

New Birth & Eternal Life

John 3

Jesus' Teaching

❑ Read John 3:1-15. A man named Nicodemus¹ went to see Jesus. Nicodemus was impressed by Jesus, and he wanted to know more about him. Jesus told him, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God² unless they are born again”³ (3:3, *NIV*). Jesus also told him, “no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit”⁴ (3:5).

1. What kind of “birth” is Jesus talking about? Why is this “birth” needed?⁵



📖 “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (*John 1:12-13, NIV*).

📖 “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ” (*Ephesians 2:1, 5, NIV*).

❑ Nicodemus did not understand (3:4, 9). As “Israel’s teacher,” he should have understood more (3:7, 10),⁶ but the “one who came from heaven” (Jesus) would give further revelation.

❑ Jesus’ statement in verses 14-15 refers to an Old Testament story. Read Numbers 21:4-9.



2. How does Jesus use this story to illustrate his mission and the needed response of human beings?⁷

¹ Nicodemus was a Pharisee (a Jewish party known for strict observance of the Law and its interpretations) and a member of the ‘Jewish ruling council’ (Sanhedrin). Nicodemus is mentioned again in John 7:50-51 and 19:38-42.

² ‘kingdom of God’ – the reign (rule) of God. “To a Jew with the background and convictions of Nicodemus, ‘to see the kingdom of God’ was to participate in the kingdom at the end of the age, to experience eternal, resurrection life” (D.A. Carson, *John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 188). While the kingdom is future in its full realization, the kingdom has already come in the person of Jesus Christ (the King). Thus those who submit their lives to Christ, and are ‘born again’ or ‘born from above,’ enter the kingdom now.

³ ‘born again’ (*gennēthē anōthen*) – can also be translated ‘born from above.’ Both are true.

⁴ ‘water and the Spirit’ – interpretations vary, but likely refers to a new birth that cleanses and renews, since water is used metaphorically to refer to renewal and cleansing in the Old Testament. For example, the LORD said ‘I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities ... I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you ... And I will put my Spirit in you ...’ (*Ezekiel 36:25-27a, NIV*)

⁵ It’s a *spiritual* birth – the beginning of spiritual life. Our natural fallen condition is spiritual death, resulting from a broken relationship with God. To have spiritual life, we must be brought into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit enables us to respond in faith, and the Spirit gives us new [spiritual] birth and life.

⁶ Based on Old Testament teaching, Nicodemus ‘should have understood...God’s promise that he would give his people a new heart, a new nature, clean lives and a full measure of the Spirit on the last day.’ (Carson, 197)

⁷ ‘the Son of Man’ is what Jesus called himself. The phrase ‘lifted up’ refers to his being lifted up on the cross (that is, his sacrificial death as the Lamb of God), but also to his resurrection and exaltation. As we ‘believe in him’ we are united with him. ‘We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life’ (*Romans 6:4, NIV*)

3. How would you describe “eternal life” (3:15)?⁸



📖 *Jesus prayed to God the Father, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3, NIV)*

4. Read John 3:16-21. What do verses 16-18 say about God, our situation as human beings, and Jesus’ purpose in coming? Why should people believe in Jesus?

📖 “For God so loved the world⁹ that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (*John 3:16, NIV*).

5. How do verses 19-21 use “light” and “darkness” to illustrate the human situation, the purpose of Jesus’ coming, and different human responses to him?

John's Testimony

- ❑ Jesus and his disciples went into the countryside, and baptized (3:22; 4:2). Some disciples of John the Baptist were concerned about the effects of Jesus’ ministry on John’s ministry. They said, “...everyone is going to [Jesus]” (3:26). How does John respond? (3:27-30)
- ❑ John emphasizes his role in God’s plan. He is not the Messiah, but was sent to prepare the way for him (3:28). He is not the bridegroom, but rather the bridegroom’s friend (3:29).
 - 📖 *John says, “[Jesus] must become greater; I must become less” (3:30).*
- ❑ John (the gospel writer) gives further testimony concerning the supremacy of Jesus (3:31-35). Jesus “comes from heaven” and “is above all” (3:31). He “speaks the words of God” (3:34). God the Father “has placed everything in his hands” (3:35). John concludes...
 - 📖 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them” (*John 3:36, NIV*).

The Light & You

- Do you want to see the kingdom of God? Do you want eternal life? God has provided the way. Do you need to believe in Jesus Christ?
- If you have believed, does your life and ministry point to Jesus? Is he getting the priority and praise he deserves? Commit to this attitude: He must become greater; I must become less.

⁸ ‘eternal life’ (*zōē aiōnios* – ‘life pertaining to an age’) – It is the ‘life of the age (*aiōn*) to come,’ which is endless. Thus the adjective *aiōnios* means ‘without end, everlasting, or eternal.’ However, ‘eternal life’ is not mere endless existence. It is life in union with the one true, eternal God. Thus ‘knowing God’ (in personal relationship) *is* eternal life (*John 17:3*). Since God is the Source of life and blessing, eternal life is the ultimate quality of life. It is the resurrection life of Christ, which is a life of victory over sin and death. ‘Eternal life’ begins when a person enters into personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, though the *full* realization of eternal life is future. ⁹ Elsewhere John wrote, ‘Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them’ (*1 John 2:15*). Does this conflict with John 3:16? No. God’s ‘love’ in John 3:16 is a holy love of redemption. The ‘love’ in *1 John 2:15* is a selfish love of embracing worldly things. Some also say that ‘world’ (*kosmos*) has a different nuance in John 3:16 (i.e., ‘the world as humankind’) instead of ‘the world as that which is opposed to God,’ which is the most common meaning of the word *kosmos* in John’s writings.