



Jesus and Nicodemus

Story Elements

- **Text:** John 2:23-3:15
- **Setting:** circa AD 27 in Jerusalem
- **Characters:** God, Jesus, and Nicodemus
- **Plot:** A Pharisee named Nicodemus visits Jesus privately and is instructed on the Kingdom of God and the new birth.
- **Key word(s):** “ye must be born _____” – These words serve not only as a summary of the Gospel call, but they also succinctly describe the need of the every unbeliever and the means of salvation.
- **Climax:** *John 3:10* Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? This verse highlights the spiritual ignorance of the Israel’s

spiritual leadership (like Nicodemus) and leads us to the concluding words of Jesus that explain what it means to be born again.

Nicodemus’ Curiosity

1. (v 1) Jesus’ first Passover during his public ministry left quite an impression on the people of Jerusalem. Between the cleansing of the temple and the performance of miracles, many were noticing the Savior’s uniqueness.

John 2:23 Now when he was in Jerusalem, at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the _____ which he did.

2. One of those people was Nicodemus, a member of the _____ – the ruling body of the Jews. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, and many understand that to mean he was afraid that his interest in Christ would’ve been discovered, and his professional reputation jeopardized. Edersheim explains Nicodemus’ secrecy:

“We can scarcely realise the difficulties which he had to overcome. It must have been a mighty power of conviction, to break down prejudice so far as to lead this old Sanhedrist to acknowledge a Galilean, untrained in the Schools, as a Teacher come from God, and to repair to Him for direction on, perhaps, the most delicate and important point in Jewish theology. But, even so, we cannot wonder that he should have wished to shroud his first visit in the utmost possible secrecy. It was a most compromising step for a Sanhedrist to take.”¹

3. (v 3) Nicodemus, like most pious Jews of the day, would’ve desired the coming of the Kingdom of God.² His interest in the doctrine would’ve been piqued by John the Baptist’s preaching (Matt. 3:1-2), and then brought to fevered pitch by the miracle-working, temple-cleansing rabbi from Galilee. It is no surprise, then, when Jesus begins the conversation with, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot _____ the kingdom of God.*

Nicodemus’ Confusion

4. (vv 4-6) The Savior’s statement about the need for a rebirth would’ve made Nicodemus not only confused but shocked. After all, it was the common assumption that to be born a Jew was a guarantee for the

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971) 381.

² Nicodemus would’ve thought of the Kingdom of God as a restoration of Israel’s national supremacy, and the physical reign of Jehovah over all the earth with Jerusalem as the theocracy’s capital.

Kingdom of God – but Jesus said a man must be *born again*! Nicodemus’ bewilderment is evident in his response: *How can a man be born when he is old?*

(a) This spiritual birth is a birth of water and the Spirit:

- i. Water, here, does not refer to _____. John Gill explains: “by ‘water’ is meant, in a figurative and metaphorical sense, the grace of God, as it is elsewhere; see Ezekiel 36:25. Which is the moving cause of this new birth, and according to which God begets men again to, a lively hope, and that by which it is effected; for it is by the grace of God, and not by the power of man's free will, that any are regenerated, or made new creatures.”³
- ii. It is the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit that breathes new life into those who are spiritually _____. (cf. Eze. 37:1-14) “*Breath* and *spirit* (one word both in *Hebrew* and *Greek*) are constantly brought together in Scripture as analogous (Job 27:3; 33:4; Ez 37:9–14).”⁴

(b) What Nicodemus failed to understand (and so many others in his day) was that the Kingdom of God is not physical, but spiritual; therefore, a physical birth cannot gain entrance, but a spiritual birth is needed.

(c) (v 8) The Savior explained that the spiritual birth is like the blowing of the wind: it cannot be predicted in its coming or its going, but is heard in its _____; so also, the spiritual birth, wrought by the moving of the Holy Spirit, is beyond our comprehension, but its effect is evidenced in the one who is reborn.

5. (v 9) Having been instructed on **what** is needed for entrance into the kingdom, Nicodemus’ next question concerns the **how**. “From this moment Nicodemus *says nothing more*, but has sunk unto a disciple who has found his true teacher.”⁵

(a) (vv 10-13) Jesus rebuked Nicodemus for being a teacher in Israel but failing to comprehend the necessity of the new birth – something taught in the Old Testament.

(b) Jesus also emphasized what Nicodemus already confessed: that he was *a teacher come from God*. Jesus was indeed such a teacher, more so than even _____, who ascended up to God in the mount, but Jesus descended from heaven itself to teach men the gospel.

(c) (vv 14-15) The Savior then used an Old Testament illustration to teach Nicodemus the *how* of the new birth. As the Israelites who suffered the deadly bite of fiery serpents were to look upon the brazen serpent for life from the _____, so the Son of Man will be lifted up (in his death on the cross) *That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life*.

APPLICATION➔ What is the evidence of the Spirit working in the new birth? How do we “hear the sound thereof”? *That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life*. When a person believes on Jesus, receiving the gospel, we know that the Holy Spirit has brought a person from death unto life. **1 Corinthians 12:3 ...no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the _____.**

Answer Key: Key word(s): “again” • John 2:23, miracles • 2. Sanhedrin • 3. see • 4. a)i. baptism; ii. dead; c) effect • 5. b) Moses; c) dead; ➔ Holy Ghost

³ John Gill, *John Gill's Exposition of the Bible*, <https://johngill.thekingsbible.com/CommentaryVerse/43/3/5>

⁴ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 131.

⁵ Ibid., quoting Stier.