

# The Book of John - 18

**Introduction** - We move on to chapter number 3 in the book of John. This chapter is undoubtedly one of the most profound in all of the Word of God. Verse number 16 has been called by many the most beautiful verse in the Bible. We closed chapter 2 with the Lord Jesus Christ not committing Himself to the men that believed in Him, for the Bible says, *“Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.”* In this chapter, we will be introduced once again to another witness. His name is Nicodemus.

## II. The Witness of the Word 1:19-4:54

A. John the Baptist **v1:19-36**

B. Andrew **v1:37-40**

C. Peter **v1:41-42**

D. Philip **v1:43-44**

E. Nathanael **v1:45-51**

F. \_\_\_\_\_ 3

I like how John Philips breaks down this entire chapter, and so I would like to use his main points:

1. The World's Greatest **Tragedy**. V1-10
2. The World's Greatest **Truth**. V11-15
3. The World's Greatest **Text**. V16
4. The World's Greatest **Test**. V17-21

Let's read the introduction found in **verses 1 and 2**.

*“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”*

**The Pharisees** - The term Pharisee comes from a Hebrew word that means separated ones. “They were the developers of the oral tradition, the teachers of the two-fold law: written and oral. They saw the way to God as being through obedience to the law. They were the progressives of the day, willing to adopt new ideas and adapt the law to new situations.” <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles W. Draper with Harrop Clayton, “Jewish Parties in the New Testament,” ed. Chad Brand et al., Holman Illustrated Bible Page 1. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 1:52 PM April 19, 2023.

**The Sadducees** - The Sadducees were aristocrats. They were the party of the wealthy and of the high priestly families. They were in charge of the temple, its services, and concessions. They claimed to be descendants of Zadok, high priest of Solomon.<sup>2</sup> We see from this first verse that Nicodemus was a member of the high religious court of the land, the Sanhedrin.

In **John 7:48-50** we see how Nicodemus is named as one of them, *“48 Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? 49 But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. 50 Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, **being one of them**),.”*

The label “Sanhedrin” is based on the Greek word συνέδριον (*synedrion*), which is a general word for “council” and can be used for local governing assemblies as well as for the high council in Jerusalem. And so, you can imagine this important figure, a man with great power and authority, was coming to speak with the Lord. Nicodemus was a religious man. In **verse 10**, the Lord tells us that Nicodemus is a διδάσκαλος *didaskalos* - which means teacher/instructor and even gives the idea of a doctor of the law. As we look further at this account, we will discover that the Holy Spirit contrasts this man with the woman at the well in the next chapter, John 4. Notice again how Nicodemus addresses the Lord.

**John 3:2** *“The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”*

Nicodemus makes His initial inquiry impersonal by using the pronoun “**we**.” As we saw previously, these miracles validated that the Lord had “come from God...” but a belief in who He is was needed. Immediately the Lord makes this evident by the conversation that follows. You see, Nicodemus addresses the Lord as simply a teacher (ῥαββί *Rabbi* and διδάσκαλος *didaskalos*) sent by God rather than the Anointed One and Savior. Every man that enters this World needs to be born again, *“not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:13)*

Nicodemus, many have said, is the best that man, culture, education, and religion could produce. **He was a Pharisee of Pharisees.** And so, as we continue through this passage, we see “The World’s Greatest Tragedy.”

**What is the tragedy?** It is the false truth that man can be reconciled to God by any system of works. It is that man thinks he can somehow erase His debt of sin without a Savior. It is that man by Himself can walk in righteousness before Almighty God.

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Dictionary (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 917.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

John Philips stated in His commentary, “If anyone among the Jews thought that he was a candidate for the kingdom of heaven, **that man must have been Nicodemus**. Born into the chosen nation, a member of the commonwealth of Israel, circumcised the eighth day, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, one who tithes of mint and anise and cumin; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless; and willing, indeed, to give a Galilean prophet a fair hearing. The only man who could boast of a record like that was Saul of Tarsus (Philippians 3:4-6). But after he came to Christ, Paul evaluated all those things as confidence in the flesh” (**Philippians 3:4**).”

It becomes clear from what follows that Nicodemus could not enter the kingdom of heaven nor even envision the kingdom of heaven without being born again. We should **note positively the cautiousness of Nicodemus**. “There are some who are carried about with every wind of doctrine. Nothing astonishes us more than the ease with which men take up a new religion except the ease with which they lay it down. Not so with Nicodemus. He knew that Judaism was of God and that Judaism prophesied a Messiah with which Christ did not seem to correspond. Yet Christ’s miracles appeared to authenticate His mission. But before accepting Him, he would inquire further.” I am very well convinced that many people believe things for which they have no scriptural support.

While this will be the norm at first for a babe in Christ (the instruction of the first principles of the Christian life), spiritual maturity necessitates that we discover **the biblical basis for our entire lives. This is the only** standard by which we measure truth. In this, we can agree with Nicodemus’ cautiousness. We ought to be like Bereans. Receive the word with all readiness of mind, and search the Scriptures and see if these things be so. (**Acts 17:11**)

**John 5:39**, the Lord gives this same admonishment in dealing with those who would not receive Him. He stated, “**Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.**”

Notice with me what is stated in **verse 3**.

**John 3:3** “*3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he **cannot see the kingdom of God.***”

**The first time the Lord uses this statement, He alludes to spiritual blindness.... “he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (v3)**

**The second time the Lord says, “he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (v5)**

One of the nation’s desires was the immediate establishment of **the Messianic Kingdom**.

Albert Barnes stated it this way, “Nicodemus, according to the general sense of the

nation, thought that when the Messiah came, and his kingdom was set up, they should all share in it, without any more ado; they being the descendants of Abraham, and having him for their father: but Christ assures him, that he must be "born again."

Several more words are important for us to feel the full force of these initial statements found. (**Verses 3 and 5**)

**The first is the word "Except."** This, coupled with the terms, **Verily, Verily...** indicates the strongest language the Lord could use to communicate to Nicodemus an **essential need**. As we look at these statements, we will also notice that as the Lord develops this conversation, He directs these statements to Nicodemus, but then will broaden **the imperative to all men using the word "Ye..." (vs. 7) John 3:3** *"3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

The Lord's reply to Nicodemus gets to the heart of what Nicodemus needs to know, not what he was asking. You and I must observe this as we talk to others about the Lord. What is important for a religious person to know? What is important for a non-religious person to know?

Another important word used in this statement is the word "again..." This exact word (Anothen, ἄνωθεν) has three different applications, as shown by the Scriptures.

**The first usage** of the word again means "from the beginning, completely and fully." **Luke 1:3** we see an example of this usage: **Luke 1:3** *"3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things **from the very first** (ἄνωθεν), to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,"*

**The second usage** of the word is seen here, which means "a second time, a repeated act." It is also used in **Galatians 4:9** in this manner *"9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire **again** (ἄνωθεν) **to be in bondage** (δουλεύω - meaning servitude, bondage)?"*

**The third usage** means "from the top, which means from God." This is seen in **John 19:11** *"11 Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee **from above** (ἄνωθεν): therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."*

We understand that the Lord was stating you must be born:

Completely or fully. - This speaks to the new creation.

A second time. - This speaks to regeneration, which means second birth.

From Above - This speaks to the agent of regeneration, God the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus' response again reveals that he did not understand the Lord's statement. Notice his response in **verse 4**.

**John 3:4** *"4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"*

I like what John Philips said concerning this statement. Nicodemus **did not ask why, but instead, he asked how**. Something else to note is that what the Lord told him at this moment seemed impossible to Nicodemus because he was hearing these things and interpreting them naturally. He exclaims, *How can a man be born when he is old?* I am thankful for what we find next in the text. The Lord does not unbraided Nicodemus for his lack of understanding and question but explains what He means. We come to understand that the Lord is willing to give light to those who are seeking Him. And as His children, He teaches us and gives us wisdom.

**James 1:5** *"5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."*

As the Lord answers Nicodemus, He gives Him (1) **the Source** of the new birth, (2) **the Importance** of the New Birth, and (3) **the Nature** of the New Birth.

**The first is the source of the New Birth.**

**What is the source of the New Birth?** You and I understand that the source of the New Birth is **God**.

**John 3:5** *"5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*

There is much debate as to what is meant by the phrase "born of water..."

I want you to note several things, however:

- Whatever is meant would be relevant to Nicodemus. The Lord was not trying to deceive Nicodemus. He goes to great lengths to explain what He means. Later on, the Lord would speak using parables to conceal the truth. But this does not fit this moment nor the purpose of this record. For instance, look back at **Chapter 2 in verses 19-21**.
- **Christian Baptism** cannot be in view here because Nicodemus would have no understanding of it. (It is **anachronistic** [against chronology]---belonging to a different period of time... This would be like asserting that the Old Testament saints understood what the New Testament church was in the Old Testament. Or like asserting that Nicodemus would understand the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.)

**(Matthew 28:18-20)**

- Some have asserted that the reference to water refers to John's baptism, which points to the baptism of the Spirit. (**Matthew 3:11** *"11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:"*)
- Some assert that being born of water **has nothing to do with baptism** but rather has to do with physical birth because of the context of verses **3-6.**) It would seem strange that the Lord would speak about water baptism in verse 5 after Nicodemus interpreted **verse 3** as **natural birth**. And it would seem out of place for the Lord to refer to natural physical birth **in verse 6** right after **verse 5** if that is not what is in view.

Regardless of any of these interpretations (except an attempt to show regeneration by baptism, which is foreign to the Bible), **the emphasis for this verse is being born of the Spirit.** The Lord teaches unequivocally that the source of the birth is the Holy Spirit. Spiritual Birth is an act of God. God gives life. Early in our study of this gospel record, we were given this wonderful truth in **John 1:12-13** *"12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* Remember that with these first ten verses, we see The World's Greatest Tragedy... The Lord expresses it in the statement found in verse 10.

**John 3:10** *"10 Jesus answered and said unto him, **Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?**"*

Nicodemus is a wonderful example of someone who does receive Christ as His Saviour. But we also find great tragedy in these words,

**II Timothy 3:1-7** *"1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; 5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. 6 For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, 7 **Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.**"*