



You Must Be Born Again

John 3:1-21

3. Jesus Predicts His Life-Giving Death

Continuing conversation with Nicodemus

▼ This is a researching rabbi

John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

▼ There is a radical rebirth

John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

John 3:4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"

▼ This is a reengineered and reinvigorated reality

John 3:8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

▼ This is a revolutionary revelation

John 3:9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

Continuing clarification from Jesus

▼ Jesus issues a pointed rebuke

John 3:10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

- ▶ You guys are clergymen
- ▶ You guys are confident and conceited
- ▶ You guys are clueless

▼ Jesus imparts another powerful revelation

John 3:13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.

- ▶ I have a heavenly identity
- ▶ I have heavenly information

▼ Jesus inserts a prophetic riddle

John 3:14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

Numbers 21:4 They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; 5 they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" 6 Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." 9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

John 12:32 But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

- ▶ I will be lifted up in death
- ▶ I will be looked at in dismay
- ▶ I will bring life to the doomed and dying

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Critical Conclusions

- 1) Jesus is the Son of God who came from heaven — and he is the only clear revelation of God — study him intentionally and intensely.
- 2) Jesus is the only effective sacrifice for sin — crucified shockingly and shamefully on a cross — look long and hard at that and believe.
- 3) Jesus died — but he rose again as our living Lord — follow him in faith and devotion — all the way home to victory and eternal life.

John 3:1-21

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

³ In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

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⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

⁹ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Nicodemus' Credentials

1. Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

- ▶ The Pharisees were one of two primary religious/political parties (along with the Sadducees) mentioned in the New Testament who exerted sway during Jesus' day.
- ▶ The Pharisees believed in the scriptural authority of the Old Testament including the books of Moses, the books of history, the psalms, proverbs and prophets.
- ▶ The Pharisees believed in the future resurrection of the dead, both righteous and unrighteous, and believed in the existence and ministry of angels and spirits.
- ▶ Differentiated from Pharisees, Sadducees believed only the Law of Moses was scripturally authoritative, and they did not believe in the resurrection, angels or spirits.
- ▶ During the New Testament period, the Pharisees were the predominant party, though the Sadducees controlled the high priesthood.
- ▶ The Gospels and Acts paint the Pharisees as super-religious, exceedingly legalistic, unsympathetic toward the common man, often hypocritical with impure motives.
- ▶ Theologically, however, Jesus would have believed with and been aligned with the Pharisees.
- ▶ Many believers in the early church were Pharisees (Acts 15:5), and the Apostle Paul claimed affiliation with the Pharisees (Acts 23:6; Acts 26:5; Philippians 3:5).

2. Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council.

- ▶ The Jewish ruling council, or the Sanhedrin, consisted of the High Priest and 70 members; this body served as the religious supreme court for the Jewish nation.
- ▶ The Sanhedrin met and ruled at the permission of the Roman Empire; it was highly political and included members from both the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

3. Nicodemus was a rabbi.

- ▶ Jesus himself identified Nicodemus as a rabbi, or teacher, here in John 3:10: "You are Israel's teacher..."

Nicodemus' Christianity?

1. Nicodemus would later defend Jesus when the rulers discussed having Jesus arrested.

John 7:32 The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. — ⁴⁵ Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?" ⁴⁶ "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared. ⁴⁷ "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. ⁴⁸ "Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?" ⁴⁹ No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them." ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, ⁵¹ "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" ⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee." ⁵³ Then each went to his own home.

2. Nicodemus would participate in the burial of Jesus after the crucifixion.

John 19:38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

3. Nicodemus would continue to be mentioned in Christian tradition.

Beyond the Gospel of John, there is no biblical reference to Nicodemus. An apocryphal and pseudepigraphical work was written under his name in the 4th century, called *The Gospel of Nicodemus*. Nicodemus is venerated as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church and in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Jewish historian Josephus had a brother named Nicodemus ben Gorion, who was a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, but a positive identification is impossible.