

How Jesus Led Nicodemus to Eternal Life

John 3.1-15

John wrote his Gospel that we would believe in Jesus and receive eternal life, and that's the subject of the first discourse he records between Jesus and Nicodemus. Their dialogue moves from who Jesus is, to what being born again entails, to how Nicodemus (and anyone) can receive life.

- Question 1 (implied): *Who are You (the Messiah!)?* (1-3)
 - Backdrop: Believers-on-the-way in John 2.23-25
 - Nicodemus a 'doubtful believer': *Who are you – really?*
 - Jesus' surprising response: New birth is a 'God thing'!
- Question 2: *Can a person really be born again?* (4-8)
 - The natural human focus: *What can I do?*
 - There is physical birth, and spiritual birth (cf. 1.12-13)
 - Spirit (pneuma) and wind (pneuma): New birth 'mystery'
- Question 3: *How can a person be born again?* (9-15)
 - Hints in the Old Testament: The Spirit and the last days
 - 'Heavenly things': The Son of Man must be "lifted up"
 - Whoever believes in Him has eternal life

Epilogue: Did Nicodemus believe in Jesus? See Jn 7.45-52 & 19.38-39!



1. Chapter and verse divisions in our Bible are not inspired; they were inserted in the 12th and 16th centuries. While helpful, they sometimes divide narratives that should be connected. John 2.23-25 and 3.1-15 really go together. Nicodemus is an example of Jews who believed in Jesus, or were drawn to believe in Him, because of His teaching and miracles He performed during Passover. Read over Nicodemus' questions to Jesus and Jesus' responses. Notice how Jesus directs the conversation so that it focuses on spiritual birth.
2. After Jesus raises the issue of being "born again" in v3, Nicodemus is confused. What is he focused on in v4? What does the reference to water in v5 signify? How does v6 help understand this? Spiritual birth has a "mysterious" reality that should not surprise us, since all that comes from God is in a way 'beyond us' (see Isa. 55.8-9). It is this which Jesus alludes to in v8. In Greek, the words "Spirit" and "wind" are the same (πνεῦμα = *pneuma*). How is being born of the Spirit and the blowing of the wind similar?
3. Up to v8, Nicodemus has learned that to enter and experience God's kingdom he needs to be born again and that this is not something he can accomplish on his own. This prompts his question in v9. What does Jesus chide Nicodemus (and all the Pharisees; "you" in v11b-12 is plural) for in vv10-12? While being born of the Spirit was not addressed in the OT, the Spirit's connection with the kingdom was, which Nicodemus and other Jewish religious leaders missed. See Isa. 32.15; 44.3; Ezek. 36.25-27; Joel 2.28-29.
4. Jesus is uniquely qualified to reveal hidden heavenly truths, because He is from heaven (v13). Referring to Himself as "the Son of Man" is an affirmation of His deity (see the prophetic reference in Dan. 7.13-14, and the Jews' response to Jesus using this title in Matt. 26.63-66). The reference to Moses in v14 is from Numbers 21.4-9. Read over the account. What did the people have to do to be saved? What is Jesus being 'lifted up' pointing to (John 12.32-33)? What do we need to do to be saved (have eternal life)?