

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY, JOHN 2:1-12:50

JESUS' MINISTRY IN JUDEA, JOHN 2:13-3:36

INTRODUCTION

A. Outline of the *Gospel of John*

1. Prologue (1:1-18)
2. Preparation for Jesus' ministry (1:19-51)
3. Jesus' Ministry (2:1-20:31)
 - a. His public ministry (2:1-12:50)
 - b. His private ministry (13:1-17:26)
 - c. His passion ministry (18:1-20:31)

B. Notes

1. Warren Wiersbe, *The new birth is one of the key topics in John 3. In addition, in this chapter we see Jesus Christ in three different roles: the Teacher (John 3:1–21), the Bridegroom (John 3:22–30), and the Witness (John 3:31–36).*
2. Leon Morris, *John pursues his aim of showing that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31) chiefly in two ways: he narrates some of the signs Jesus did, and he records some of the discourses Jesus spoke ... The first "discourse" is a private talk to a single listener, Nicodemus, a member of the ruling class. The conversation brings out the means of attaining eternal life, and, in typical Johannine fashion, this leads on to reflections of the Evangelist and to further incidents.*
3. Grant Osborne, *This entire dialogue centers on Jesus correcting one of those who had an inadequate faith. Nicodemus's conversion moves the length of the Fourth Gospel, as he undergoes spiritual conviction here, is seen on Jesus' side (perhaps as a secret follower) in 7:50, and is clearly a believer in 19:39.*

DISCUSSIONS CONCERNING THE NEW BIRTH, JOHN 3:1-36

JESUS' CONVERSATION WITH NICODEMUS, JOHN 3:1-21

A. Jesus declared that spiritual life demands a new birth (1-8)

1. Introduction of Nicodemus (1-2)
 - a. Related verses
 - 1) John 7:50, *Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them,*
 - 2) John 9:29, *We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.*
 - 3) John 19:39, *Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.*
 - 4) Luke 24:20, *and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.*
 - 5) Matthew 22:16, *And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.*
 - 6) Acts 10:38, *how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.*
 - b. Comments
 - 1) Nicodemus was a Pharisee (1) *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.*
 - a) Edwin Blum, *Nicodemus represented the best in the nation. He was a teacher (v. 10), a Pharisee, and a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. The Sanhedrin had 70 members who were responsible for religious decisions and also, under the Romans, for civil rule.*
 - b) Warren Wiersbe, *He was a man of high moral character, deep religious hunger, and yet profound spiritual blindness.*

- c) Thomas Constable, *As a Pharisee Nicodemus would have had respect for the Jewish Scriptures and would have been nationalistic politically. He would have stressed the careful observance of Israel's laws and the traditions of the elders. Obedience to these was the way of salvation for Pharisees ... Later Jesus mentioned that Nicodemus was a prominent teacher in Israel (v. 10). John also recorded that he was fair-minded (7:50–51).*
 - d) Charles Swindoll, *The Pharisees ... were meticulous expositors of Scripture and worked tirelessly to apply the general principles of the law to everyday life ... oral tradition of the Pharisees was preserved in a document called the Mishnah, which contains no less than twenty-four chapters just on how to keep the Sabbath.*
 - e) Leon Morris, *The Pharisees had no vested interest in the Temple (which was rather the domain of the Sadducees). A Pharisee would, accordingly, not have been unduly perturbed by the action of Jesus in cleansing the Temple courts. Indeed, he may possibly have approved it, partly on the general principle that anything that put the Sadducees down a peg or two was laudable and partly in the interests of true religion ... John says that he was "a ruler of the Jews" ... The use of the expression is doubtless intended to let readers know that Nicodemus stands as the representative of the old religion.*
 - f) William Barclay, *There are certain things that we know about Nicodemus ... (1) Nicodemus must have been wealthy. When Jesus died, Nicodemus brought for his body 'a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds' (John 19:39)—and only a wealthy man could have brought that ... (2) Nicodemus was a Pharisee ... There were never more than 6,000 of them; they were what was known as a chaburah, or brotherhood ... (3) Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews. The word is archon. This is to say that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a court of seventy members and was the supreme court of the Jews ... (4) It may well be that Nicodemus belonged to a distinguished Jewish family ... it is amazing that this Jewish aristocrat should come to this homeless prophet who had been the carpenter of Nazareth, that he might talk to him about his soul.*
 - g) R. Kent Hughes, *Nicodemus was nobody's fool. He was an educated man and an aristocrat. These things—his earnestness, his position, and his education coupled with the fact that he ultimately did respond to Christ (see John 7:50–52; 19:38–39)—make his life a perfect case study for learning the essentials of salvation.*
- 2) Nicodemus acknowledged that Jesus was blessed by God (2), ***This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."***
- a) His visit with Jesus was at night probably to keep his visit private and without interruptions. Possibly, he did not want a confrontation with other Pharisees who were already antagonistic toward Jesus.
 - b) Thomas Constable, *Nicodemus addressed Jesus as "Rabbi," which was a respectful title that recognized Him as a teacher. One rabbi was coming to another for discussion. However, this title also indicated the extent of this man's faith. He did not address Jesus as the Messiah, or the Son of God, or his Lord. All the same, he expressed belief that Jesus had come from God ... Nicodemus may have wanted to determine if Jesus was a prophet as well as a teacher.*
 - c) Edwin Blum, *"We" probably means the favorable ones on the council ... The words "from God" are in an emphatic position in the Greek. The signs had pointed out Jesus as God's Man (God was with Him), and Nicodemus wanted to talk to Him as one Rabbi to another.*
 - d) Leon Morris, *We must notice that he regards Jesus as a teacher only, and that he has as yet no perception of the real nature of him whom he sought out. He has come as one teacher to another to discuss matters of mutual interest. Indeed, there may even be a trace of condescension in that he, an honored Pharisee, had come to talk to a teacher who had never been through the schools (7:15).*
 - e) F. F. Bruce, *Even if he did not grasp the significance of the signs, he recognized by their character that they could not be wrought except by the power of God. Therefore, although Jesus did not belong to one of the acknowledged schools of sacred learning, this leading teacher in Israel saluted him as an equal with the title "Rabbi"—a mark of respect ...*
 - f) Grant Osborne, *I believe John pictures Nicodemus as inquiring honestly and openly; and that in John this is one of several salvation confrontations (like the Samaritan woman in chapter 4 or the blind man in chapter 10), a necessary step in Nicodemus's eventual conversion. I see it as a positive dialogue rather than negative debate.*

2. Jesus interacts with Nicodemus (3-8)
 - a. Jesus clearly stated that one must be born again (3), *Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*
 - 1) Related verses
 - a) John 1:13, *who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*
 - b) Galatians 6:15, *For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.*
 - c) 1 Peter 1:3, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*
 - d) 1 Peter 1:23, *since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;*
 - 2) Comments
 - a) *born again*
 - 1] R. Kent Hughes, *He was prepared for an exchange of philosophical ideas, but he was not prepared for what followed. Jesus cut him off and went straight to the heart of the matter. In a glorious instant the vocabulary of our faith was given one of its greatest concepts—“born again” ... The rabbis had a saying: “A proselyte who embraces Judaism is like a newborn child.” All things were thought to be completely new, and old connections destroyed. When Nicodemus heard Jesus’ words, he knew what Jesus was saying.*
 - 2] William Barclay, *When Nicodemus came to Jesus, he said that no one could help being impressed with the signs and wonders that he did. Jesus’ answer was that it was not the signs and the wonders that were really important; the important thing was such a change in a person’s inner life that it could only be described as a new birth ... it is to have something happen to the soul which can only be described as being born all over again; and the whole process is not a human achievement, because it comes from the grace and power of God.*
 - 3] Thomas Constable, *Jesus’ abrupt dogmatic statement cut to the heart of the matter. He affirmed strongly that one cannot see the kingdom of God without a second birth from above (Gr. anōthen, cf. v. 31).*
 - 4] Warren Wiersbe, *Though all human beings have experienced natural birth on earth, if they expect to go to heaven, they must experience a supernatural spiritual birth from above.*
 - 5] Merrill Tenney, *Just as an infant, by the very occurrence of his birth, is fitted for a new life in a strange realm, so men must experience spiritual rebirth preparatory to their entrance into the kingdom of God.*
 - 6] Leon Morris, *Jesus declines to carry on with courteous exchanges that get nowhere, but plunges immediately into the very heart of the subject ... in one sentence he sweeps away all that Nicodemus stood for, and demands that he be remade by the power of God ... Anyone who would enter the kingdom of God must be born in a radically new fashion, and this second birth is from heaven. Entry into the kingdom is not by way of human striving (cf. 1:13), but by that rebirth which only God can effect.*
 - 7] Charles Swindoll, *This new requirement grabbed his attention, and his demeanor shifted dramatically. He dropped his flattering façade and engaged Jesus in thoughtful debate.*
 - 8] John Calvin, *By the term born again He means not the amendment of a part but the renewal of the whole nature. Hence it follows that there is nothing in us that is not defective.*
 - d) *the kingdom of God*
 - 1] Thomas Constable, *The term “kingdom of God”—as Jesus used it consistently—refers to the messianic kingdom. That kingdom began with the appearance of Messiah, and it will culminate in His earthly kingdom, which will begin when He returns to this earth ... To “see the kingdom of God” means to obtain eternal life (cf. Mark 9:43, 45, 47).*
 - 2] Edwin Blum, *To be born again or born “from above” ... is to have a spiritual transformation which takes a person out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God (cf. Col. 1:13).*
 - 3] Grant Osborne, *This kingdom of God is inaugurated—that is, it is both here (already) and imminent (not yet) and will be consummated at the second coming.*
 - 4] Leon Morris, *We are probably not meant to make much of a distinction between seeing and entering (v. 5) the kingdom. But it will be appropriate that Jesus speaks here of seeing it. So far from entering into all that its privileges mean, anyone who is not reborn will not even see the kingdom.*
 - 5] F. F. Bruce, *To a Jew with Nicodemus’s upbringing, seeing the kingdom of God would mean participation in the age to come, the resurrection life ... But Jesus speaks of a regeneration to be experienced here and now ... to enter immediately into the life of that coming age.*

- 6] William Barclay, *It is not the desirability of this change that Nicodemus questioned; that he knew only too well; it is the possibility. Nicodemus is up against the eternal problem, the problem of someone who wants to be changed and who cannot change himself.*
- 7] Jewish religious teaching concerning entrance into the kingdom of God proclaimed that all Jews would be admitted except for those guilty of apostasy or extreme wickedness. Jesus told Nicodemus that he who is a member of the Sanhedrin and *teacher of Israel* must be born again.
- b. Nicodemus was confused by Jesus' statement (4), **Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"**
- 1) Thomas Constable, *His crassly literal question may reflect some disdain for Jesus' affirmation, or Nicodemus may have been speaking wistfully, or he may have been eager or impatient to hear Jesus' explanation.*
 - 2) Warren Wiersbe, *The situation is no different today. When you talk with people about being born again, they often begin to discuss their family's religious heritage, their church membership, religious ceremonies, and so on.*
 - 3) Edwin Blum, *Nicodemus was certain Jesus did not mean something absurd (such as a reincarnation or a second physical birth), but yet he did not grasp the nature of regeneration.*
 - 4) Leon Morris, *A man, Nicodemus might have said, is the sum of all his yesterdays. He is the man he is today because of all the things that have happened to him through the years. He is a bundle of doubts, uncertainties, wishes, hopes, fears, and habits, good and bad, built up through the years. It would be wonderful to break the entail of the past and make a completely fresh beginning. But how can this possibly be done?*
 - 5) R. Kent Hughes, *We desire to change. We want to be different. We want new minds and new personalities. We want to be born again, but it is as difficult as going back into our mother's womb.*
- c. Jesus emphasized that one must be born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God (5-8)
- 1) The necessity of the new birth (5-6), **Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**
 - a) Related verses
 - 1] 1 Corinthians 15:50, *I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*
 - 2] John 6:63, *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*
 - b) Comments
 - 1] *water and the Spirit*
 - a] Charles Swindoll, ... "born of water and the Spirit" should have sparked the rabbi's memory of a familiar Old Testament promise: (Ezekiel 36:-25-27, *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*) Unless one is born "from above" through the cleansing work of the Spirit of God within, he or she cannot enter God's kingdom.
 - b] Grant Osborne, ... in 7:38-39 John states that the "living water" is "the Spirit." The water metaphor in John refers to the Spirit ... Water as signifying spiritual cleansing is part of the coming of the Spirit in Ezekiel 36:25-28, "I will sprinkle clean water on you ... and put a new spirit in you" ... The imagery of birth from above as a new birth from the Spirit's cleansing flows right out of Ezekiel.
 - c] Merrill Tenney, *The statement presupposed the activity of the Holy Spirit within all who entered the kingdom ... In Old Testament teaching, the Spirit came upon the prophets or other specially chosen men for unusual reasons, but nowhere in Judaism was taught the coming of the Spirit upon all men for their personal regeneration. The mystery and reality of the Spirit's work were both contained in Jesus' illustration of the wind whose origin was undiscoverable but whose presence was manifest. Nobody could deny its existence. Thus it was with those born of the Spirit. The origin of their life could not be defined, but its actuality could be seen by all.*

- d. Thomas Constable, *There are several views of the meaning of being born of water and the Spirit ... The definite article translated “the” before “Spirit” is absent in the Greek text ... A more literal translation would be simply “born of water and spirit” ... The construction of the phrase being born of water and the Spirit in the Greek text indicates that the preposition “of” governs both water and Spirit. This means that Jesus was clarifying regeneration by using two terms that both describe the new birth. He was not saying that two separate things have to be present for regeneration to take place. It has but one Source ... The only view that seems to be consistent with all of these factors is as follows: The Old Testament often used water metaphorically in order to symbolize spiritual cleansing and renewal (Num. 19:17–19; Isa. 55:1–3; cf. Ps. 51:10; Jer. 2:13; 17:13; Zech. 14:8). God’s spirit (or Spirit) in the Old Testament represents God’s life (Gen. 1:2; 2:7; 6:3; Job 34:14). God promised that He would pour out His Spirit on people like water (Isa. 32:15–16; Joel 2:28–29). The result of that outpouring would be a new heart for those on whom the Spirit came (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:26) ... Jesus evidently meant that unless a person has experienced spiritual cleansing and renewal (empowerment) from God’s spirit (or Spirit), he or she cannot enter the kingdom. This is what He meant by being born from above or again (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11).*
- e] Leon Morris, *It is the perennial heresy of the human race to think that by our own efforts we can fit ourselves for the kingdom of God. Jesus makes it clear that it is impossible to fit oneself for the kingdom. Rather, it is necessary to be completely renewed, born anew, by the power of the Spirit. These solemn words forever exclude the possibility of salvation by human merit. Our nature is so gripped by sin that an activity of the very Spirit of God is a necessity if we are to be associated with God’s kingdom.*

2] *flesh ... spirit*

- a] Thomas Constable, *Here, not in verse 5, Jesus clarified that there are two types of birth: one physical and one spiritual. “Flesh” again refers to human nature (cf. 1:14), namely, “all that belongs to the life of sensation.” The Holy Spirit gives people spiritual life. We are spiritually dead in sin until the Spirit gives us spiritual life. Jesus was speaking of a spiritual birth, not a physical one ... the Old Testament spoke of it (cf. Ps. 87:5–6; Ezek. 36:25–28). It revealed that entrance into the kingdom is a spiritual matter, not a matter of physical descent or merit. This was a revelation that most of the Jews in Jesus’ day, including Nicodemus, either missed or misunderstood.*
- b] Edwin Blum, *There are two distinct realms: one is of fallen man (the flesh) and the other is of God (the Spirit). A fallen person cannot regenerate himself; he needs a divine operation. Only God’s Holy Spirit can regenerate a human spirit.*
- c] Leon Morris, *... Jesus has been speaking of a spiritual kingdom, the kingdom of God. For entrance into that kingdom a spiritual birth is required.*
- d] Grant Osborne, *Nicodemus is clearly confused, and so Jesus explains the concept further. There are two kinds of birth—physical or “fleshly” birth and spiritual birth. Jesus contrasts the two... Nicodemus had failed to grasp this, and so long as he remained on the earthly plane he could never find eternal life. Only when he turned to the Spirit “from above” could he have spiritual life.*

2) New birth is the work of the Holy Spirit (7-8), ***Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.***

a) Related verses

- 1] John 5:28, *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice*
- 2] 1 Corinthians 12:11, *All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

b) Comments

1] *You must be born again*

- a] F. F. Bruce, *Jesus was speaking personally to Nicodemus, but his words held good for others as well as Nicodemus, and hence the transition to the second person plural in the statement, “You must all be born from above.”*
- b] Edwyn Hoskins, *There is no evolution from flesh to Spirit.*
- c] Edwin Blum, *People should not stumble at or reject the importance of Jesus’ words. They must be born from above. The necessity is absolute and is universally binding.*

- d] Thomas Constable, *Nicodemus needed spiritual life. He needed to experience the new birth. He had evidently viewed acceptance by God like so many of his Jewish contemporaries did. If so, he thought that his heritage (ancestry, position, works, all that made him what he was) was adequate to get him into the kingdom and make him acceptable to God. He had to realize that he needed a complete spiritual cleansing and renewal, which only God could provide by His Spirit. Likewise today, most people are relying on themselves—who they are and what they have done—for acceptance with God. They, too, need to know that they need spiritual cleansing and life that only God can provide. They must be born again or there is no hope of their entering God’s kingdom ... The person born of the Spirit is similar to both the Spirit and the wind in that it is impossible for unregenerate people to understand or control him or her. They do not understand his or her origin or final destiny. Nicodemus should have understood this too, since the Old Testament revealed the Spirit’s sovereign and incomprehensible working in giving new life (e.g., Ezek. 37:1–10).*
 - e] Leon Morris, *In the light of the principle he has just enunciated Jesus urges Nicodemus not to be astonished at his teaching on the new birth. It is only what is to be expected ... There is no other way than that of rebirth.*
 - f] Grant Osborne, *It is completely inadequate to think any person or system of teaching controls the process of salvation. The Spirit is in control, not one school of thought or one leading authority.*
 - g] Charles Swindoll, *The Spirit of God, the Source of all spiritual life, cannot be impressed to give life as a reward; He cannot be bribed, or flattered, or tricked into giving life in exchange for sacrifice; and He will not sell eternal life, which is priceless, for anything temporal, which is worthless ... Religion is manmade. Religion is of the physical realm—impressive on earth, rubbish in heaven.*
- 2] *The wind ... the Spirit*
- a] Thomas Constable, *There are three similarities; First, both the Spirit and the wind operate sovereignly. Man does not and cannot control either one. Second, we perceive the presence of both by their effects. Third, we cannot explain their actions, since they arise from unseen and partially unknowable factors. They are mysterious.*
 - b] Edwin Blum, *This verse contains a wordplay which cannot be adequately expressed in English. The Greek word *pneuma* means both wind and Spirit. The work of the Spirit (*pneuma*) is invisible and mysterious like the blowing of the wind (*pneuma*). Man controls neither.*
 - c] Warren Wiersbe, *Everyone who is born of the Spirit is like the wind: you cannot fully explain or predict either the wind or the child of God! For that matter, human birth is still a mystery, in spite of all that we know about anatomy and physiology. Each new life is exciting and different.*
 - d] Leon Morris, *As is the wind, so is anyone who has been born of the Spirit. The person who lacks spiritual life may have contact with such people, but knows neither the origin of their life nor their final destiny.*
 - e] F. F. Bruce, *As the coming or going of the wind cannot be controlled by human power or wisdom, so the new birth of the Spirit is independent of human volition—coming neither “from the will of flesh nor from the will of a man,” as John has already put it in his prologue (John 1:13).*
 - f] Grant Osborne, *The power of the Spirit in us is a mysterious force, and our job is simply to open our heart to him. That is what Nicodemus cannot comprehend, a force that he does not control. Yielding to the Spirit is beyond his ken. All any of us can do is allow God and the Spirit to do their work and give us the new birth. We accept it; we do not control it.*
 - g] William Barclay, *You may not know how the Spirit works; but you can see the effect of the Spirit in human lives.*

TO BE CONTINUED, LORD WILLING!

- B. Jesus instructed Nicodemus who still did not understand (9-15)
- C. John the Baptist’s testimony concerning Jesus (22-36)