

# JESUS AND NICODEMUS

John 3:1-21

## STRUCTURE

**Key-person:** Jesus

**Key-location:** Jerusalem

### Key-repetitions:

- Truth: Jesus said, “I tell you the truth” (Jn 3:3, 5, 11); the person who lives by truth comes into the light (Jn 3:21).
- Believe/faith: Nicodemus didn’t believe when Jesus spoke of earthly things; how would he believe if Jesus spoke of heavenly things (Jn 3:12); all who believe in the Son of Man have eternal life (Jn 3:15); all who believe in God’s Son will not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16); whoever believes is acquitted, but whoever doesn’t believe is condemned because he hasn’t believed in God’s Son (Jn 3:18).
- Teacher: Nicodemus called Jesus “Teacher” (Rabbi = Teacher) and said Jesus was a teacher sent from God (Jn 3:2); Jesus called Nicodemus a teacher of Israel (Jn 3:10).
- Born: Jesus said born again (Jn 3:3, 7); Nicodemus asked how an old man could be born, he can’t be born from his mother a second time (Jn 3:4); Jesus said no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Humans give birth to humans, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit (Jn 3:5-6). Jesus compared the wind to being born of the Spirit (Jn 3:8).
- Spirit: born of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5); Spirit gives birth to spirit (Jn 3:6); Jesus compared the wind to being born of the Spirit (Jn 3:8).
- Son: Jesus used “Son of Man” to refer to himself (Jn 3:13, 14); God’s Son (Jn 3:16, 17, 18).
- Light: Light came into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light (Jn 3:19); wrong doers hate the light, and won’t come into the light (Jn 3:20); whoever lives by the truth welcomes the light and the light shows that his actions were done through God (Jn 3:21).

### Key-attitudes:

- Jesus’ frankness with Nicodemus.
- Nicodemus’ cautious curiosity when he came to see Jesus at night.
- Nicodemus’ confusion when Jesus spoke of being born again.

### Initial-situation:

Jesus was unknown outside of his hometown of Nazareth when he began his first year of ministry. John the Baptist was famous, and crowds were flocking to hear him and to be baptized by him.

Jesus began his public ministry at the Jordan River when he was baptized. Then Jesus went to the desert’s dry rocky wasteland, where he resisted temptations from Satan.

Jesus returned to where John the Baptist was preaching and baptizing. John the Baptist told his disciples that Jesus was the "Lamb of God." Two followed Jesus, and they brought two more men to him. The four men went with Jesus to Cana, where Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding feast by transforming water to wine. Jesus then went to Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover and cleansed the temple courtyard of people who were buying and selling.

**Initial-problem:**

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Jewish ruling council, came to see Jesus one night.

**Final-situation:**

Jesus told Nicodemus, "God didn't send his Son into the world to condemn the world as guilty, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is acquitted, but whoever doesn't believe is already condemned as guilty, because he hasn't believed in God's one and only Son."

## BIBLE STORY

Nicodemus was a Pharisee (*a religious leader who was a member of the legalistic self-righteous Jewish group noted for strict obedience to Jewish tradition*). Nicodemus was also a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. One night Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we know you're a teacher sent from God. No one can perform the miracles you perform unless God is with him."

Jesus replied to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth. No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again from above."

Nicodemus asked, "How can an old person be born? He can't enter a second time into his mother to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth. No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born through water and the Spirit. Humans give birth to humans, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. Don't be surprised when I tell you, 'You must be born again from above.' The Spirit is like the wind that blows wherever it pleases. You hear the wind, but you don't know where it comes from nor where it's going" (Jn 3:1-8).

Nicodemus asked, "What do you mean? How can this be?"

Jesus told Nicodemus, "You're a well-known teacher of Israel, but you don't understand these basics! I tell you the truth. I know what I'm talking about. I testify to what I've seen, but still you reject my evidence. I've spoken to you of earthly things, and you don't believe. How will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone up to heaven except the Son of Man who came down from heaven (Jn 3:9-13).

"In the same way that Moses in the desert lifted up the metal snake on a pole (*Num 21:4-9*), it's necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up. Then everyone who believes in him may have eternal life (Jn 3:14-15).

"God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. God didn't send his Son into the world to condemn the world as guilty, but to save the world through his Son. Whoever believes

in him is acquitted, but whoever doesn't believe is already condemned as guilty, because that person hasn't believed in God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light because their actions were evil. People who do evil hate the light, and won't come into the light for fear that their actions will be exposed. But people who live by the truth welcome the light. Then the light shows that God is really the one doing what they do" (Jn 3:16-21).

### GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

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|---|--|
| 1. What catches your attention in the story?                  | 5. How did the characters face their problems?                                       |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems?  |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story?                  | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face?                     | 8. What does the story tell about God?   |

### SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who was Nicodemus?
2. What is significant about Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night?
3. What did Jesus mean when he told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again?
4. What point was Jesus making by comparing spiritual birth to the wind?
5. What did Jesus have to say to Nicodemus about belief?
6. How does the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus show that God provides only one way to be saved?
7. How can Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus help us with our relationship with Jesus?

### LIFE-LESSONS

1. **To enter the Kingdom of God, a person has to have a totally new beginning that comes from God.** The theme of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus was: How to enter the Kingdom of God (Jn 3:3, 5). Jesus said that Nicodemus needed to be born again. Jesus used two symbols to explain the meaning of the new birth:
  - Water. Water refers to the physical birth. A mother's water breaking is part of the process of a baby's birth.
  - Wind. Wind symbolizes the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:8). Jesus baptized with the Spirit (Jn 1:33; Mk 1:8). The Spirit convicts the world of sin, justice, and judgment (Jn 16:8-11).
2. **Some people go through a prolonged process before they become a follower of Jesus.** It took Nicodemus close to three years from the time he visited Jesus at night until he became a committed follower of Jesus. Afraid of being discovered, Nicodemus first came to see Jesus at night (Jn 3). About two years later, Nicodemus was attending the Jewish ruling council. The council members spoke

about the need to eliminate Jesus, and Nicodemus timidly raised the question of justice (Jn 7:49-51). Three years after Nicodemus visited Jesus at night, he boldly joined Joseph of Arimathea in burying Jesus' body (Jn 19:38-40).

3. **People don't enter the Kingdom of God by being religious or having knowledge about God, but by being spiritually reborn with a life-changing experience that comes from believing in Jesus.** Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He was a member of the legalistic, self-righteous Jewish group noted for strict obedience to Jewish tradition. Pharisees were religious leaders. Nicodemus was a teacher of the Old Testament. Jesus accused Nicodemus of being a teacher of Israel who did not understand spiritual things (Jn 3:10-11). Nicodemus was a member of the Jewish ruling council called the Sanhedrin. Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again (Jn 3:3, 5). A person must experience the new beginning that results when he believes that Jesus alone saves. Jesus declared that he was the only true source of revelation about God, because he was the only one who descended from heaven (Jn 3:13). Jesus compared himself to the metal snake Moses lifted up (Jn 3:14-15). When the Israelites were complaining during their desert wandering, God sent a plague of snakes. Those doomed to die from snakebites could be healed only by looking at the elevated metal snake and by believing that God would heal them (Numbers 21:8-9). Similarly, salvation happens only to the people who look up to Jesus, believing that he will save them (Jn 3:14-15). Only belief in Jesus saves a person from eternal condemnation (Jn 3:18).
4. **The new birth and the actions of the Spirit are difficult to explain.** In the same way, it is hard to explain the wind, because its actions can be seen without being explained (Jn 3:6-8).
5. **Jesus Christ needed to be lifted up on the cross in order for sinful people to be saved.** Jesus reminded Nicodemus of what happened to their Jewish ancestors in the desert (Jn 3:14-15). The Jewish ancestors sinned against God, then God sent snakes that bit them, and they began to die. They repented, and God told Moses to make a metal snake and put it on a pole. Those who were bitten and looked at the metal snake were cured (Nm 21:8-9). Jesus' death on the cross has the same effect as the metal snake Moses put on a pole. The metal snake became an illustration of Jesus (Jn 3:14-15):
  - The serpent illustrates the deadly consequences of sin.
  - The pole illustrates Christ's cross where he was offered as a substitute to save all who look to him with faith.
  - To look at the metal snake and live, illustrates simple faith. The sinful person is saved by the faith that looks to the Lord Jesus, who took the responsibility for our sin when he hung on the cross.
6. **The opposite of belief in Jesus is loving sin.** Jesus accused people of refusing to believe in him as God's Son because they hate the light and love darkness.

People prefer darkness to light because their actions are evil and they won't come into the light for fear that their evil actions will be exposed (Jn 3:18-21).

### LEARNING ACTIVITY

**Chant:**

Words in **bold and underlined** are stressed. Stress words by stretching them out instead of increasing volume.

<b>ALL</b>	
“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” (John 3:16 NIV).	
<b>GROUP 1</b>	<b>GROUP 2</b>
For <b><u>God</u></b> so loved the world	God <b><u>so loved</u></b> all the people of the world
That he <b><u>gave</u></b> his one and only Son	His <b><u>one</u></b> and <b><u>only</u></b> Son
That whoever <b><u>believes</u></b> in him	Everyone who believes <b><u>in him</u></b>
<b><u>Shall not</u></b> perish	Not <b><u>perish</u></b>
but <b><u>have eternal</u></b> life.	Have eternal <b><u>life</u></b> .
<b>ALL</b>	
“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” (John 3:16 NIV).	