

HOW TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD!

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and only way all of mankind can enter the
Kingdom of God.

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John 3:1-15

As one examines the millions of religions in the world, one is made aware of the common denominator they all possess, that of personal works to merit acceptance before God.

Here is where Christianity differs from all human religions, in that all a person has to do is believe in the sufficient work of Jesus Christ to be accepted by God.

The key to entering the Kingdom of God is declared by Jesus to Nicodemus the Pharisee in what is the first of several discourses selected by John as evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing, a person may have life in His name. (*John 20:31*)

This particular discourse reveals the one and only way all of mankind can enter the Kingdom of God.

The secret of entering the Kingdom of God is revealed to Nicodemus as he plays out three distinct roles.

- I. **Nicodemus the Seeker** (*Verses 1-3*)
- II. **Nicodemus the Skeptic** (*Verses 4-8*)
- III. **Nicodemus the Student** (*Verses 9-15*)



Nicodemus the Seeker

(Verses 1-3)

The Identity of Nicodemus (Verse 1)

Nicodemus was a Pharisee who was the religious ritualists of the day. They had risen during the Macabean wars against Antiochus Epiphany who attempted to wipe out the Jewish religion. There were no more than 6,000 at any one time. Their name meant the “separated ones.” They were the scribes and teachers of the Law of Moses.

The Mishnah was the codified scribal law, for example, the section on the Sabbath extends to not fewer than twenty-four chapters. The Talmud is the commentary on the Mishnah and in the Jerusalem Talmud, the section on the Sabbath law runs sixty-four-and-a-half columns and in the Babylonian Talmud it runs to one hundred and fifty-six double folio pages. The Pharisees were to live out the very law they taught but for the most part, they were the epitome of hypocrisy.

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel, comprised of elders, scribes and high priests that oversaw the affairs of Israel. The court comprised of seventy members after the Old Testament order and consisted of the Pharisees who were the ritualists and the Sadducees who were the materialists, and also of the priestly order.

Nicodemus was without doubt a prominent figure in the Jewish community and looked up to by his peers and by the people. He apparently was wealthy because when he came to bury the body of Jesus along with Joseph of Armimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus who had asked Pilate for the body of Jesus, he brought 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes, a considerable amount that would have been very costly.

(John 19:38-39)

The Initial Conversation with Nicodemus (Verse 2)

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. There are those who say he came at night because he was afraid of his peers and label him a coward, others say he came to find fault with Jesus. But the context reveals that for whatever reason Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, he was a sincere seeker. In fact, he is put in contrast to the individuals in the preceding chapter who Jesus did not commit Himself to because they believed in Him due to the signs He showed them and not by genuine faith. (*John 2:23-25*)

There are many reasons he could have come by night, revealing the chance he was taking in view of the clash in the temple cleansing. He might have come at night simply so that they would not be interrupted. He could have come at night after the practice of the rabbis who studied the law a night. He could have come at night symbolizing the dark spiritual condition of his life despite his religious credentials and position.

Two other times Nicodemus is identified by the phrase, "he who came to Jesus by night."

(*John 7:50, 19:39*)

The contrasts of light and darkness are prominent in John. (*Verses 1:5, 9, 3:19, 8:12, 9:4-5, 12:35*)

Nicodemus addressed Jesus with respect, he called Him Rabbi which means master or teacher the title is believed to have originated from the Chaldeans, signifying doctor or master was not used before the captivity except for describing officers of Assyria and Babylon, "Rabsaris" and "Rabshakeh."
(2 King 18:17)

Nicodemus confessed Jesus to be from God, and the statement is not limited to him by the plural pronoun, "We know that You are a teacher sent from God," perhaps referring to other Pharisees, elders and scribes. The word "know (oida)" means intuitive knowledge and can be translated "perceive" or "understand," the exact same word is translated "see" in verse three. The reason that Nicodemus gives for believing that Jesus is from God are the signs He had done. "For no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him."

The statement by Nicodemus about the signs as valid credentials to prove Jesus was from God is true in that He did all within the boundaries of the Scriptures and gave God the glory. But the statement is wrong in that Satan can counterfeit signs. He will do this through the Anti-Christ, who will come after the working of Satan with all power, signs and lying wonders and deceitfulness of unrighteous.
(2 Thessalonians 2:9-10a) The false prophet will do great signs, bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of man. *(Revelation 13:13)*

All signs and wonders must be judged by the Scriptures, and if they add, take away or contradict them, then they are not of God! *(Deuteronomy 13:1-13)*

Are you open to admit your own ignorance about spiritual matters and how to enter the Kingdom of God? Are you ready to learn as a student, and receive and believe the way to enter the Kingdom of God? Are you ready to trust the Scriptures that declare that faith in Jesus is the only way to be born again? Are you ready to change your theology, if corrected by the Scriptures ?

Nicodemus the student came to know that a man must be born again to enter the Kingdom of God!

The secret of entering the Kingdom of God was revealed to Nicodemus as he played out three distinct roles.

- I. Nicodemus the seeker came to Jesus with an open heart, so you must do!
- II. Nicodemus the skeptic was patiently ministered to by Jesus, so have you!
- III. Nicodemus the student came to know that a man must be born again to enter the Kingdom of God, so we pray you do!

The application is unmistakable, for it is an equal parallel, "So must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (*John 3:14b-15*) Two absolute musts, should not be missed the Son of Man must be lifted up and the sinner must be born again or he or she will never understand or enter the Kingdom of God. (*Verses 3, 5, & 7*) The outcome being "eternal life," age abiding life which primarily speaks of a quality of life and secondly life that never ends in fellowship with God. The symbolism is incredible, the pole represented the cross in the wilderness, the brass serpent represented sin being judged on the cross and the act of looking to the serpent on the pole in the middle of the camp represents faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

God desires each of us to put our trust and faith in the revelation of His word, regardless of how ridiculous or impossible it may be to believe. For just as looking at a brass pole would keep them from dying from the venomous bites so our looking to Jesus who died for the sins of the world will keep us from perishing!

Jesus referred to His death and the outcome of His death and resurrection by way of John's commentary, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die. (*John 12:32-33*)

The servant of Naaman exhorted him, "If the prophet would have told him to do some great thing, he would have done it. How much more then, when he says to you, wash, and be cleansed?" He went down dipped himself seven times and his flesh was restored as a little child. (*2 King 5:13-14*)

The Incredible Response of Jesus ***(Verse 3)***

Jesus declares that what He was saying was of the utmost importance and truth by the phrases, "Most assuredly," "Verily, Verily" or "Truly, Truly," depending on your translation. *(Verses 3, 5, 11)*

Jesus declares He was and is supreme in authority having no need to quote Moses or the elders "I say to you" Jesus declares "that unless one is born again (anothen) from above, he or she can not see (oida, to perceive or understand) the Kingdom of God." He says this three times. *(Verses 3, 5, 7)*

The Kingdom of God to the Jews meant the age to come when the Messiah would destroy their enemies and reign for a thousand years, while the Kingdom of God to the Christian is in the present and yet to come. The Church is not the Kingdom, the Church will not bring in the Kingdom, the Church is part of the Kingdom, yet the Church will reign in the Kingdom.

Notice that Jesus answered Nicodemus not according to what he had spoken but according to what was in his heart. Jesus knew he was thinking of entrance to the Kingdom of God. *(Verses 2:24-25)*

There is a story in the Old Testament about a little captive girl who told the wife of the king of Syria that there was a prophet in Samaria that could heal the

chief captain whose name was Namaan of leprosy. The king sent him his request for healing in letters, along with silver and gold. Namaan the leper went with an open heart! *(2 Kings 5:1-5)*

Let me ask you a few questions at this point. Have you come with an open heart, having heard about Jesus? Have you come because of the miracles that you have heard about in the lives of others? Have you come with an open heart? If you have, then Jesus will tell you how to experience the greatest miracle by being born again!

You see, Nicodemus the seeker came to Jesus with an open heart and so must you!

Jesus Declares the Answer to Nicodemus' Petition to be Instructed About the Method of Being Born Again (Verses 13-15)

In verses 13-15 Jesus declares Himself to be the unique revealer of heavenly things. He is the One who has descended from heaven and come down, He is the Son of Man, the title identifying His incarnation and one like man, which only Jesus uses of Himself!

Jesus then tells Nicodemus how to be born again once more in verses 14 –15. The message comes from the Scriptures, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.” (*John 3:14a, Numbers 21:4-9*)

The passage revealed the people of Israel speaking against the Lord and Moses, accusing Moses of having brought them out of Egypt to have them die in the wilderness. God sent fiery serpents into the camp and many die from the poisonous snakes in verse 6. So the people came to Moses and repented of their sin and pleaded for his intercession in verse 7. God told Moses to make a brass serpent and set it on a pole in the middle of the camp that if any who had been bitten would look upon it, they would not die in verses 8 – 9. Here is another example of the “word” referring to the “word of God.”

Jesus declares His superior witness by the pronoun “we.” It speaks of Jesus and others, “We speak what we know and testify what we have seen.” This is the only time Jesus speaks in the plural “we.” Some say it refers to John the Baptist, others to the Prophets, which would include John. And still others say it refers to His disciples. Yet there are others who think it refers to the Father. Which is it? Take note that in our context the “we” has to stand in contrast to the “we” of Nicodemus, which refers to the Jewish leaders, therefore the “we” of Jesus has to be His followers.

The pronoun “you” refers to Nicodemus and the Jewish leaders who did not receive the witness, so Jesus reproves Nicodemus in verse 12 for his inability to understand what Jesus had told him already. The things Jesus had told Nicodemus were spiritual truths based on earthly things that he did not believe; yet the things of Heaven would be even harder to believe. How would he believe these spiritual truths?



Nicodemus the Skeptic

(Verses 4-8)

Nicodemus Responds to Jesus with Great Skepticism.

(Verse 4)

Nicodemus asked Jesus the direct question, "How can a man be born again when he is old?" This reveals two things: The futility of the natural mind to understand spiritual things and the impossibility of such a thing being able to happen on a natural level.

(1 Corinthians 2:14)

Nicodemus' second question was, "Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Confirming his blindness regarding spiritual things.

Note that Nicodemus' questions are honest and sincere even though he is a bit skeptical. He attempts to understand as well as he can, but also speaks his mind. Notice that Jesus does not rebuke him nor does He become impatient, but rather Jesus continues to minister to him, even as the Scriptures say, "A bruised reed He would not break, and smoking flax He will not quench." *(Matthew 12:20)*

Jesus Declares the Evidence of His Ignorance. *(Verses 10-12)*

In verses 10-12 Nicodemus is mildly reproved by two things. Jesus first points out his position of responsibility, "Are you the teacher of Israel?" By the use of the article, it implies the distinguished position of possibly the leading teacher if not one of the distinguished teachers of Israel. Teachers were to be the models for others.

Jesus next points out his accountability, "And do not know these things?" The statement implies that he should know this truth. The word know "ginoskeis" means to know by experience. Ezekiel certainly was one of the prophets that spoke of the new birth through a new heart and a new spirit.
(Ezekiel 36:35-38)

This is why Jesus wept over Jerusalem as He said, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes?" *(Luke 19:42)* This is also, why Jesus said, "If the blind lead the blind, they will both fall into the ditch." *(Matthew 15:14)*

Therefore, Jesus reproves Nicodemus for his rejection of God's witness in verse 11. Jesus qualifies the importance of what He is going to say again in two ways; first by the genuineness and truthfulness of the words by the phrase, "Most assuredly," second by His supreme authority, "I say to you."

Jesus Answers Nicodemus with Great Patience (Verses 5-8)

Jesus declares the same truth a second time by using a few different words to emphasize the source and the results of the new birth. (*Verse 5*)

The importance of the statement is evident, “Most assuredly” and the supreme authority is stated again, “I say to you.” Jesus declares that unless a man be born again, he or she cannot see the Kingdom of God, once again using different words as synonyms to communicate this great truth.

Looking at the words in reverse order, the first word Jesus substituted is the word “enter” for “see” in verse three, emphasizing the results of the new birth. Remember “see” means to perceive or understand in reference to the Kingdom. Therefore, the word “enter” has to refer to the Kingdom also, namely that one who is born again is able to understand and enter the Kingdom of God.

The second word Jesus substituted is “again” or “above” in verse three with the phrase “of water” and “of the Spirit,” emphasizing the source of the new birth. Whatever meaning we want to give to both of these latter phrases, it must be true to the meaning of the word “again.” The word “again” or “above” describe the source of the birth, namely spiritual and from heaven.

Therefore, the phrases “of water” and “of the Spirit” must refer to something spiritual and from heaven and not something different, which would only further confuse Nicodemus!

Some have declared that “of water” means water baptism because John the Baptist and the disciples of Jesus baptized with water, but this commits two errors. Jesus would be teaching that water baptism was a requirement to be saved, and enter heaven, thereby undermining His finished work of the cross for redemption. (*Romans 6:3-4, 1 Peter 3:19-21*) Second, Jesus would be contradicting the heavenly source of the new birth, for water is sourced on earth not in heaven.

Others have declared that “water” and “Spirit” refer to the same thing, namely the purifying work of the Holy Spirit, committing three errors.

First, that Jesus is not using “water” as a metaphor but a simile. Second, that Jesus was being redundant in affect saying “one had to be born of the Spirit and of the Spirit.” Third, ignoring that Jesus is stating two things not one, water and Spirit. The only meaning that the phrase “of water” can refer to is “the word of God.”



Nicodemus the Student

(Verses 9-15)

Nicodemus Responds to Jesus with Great Interest.

(Verse 9)

In verse nine, Nicodemus ask Jesus the question, “How can these things be?” This reveals two things, the ignorance of Nicodemus regarding the spiritual matters of the new birth and his petition to be instructed as to the method of being born again.

Though Nicodemus was a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, he humbled himself to be instructed. Though Nicodemus was a ruler of the Sanhedrin with all the authority, he never challenged the authority of Jesus.

This is no longer the “how” of verse 4b, but of a student who desires to be a disciple!

The term “water” is used in two ways in John, literal and symbolic. Ten of the twenty-four times it is found in John, it is used symbolically. Nine are used of the Holy Spirit, eight as Jesus conversed with the Samaritan woman at the well. (*Verses 4:7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15*) One time at the Feast of Tabernacles as Jesus prophesied of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as rivers of living water. (*John 7:38*)

The only time the term “water” is used symbolic of the “word” is here in our text. We have already shown that Jesus would be speaking redundantly if it referred to the Holy Spirit, but the final determination comes from the mouth of Jesus Himself as He tells His disciple, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” (*John 15:3*) This seems to be confirmed by the Scriptures. (*Ephesians 5:26, James 1:18, 1 Peter 1:23*) There are two other verses in our text that will prove “water” to be the word of God. (*Verses 8, 14*)

Jesus declares the same truth a third time by dismissing Nicodemus’ understanding of a physical, earthly birth. (*Verses 6-8*) Jesus first made the distinction clear, that earthly birth has nothing to do with the heavenly birth. (*Verse 6*) This dismisses the teaching that “water” refers to our earthly birth in our mother’s womb in contrast to the spiritual birth from above. (*Job 14:4, Psalm 51:5, Romans 3:10-12*)

Jesus next declares to Nicodemus for the third time the key to enter the Kingdom of God in verse seven. Jesus exhorts Nicodemus not to marvel, be amazed or puzzled that He is telling him, "You must be born again." Jesus returns to the original statement of verse three and adds one more thing, the word "must", which means obligation, with the idea of an absolute requirement without exception and is used three times in the chapter. (*Verses 7, 14, 30*)

Jesus illustrates the new birth for a third time in verse eight. The usual teaching of the verse uses the wind as an illustration of the effect on a person who is born from above and certainly, we can all identify with this description. The problem with this interpretation is that the word for "wind" is "pnuma" and of the 385 times it appears in the New Testament, this is the only time it is translated "wind", all others are translated "spirit" and "Spirit."

Lets read it with that understanding, "the Spirit blows where it wishes and you hear the sound "phone" of it. How does the Holy Spirit speak? Through the word of God! Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. (*Romans 10:17*)

So if everyone who is born of the Spirit is the application, the Holy Spirit illuminates the word of God, brings conviction to the heart of man, repentance is manifested and the person is born again from above. (*John 1:12-13*)

When Naaman the leper was told to go dip himself seven times in the Jordan by the servant of Elisha to be healed, he became furious and offended that Elisha himself did not come out to call upon God to heal him then and there, not to mention the ridiculous command to go dip himself in the muddy Jordan seven times to be healed. He turned away in a rage.
(2 Kings 5:10-12)

You may be sitting here skeptical and attempting to figure out how it is possible for a person to be born again from heaven. Your natural mind may be unable to accept it. You might be saying like Nicodemus, "How can I be born again at this point in my life?" The truth of the matter is that you have to open your heart to the word of God as the Holy Spirit desires to reveal your need of repentance and salvation!

Nicodemus the skeptic has been patiently ministered to by Jesus!