to be deceptive. Look closely again at what He said and what He did and you'll see.

1. *By staying, He said no to their agenda.* They wanted Him to go *to become a public figure*, and this was the perfect time to do it. Sort of like the politicians in the Labor Day parade. If you want to win the crowd, then you've got to work the crowd.

But that was their agenda, not His. When Jesus said, "I'm not going," what He meant was, "I'm not going the way you want me to go. I'm not going to win the approval of the crowd." And He made that clear by staying. By the time He did go, the roads were empty (sort of like arriving in London last Friday after the royal couple said "I do;" the frenzy was before the big event, not after).

So if by staying Jesus distanced Himself from His brother's worldly agenda, what did He accomplish by going? In short...

2. *By going, He said yes to His Father's agenda.* His Father's agenda was that He die on a cross, not win a crowd. And not just die on any cross on any day, but die on an appointed cross on an appointed day, the very day that thousands of Passover lambs were being slain for the pardon of sinners, and He, the final Passover lamb sent by God to take away the sin of the world.

Turn the clock ahead six months. It's the night before His crucifixion. He's just eaten the Passover meal with the Twelve. Then He prays, "Father, the time has come (John 17:1)." What time is He talking about? The time for the Lamb to be slaughtered.

Friends, Jesus lived His life with the cross in mind. That's what this is all about in John 7. He's not going to Jerusalem to gain some fame from a fickle crowd. His mission is to save sinners, not get their vote. And to save them, He must die in their place and for their sins, and then, three days later, to rise again for their justification.

You say, "Well, if He didn't go with His brothers, why did He go at all?" Good question. We'll find out when we listen to the message He preached in the rest of chapter seven. But we find some clues right here.

For starters, look at verse 10. John says that Jesus went, "not publicly, but *in secret*." How did He go *in secret*, and why? Luke 9:51-56 tells us the how. It says Jesus traveled through Samaria. That's a sure way to avoid the attention of the Jews, by going through Samaria, for the Jews did everything they could to avoid Samaria.

And when did Jesus arrive in Jerusalem? I'm not sure when He arrived, but verse 14 says He let people see Him *halfway through the Feast*, around day four of the festivities. Perfect timing. Jesus slipped into the city once the crowds were already there and in place in the temple. If He had come earlier, the Jewish leaders would have grabbed Him—remember, verse 1 says they're waiting to kill Him. But there's no way these lions are going to put their teeth into Him now that the fascinated crowd is in place.

Quite an intelligent Lamb, wouldn't you agree? Heading right into the lion's den, yet in perfect control. So what happened? John tells us what Jesus did during this visit to Jerusalem in chapters seven, eight, nine, and ten.<sup>5</sup> Let's take a look at what He faced upon arrival.

**C. Here's what He faced (11-13).** First of all, not surprisingly...

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<sup>5</sup> John 10:22 says Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication which was in December. Did He stay in Jerusalem from October through December, or leave and come back? I get the sense that He stayed.

1. *The critics were waiting (11)*. “Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, ‘Where is that man?’” Again, by saying, “the Jews,” John isn’t talking about all Jews (he himself is a Jew). He has in mind the Jewish leaders who have been growling at Jesus since the day He launched His public ministry in Jerusalem almost three years prior.

Remember what He did? It was Passover, and Jesus went to Jerusalem, took a whip, and ran the money changers out of the temple (2:14). Remember the response? John 2:18—“Then the Jews demanded of him, ‘What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?’”

In John 5:1 Jesus went to another Jewish feast, either Passover or Tabernacles. This time He healed a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. The response? John 5:16 says, “So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him.”

And it got worse. When Jesus told the Jews that His Father works on the Sabbath too, they went ballistic, as verse 18 indicates. “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

So they’ve been waiting for Jesus. They don’t even call Him by name. “Where is *that man*?” they say. And it’s not so they can shake His hand.

In addition to the critics, Jesus faced the crowds. Their response? John says...

2. *The crowds were whispering (12-13)*. “Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him.” “Muttering,” says the ESV. “Murmuring,” says the KJV.

And what were they saying? There was divided opinion. “Some said, ‘He is a good man.’ Others replied, ‘No, he deceives the people.’” Now that’s a pretty stark contrast. Some concluded He was a righteous man, while others wrote Him off as a fraud. That’s the way it is with fickle crowds.

“But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews.” The fear of man is a powerful force, isn’t it? Even the people who said Jesus was a *good man* kept hush about it in public lest their feelings about this Miracle Worker put them out of favor with the powers that be. That’s what the fear of man will do to a person who concludes that Jesus is merely a *good man*.

It’s interesting to hear what else they said about Him and to Him at the Feast in John 7...

Verse 15—“How did this man get such learning without having studied?”

Verse 20—“You are demon-possessed.”

Verse 27—“We know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from.”

Verse 31—“When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?”

Verse 35—“Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him?”

Verse 40—“Surely this man is the Prophet.”

Verse 41—“Others said, ‘He is the Christ.’ Still others said, ‘How can the Christ come from Galilee?’”

Verse 46—“No one ever spoke the way this man does.”

Verses 48-49—“Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them.”

Verse 51—“Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?”

Verse 52—“Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”

There’s no question where this is heading, and Jesus knew it.

3. *The cross was coming*. He has walked into the lion’s den and there’s no turning back.

### Take Inventory: Some questions to consider...

1. *Do you believe in the real Jesus?* We've taken *The Radical Challenge* this year as a church, and one of the commitments we've made is to pray for the nations of the world one by one. Last week we spent two days praying for the *Democratic Republic of Congo*. I must confess I was stunned by what I learned about the Congo from the Operation World prayer guide.<sup>6</sup>

There are about 68 million people living in the Congo. Per capita income is \$185 per year (that's one-half of one percent of income in the USA). There is no centralized, functioning government in the Congo, only a host of self-seeking warlords and militias fighting each other. There are 1.7 million displaced people in the country, refugees vulnerable to militia attacks, disease, and sexual predation. There is no functioning infrastructure in the country, which means no decent health care, no decent roads, no access to quality schools. More than five million people have lost their lives in the Congo through war, violence, starvation, and the virtual collapse of the health care system. Every day 400 children die in the Congo, half from malaria.

As horrible as those numbers are, here's the one that jumped off the page when I read it. This is happening in a country where 90% of the people are professing Christians. Hear that number again...90%. When missionaries took the gospel to the Congo in 1900 the number of people who said they believed in Jesus was 1.4% of the population. Now it's 90%.

Do you see the alarming inconsistency here? How can there be widespread rape and murder and sexual exploitation in a country where 61 of the 68 million people call themselves as followers of Jesus? I know there are a lot of socio-economic factors to the problems that plague the Congo, but here's a fundamental one. Not everyone who says they believe in Jesus believes in the *real* Jesus. We need to pray for the Congo, for the Holy Spirit to bring true spiritual awakening to the lives of millions who have tried to mix Jesus with their pagan beliefs and practices.

But friends, it's not just in the Congo where it's happening. It's right here in the Bible belt of our Tri-State. Oh friend, do you believe in the real Jesus, the One we've seen and heard from this morning? He came to save sinners from their sins, and when He does, He really does. In other words, if a person says they believe in Jesus, but they still love their sin, they don't know the real Jesus. Make sure you know the real Jesus.

2. *Do you want what the real Jesus wants?* For Jesus, it was all about the cross. Not popularity, but the cross. Not pleasing His family, but the cross. Not physical comfort, but the cross. Is that true for you?

Is your hope in the cross? Are you living your life in light of the cross? Are you thankful for the cross? Do you sing about the cross at home and talk about it at work and school? Are you investing your time and money and resources to make known the message of the cross?

That's our identity, beloved. We belong to a Lamb who not only walked right into a lion's den, but He did it to rescue us, and then conquered death on the other side.

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<sup>6</sup> Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, pp. 268-277.