

# *The Gospel of John*

## Believe and Live!

### Lesson 4

John 3:1–36

### The New Birth

The encounter between Jesus and the Jewish religious leader, Nicodemus, is one of the most familiar and important dialogues in the entire New Testament. For a man known for coming to Jesus in the dark of night, Nicodemus became influential in bringing countless others into the light. This seeker of truth first heard from the lips of the One who is Truth: *“You must be born again!”*

*At a glance* ~ **Read John 3:1–21.**

Many people come to the Word of God asking as Nicodemus did, *“How are these things possible?”* Yet not everyone comes seeking or expecting an honest answer. After your initial reading of the text, what question comes to *your* mind? Record it below and ask God to help you receive the truth into your heart.

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The closing verses of John 2 set the scene for what takes place next in chapter 3: *“Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. But Jesus didn’t trust them, because he knew human nature. No one needed to tell him what mankind is really like”* (vv. 23–25 NLT). Along comes a Pharisee who lived by the strictest rules of the Jewish faith, who wanted to know about this Teacher sent by God but who wound up learning about his own heart need.

1. What do you determine from the text about Nicodemus from verses 1–2?
  - a. What did Nicodemus believe about Jesus? Why?
  - b. Why do you think Nicodemus came to Jesus at night?

When Nicodemus approached Jesus, he referred to himself as part of a group: **“We know that You are a teacher come from God.”** But Jesus quickly turned the conversation around to make it personal: *“Most assuredly, I say to **you** . . .”*

2. What personal truth does Jesus reveal to him? vv. 3–5

Nicodemus was referring to a physical rebirth: “*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?*” Jesus was referring to a spiritual rebirth—the creation of a new life that is based upon regeneration by the Holy Spirit. In other words, being born again—or *born from above*.

- a. How does this new birth take place? v. 5 (See Titus 3:5 for insight.)

Jesus is not speaking here of water baptism, but the washing of regeneration that takes place through the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

The Jews in Jesus’ day believed they would have a share in God’s future kingdom but Jesus’ conditional requirement in verses 3 and 5 would have been astonishing to Nicodemus, and very hard for him to understand. In order for him to *see* or *enter* into the kingdom of God, he would have to experience a spiritual rebirth. We can only imagine the look of surprise on Nicodemus’ face but Jesus told him not to be surprised!

3. What illustration does Jesus use to depict the effect of the Spirit? v. 8

The words “wind” and “Spirit” both translate the same: in the Greek, *pneuma*; in the Hebrew, *ruah*. Both are invisible to the human eye but their effects are definitely visible. The origins of both are mysterious but none the less very real.

Nicodemus’ continual amazement prompts the question in verse 9: “*How can these things be?*” Jesus points to the fact that being a “teacher of Israel”—a rabbi—meant having an understanding of these things. Nicodemus was a recognized teacher of Old Testament scriptures but did not have an understanding of how they related to the Messiah’s coming. If Israel’s teacher wavered over such a fundamental truth, how would he be able to believe regarding the more difficult “heavenly things”?

### *In focus* ~ (Key words) **Rabbi**

John uses the title three times in this chapter to refer to someone of high honor and respect among the Jews. Look up the word using the resources you have on hand (Bible translations, dictionary, concordance). Write down what you observe about its use in each instance where John mentions it.

Jesus: 3:2 \_\_\_\_\_

Nicodemus: 3:10 \_\_\_\_\_

John the Baptist: 3:26 \_\_\_\_\_

*Take a closer look* ~ John 3:16

(Memorize and meditate on the memory verse each time you open your lesson.)

***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”***

What does this verse reveal to you about Jesus? Put your name in place of the words “the world.” How does this insight give you cause to rejoice today?

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The emphasis in verses 10–21 is on believing, as Jesus goes on to elaborate about His heavenly authority and His earthly mission.

4. What does Jesus say about Himself in the following:
  - a. v. 13
  
  - b. v. 14
  
  - c. v. 15
  
5. Verse 16 captures the entire gospel message and the price God had to pay for our salvation. What is it?
  
  
6. Why did God send His Son into the world? vv. 17–18
  - a. What is the one and only way to escape condemnation?
  
7. Why do sinners refuse to come to the light that leads to life? vv. 19–21
  - a. What is the result for those who do come to the light and live in the light?

## John the Baptist Exalts Christ

### *Outlook* ~ Read John 3:22–36.

The scene now moves from the vicinity of Jerusalem to the Judean countryside where Jesus remained for a time with His disciples who were baptizing. This placed them in the area near John who was also baptizing at Aenon, meaning “springs,” near Salim on the west side of the Jordan River. Two locations, two teams of disciples, two well-known leaders being used by God to further His plan, but more people were coming to Jesus now than to John. There arose a dispute between the two camps as John’s followers began to wonder why.

1. What was the issue that brought the competition between Jesus’ disciples and John’s to the forefront? vv. 25–26

The Jews of this day were very interested in ceremonial purification. Under the Old Testament law, it was necessary for them to be ceremonially clean for God to use them. The Pharisees over time added so many “extras” to the law, making it an impossible burden. For many of these religious leaders, John’s simple message of repentance and baptism was an offensive and objectionable form of purification. This became the springboard for a debate over the authority of John’s baptism and how it related to the baptisms of Jesus. (Note: v. 23 speaks of Jesus baptizing, but in John 4:2 we learn that His disciples performed the baptizing while Jesus supervised the events. He did not personally baptize.)

Neither Jesus nor John encouraged any kind of competitiveness, which we see in the verses to follow. In fact, John was quite clear on his mission and what God purposed for him to do.

2. How does John set the record straight in the verses below?
  - a. v. 27
  - b. v. 28

John’s humility makes it very clear that he was well aware of God’s sovereignty and Christ’s preeminence as well as his own place as the messenger forerunner to the Messiah.

3. What illustration does John use to introduce the church? v. 29
  - a. What does John have to say about himself in this verse?

The *bride*, which included the disciples who were following John, belonged to the *bridegroom*, Christ. John’s joy was complete and he was rejoicing to hear the bridegroom’s voice. There was no jealousy in John over Jesus’ arrival and popularity.

4. In verse 30, John makes one of the most penetrating and profound statements in the Bible; what is it?

- a. John's willingness to decrease reveals the depth of his humility. How does it also reflect his Christ-likeness?
  
- b. Personal: You may at times be tempted to focus more on yourself and what you are doing for Christ rather than on Him! What can you learn from the simplicity and humility of John's example that will help you to keep the main thing the main thing?

John the Baptist was pointing people to the Messiah, expecting the nation of Israel to repent. That didn't happen but those who did respond affirmed that God is true.

4. In verses 31–33, John describes the ways that Jesus represents the Father; what are they?

- a. v. 31 \_\_\_\_\_
- b. v. 32 \_\_\_\_\_
- c. v. 33 \_\_\_\_\_
- d. v. 34 \_\_\_\_\_
- e. v. 35 \_\_\_\_\_

The eternal life John speaks about in verse 36 is not simply speaking of heaven; every believer possesses that life right now! Anyone who does not believe has already been judged (v.18), but the sentence has not yet been carried out.

### *More like Jesus ~*

Are *you* becoming more like Jesus? Absolutely! Every time you open the Word and spend time getting to know Him more intimately, you partake in the life-long process of drawing near—going deeper—bearing fruit—becoming more like Him. As you close your lesson today, determine to put into practice what you've learned by noting it below.

- Recite your memory verse \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Reflect on a lesson you received \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Respond with prayer and praise to God \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# *Notes*