

# In The Beginning Was The Word

## John 3: 1-15

### NICODEMUS VISITS JESUS AT NIGHT

#### INTRODUCTION:

John stresses the deity of Jesus Christ. He gives us seven miracles that serve as signs that Jesus is the Messiah. He records Jesus describing himself as the bread of life, the water of life, the light of the world, the door, and also the good shepherd.

- ❖ John also provides teachings of Jesus found nowhere else in the bible. This is also the most theological book of all four gospels.

As we come to Chapter 3 the first thing we encounter is a man reaching out to the Lord.

1. It is a wonderful example of a person in need, knowing that there is something better waiting for him in the way of salvation.
  2. There will come a time in our lives that we all have to make such decisions and those decisions are what make us who we are and what we will eventually become.
  3. But the decision of turning to the Lord is the ultimate decision anyone can make in their lives.
- ✓ The sad thing in trying to witness to a Jew is that they DO NOT believe in the NT, therefore they cannot and will not tolerate its testimony.
  - ✓ We need to pray that the Spirit of the Lord will open up their understanding to the scriptures.
  - ✓ When witnessing to a Jew it is extremely difficult because their understanding of the OT differs greatly from how we know it.
  - ✓ The Jews do not use the NT to reveal the OT and neither do they use the OT to reveal the NT.
  - ✓ Therefore when they look to the scriptures like Isaiah 9:6, the wonderful councilor there and the Prince of Peace there, they say it is not talking about the Messiah, but talking about King Hezekiah.
- ❖ Again when you look to the passages in Isaiah 53, they do not believe for a moment that it is talking about the Messiah Jesus either. They look to that passage as speaking about a new messianic age to come in the future, when the whole world will look back and see that they were right.

So now let's begin to look at Chapter 3 with eyes from the Jewish perspective, where they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

1. So in John Chapter 3 beginning in verse 1 you have a ruler of the Jews coming to Jesus by night. Probably in the very late evening when all were asleep.
2. Why would a Jew come to see Jesus?

3. Why would he come if he was a ruler of the Jews, which meant that he was a great teacher of the Law and all the Jewish traditions and Torah?
4. So why would he come to see Jesus?
5. Something must have disturbed him greatly to realize that something was wrong with the way they viewed the OT and the way he was worshipping God.

❖ So now let's sit back and check out the dialog between the Lord and this great Jewish ruler.

### **John 3:1-16**

***<sup>1</sup>There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:***

1. Who was Nicodemus?
2. He was a man of the Pharisees.

A. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and the Pharisees were mainly members of ancient Israel's middle class. They were the businessmen, merchants and the tradesmen of their day.

1. That said, the average Pharisee had no formal education in the interpretation of the law and accordingly resorted to the professional scholar, the scribe, thus we often read of these two together, the scribes and Pharisees.
2. The scribes had a great deal to do with Jewish education.
3. The scribes were scholars and teachers who had the responsibility of copying and interpreting the Law.
4. It is quite possible Nicodemus was a scribe, seeing that Jesus described him as a master (teacher) of Israel.
5. The Pharisees, with the special help of those who were scribes, were the chief scholars of the first century and were in charge of the houses of study and Jewish education in general.

B. From the time of Jesus, they were the leaders of education and study.

Some of them such as Hillel achieved great status as teachers, as did also Gamaliel who had eighty students, one of whom was the Apostle Paul (Acts 22:3).

### **Acts 22:3**

*<sup>3</sup> I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.*

1. Now Nicodemus benefited from such an education.  
As we look at the key stages of Jewish education we find that;  
The study of Scripture began at the age of five when children were taught first from the Book of Leviticus how to approach God by sacrifice and then from the

Book of Psalms concerning the nature of God, before they went on to other things.

2. At the age of ten one was fit for the study of the words of the Oral Law. By thirteen one was considered old enough and informed enough to be responsible to fulfill the commandments. At the age of fifteen one was ready to study under the great teachers. By the age of twenty, a student was deemed ready to pursue a profession, and could train for the priesthood.
3. At age forty-one a man reached a place where he had understanding. And at age of fifty the individual was worthy to counsel others.
4. In all likelihood Nicodemus was older than fifty when he approached Jesus, which is really remarkable, given that Jesus was in his thirties...
5. No wonder Nicodemus came by night, he would have been embarrassed too as an elder of Israel to be taught by one so young in the full gaze of the public.

### **C. Notice John describes Nicodemus as “a ruler of Israel”.**

1. The indication here is that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of seventy who oversaw all aspects of Israel's religious life.
2. **The Sanhedrin was the supreme theocratic court of the Jews** consisting of three professional groups composing the council: These were.
  - a) High priests (the acting high priest and former high priests) and members of the chief-priestly families;
  - b) Elders (tribal and family heads of the people and the priesthood);
  - c) And scribes (legal professionals).
3. The council was the highest court of appeal, and the Sanhedrin's authority was broad and far-reaching, involving legislation, administration, and justice. They met daily, except on Sabbath and feast days, in a session room adjoining the temple. In extraordinary cases, as with the arrest of Jesus they met at the house of the high priest.
  - ❖ One of the responsibilities of the Sanhedrin was the identification, and confirmation of the Messiah.
  - ❖ That explains in part why the Pharisees are always seen questioning Jesus.
1. To begin with many of their questions were genuine; although later they become much more devious.
2. It also explains why Nicodemus came to Jesus saying, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”
3. It was his duty as a member of the Sanhedrin to identify the Messiah, and clearly Nicodemus saw Jesus as a real possibility.
4. He recognized that there was something very different about this claim to the Messianic role.

**<sup>2</sup> The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.**

1. Why did he come at night? Why not during the day?
2. Why did he call him Rabi?
3. Did he come to get more information or was he seeking the truth?
4. People ask questions for various reasons.

### **Acts 2:22**

**<sup>22</sup> Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:**

A. Nicodemus suspected that Jesus was the Messiah, but he still had some questions.

1. It is interesting that when he approaches the Lord, that Jesus goes right to the heart of his problem and speaks to him about the new birth.
2. It is also interesting that Nicodemus was embarrassingly ignorant of the new birth.
3. He had no idea of what Jesus was saying to him, even though he was a scholar of the scriptures.

**<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**

1. Jesus was teaching about a new creation –that of being born again?
2. The relevance of the new birth – is a necessity for man to see the kingdom of God, and to enter into it.
3. Peter describes again for all to see what the new birth means.

**1 Peter 1:23** <sup>23</sup> *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*

4. The corruptible seed is the flesh derived from Adam, but the incorruptible seed is the word of God which is able to save and result in a new birth.

**<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?**

Look at his questions Nicodemus asked the Lord:

- (i) "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (vs 4)
- (ii) "How can these things be?" (vs 9)

1. It was to this second response that Jesus asks, “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?”
2. He should have known these things. He was a teacher of Israel, a scribe, a Pharisee, and a judge in matters of religion, yet he clearly did not understand salvation.
3. He didn’t understand the REALITY of salvation.

>That is why Jesus said to him, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God... Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” (verses 3, 5 & 7).

>Nicodemus knew all about regulations, laws and by-laws, but nothing about regeneration; which is the need for the inner man with his dead spirit to be reconciled to God and brought alive.

>He needed to see that religion, however noble and well meaning, just wasn’t going to do it. Only the reality of the new birth can do that.

>He didn’t understand the MYSTERY of salvation – (verse 8)

So the point that Jesus was making was that salvation comes by a moving of the Spirit.

Regeneration is a work of God, a sovereign act and a powerful moving of God in the heart of a man that brings about new life and a profound change in him.

1. The Jewish teachings and traditions had not taught this new birth?
2. This was new to Nicodemus.
3. Nicodemus’s concept of birth was to return to his mother’s womb. He literally did not understand the answer Jesus gave him, - like so many people don’t understanding this same question today of the new birth?
4. The fact that Nicodemus referred to being born again when he is old, points to the age of Nicodemus. He was obviously concerned what was going to happen to him at his death. (Everybody should be concerned about this even today).
5. This is where the term being born again as a Christian comes from.

***<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.***

1. The explanation Jesus gave to Nicodemus was twofold, and had two exceptions.
  - a) You had to be born of water?
  - b) You had to be born of the Spirit?
  - c) The requirement to enter into the kingdom of God, then and even today is still the same requirement.

That is:

**<sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**

1. I guess the response from Nicodemus was still that of a lack of understanding, based on the explanation that Jesus continued to give him.
2. The two requirements were spelled out again.
  - a) The flesh is one aspect of birth. That is when a person is born into this world.
  - b) Being born of the Spirit was another aspect of birth; this was the supernatural aspect of birth being given by the Lord himself. This was not available to normal flesh, but is of the grace and mercy of God being given to a person who is worthy of His righteousness.
  - c) These are two separate things. Both are God given, but the second is only given to the righteous.

**<sup>7</sup> Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.**

1. The fact that Nicodemus had come at night might have been for several reasons.
2. It may be that he did not want anyone else to see him alone with the Lord, because after all he was a Pharisee. They were the critics of the Lord.
3. It may be also that as a ruler of the Jews if he was seen alone with the Lord, he may have been under suspicion by the other Jews for being there.
4. The other reason and possibly the main reason was because he was under conviction, and really wanted to know who this Savior was that everyone was talking about.
5. He may have had his serious doubts about Judaism being able to save a person and so he came to the real Savior for salvation.
6. The satisfying and comfort the Lord gave to Nicodemus is the same satisfying and comfort that the Lord still gives us today, and that is "Ye must be born again"

**<sup>8</sup> The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.**

1. The answer the Lord gave to Nicodemus, is this?
2. You cannot tell or see where the wind comes from, yet we know it is real and we know that is tangible. We cannot see it yet it is there.
3. Salvation is the same. We cannot see the work of the Spirit but it is there.
4. God is as real as the wind that blows on our faces. Yet we cannot see it, but can only see the result of what it does and the effect it has on us.

**<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?**

1. Nicodemus was shocked at the simplicity of the new birth.
2. The fact that just belief (faith) alone, and grace alone could usher in a new birth.
3. The birth as a result of the Spirit of God.
4. Even in our modern cultures there are still people who are trying to earn a way into heaven, but their way is not by grace alone and faith alone. This was the case of Nicodemus he thought and was taught that it required great dedication

and keeping all the laws. He did not realize that Gods new law was written upon your heart.

5. The Jews remember; they had to keep several hundred laws, in order to feel righteous, but even that was not enough.
6. Now you can begin to understanding the answer he gave as to “How can these things be”, (meaning it is so simple).

***<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?***

1. As a master of Israel, he would have also been a great teacher of the Law, and would have known all the rituals and feasts that had to be kept by their Jewish laws.
2. They taught that they had to keep the law to be approved of God.
3. Yet also in these very words of the Jesus, is the fact that had they known what the OT really said, they too would have found salvation.
4. And that is what the Lord referred to as ***“Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?”***
5. Those things were the referral to the OT, because those were only the scriptures they used and referred to. So Jesus turned the very thing against him as a witness of Him.

***<sup>11</sup> Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.***

He didn't understand the PERSONALITY of salvation – verses 11-13.

1. Nicodemus was standing face to face with the one who could save him.
2. The personality of Salvation was Jesus standing before him.

***<sup>12</sup> If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?***

***<sup>13</sup> And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.***

- Only Jesus could claim to be on earth and in heaven at the same time.

Look at these verses, look at what they teach:

1. The eternality of Christ... “He that came down from heaven”... He who is from everlasting; who had prior existence; who was in the bosom of the Father and has come down.
2. He left His Father's glory to dwell among men.
3. It was a lot for Nicodemus to get his head around, and it is hardly surprising that from this point on he utters not one word; no longer the master of Israel, he is a disciple sitting at the real master's feet.

4. Jesus gives him the answer from the OT that Nicodemus had missed. And that is verse 14.

***<sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: <sup>15</sup> That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.***

1. Just as those who looked upon the brass serpent in the wilderness and were saved, so to the Lord said to Nicodemus.
2. ***“even so must the Son of man be lifted up: <sup>15</sup> That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.***

***<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.***

- He didn't understand the INCLUSIVNESS of salvation – verses 14-15.
1. I am sure for the moment at least the teaching on Moses' rod was lost on Nicodemus... it would not be until he sees the cross that it sinks in.

### **Numbers 21:8-9**

***<sup>8</sup> And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.***

***<sup>9</sup> And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.***

2. I am equally sure he never saw the encompassment involved in the word **“whosoever.”**
3. For the Pharisees salvation was of the Jews and largely FOR the Jews, but Jesus had been given to the world – verse 16.
4. Whoever believes on him Jew or Gentile will not perish but have everlasting life.

PRAYER.....CLOSE