



*February 22, 2009*

*John 1–3*

*“Born Twice, Die Once”*

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As we get started in our series in the Gospel of John, it will be helpful to know some of the background about the author, the purpose for the book, etc. John’s Gospel was the last written (circa 85-90AD). John’s name (Yochanan) means God is gracious. He was the oldest and last surviving eyewitness of Jesus. It’s interesting to note that there are only eight of Jesus’ miracles recorded in this book; however, six of the eight only appear in this book. John’s emphasis and purpose is to show the deity of Jesus Christ ([John 20:31](#)<sup>1</sup>).

The focus of this study is regeneration. Ten times in the first three chapters John writes about birth or being born, not physically but spiritually. One example is [John 1:12–13](#), where the words “*born of God*” indicate a spiritual birth. Not only is there confusion about spiritual birth in our day, there was confusion even on the part of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day.

The account of Jesus and his nighttime conversation with Nicodemus is found in [John 3:1–21](#). Nicodemus was a prominent leader of the Pharisees, a religious sect like the Sadducees, and a member of the Sanhedrin,<sup>2</sup> the 70 ruling elders of Israel. The Pharisees (*perashiyim – separated ones*) were true to their name. They avoided contact with anyone and anything that might make them “unclean.” They also believed that the traditions passed down by the ancient rabbis, as recorded in the Mishna, carried as much weight as the Scriptures themselves, which caused Jesus to rebuke them in [Mark 7:8](#). It wasn’t a popular thing for someone to socialize with Jesus, especially if you were a person, like Nicodemus, of high social standing. Nicodemus was searching for answers, in addition to his desire to really know who Jesus was. In this study, we’ll learn of Nicodemus’ credentials, his curiosity and confusion about spiritual birth, and finally, his conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> “*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*”

<sup>2</sup> The Sanhedrin is similar to the United States Supreme Court.

## The Credentials of Nicodemus

1. Nicodemus was “*Israel’s teacher*,” according Jesus comment in [John 1:10](#), which means he was *the* teacher of Israel, a respected master-teacher.
2. In spite of all of his intelligence and education, Nicodemus was smart enough to know there were some things he didn’t know.
3. Jesus told him that “*unless you are born again [born from above],*” you cannot “*see [experience or fully know] the Kingdom of God.*” ([John 3:3](#))
  - a. The Kingdom of God is a destination (heaven), but it is also a transformation when a person yields their life to the rule and reign of God.
    - i. [Luke 17:20–21](#) – “*Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.’*”
    - ii. God is not some tyrannical dictator who is going to take over a person’s life, whether they want him to or not; he is a benevolent king, a generous and loving king, who opens his kingdom, including heaven, to all who are born again.

## The Curiosity of Nicodemus

4. Jesus explains spiritual birth in [John 3:5–8](#).
5. There is natural birth/physical birth. The reference to water, which is a part of the birth process, and is commonly understood when someone says, “Her water broke.”
6. There is a supernatural birth/spiritual birth, which is a work of God.

## The Confusion of Nicodemus

7. Jesus answers the anticipated question Nicodemus has (“How can this be?) by illustrating the fact that no one can see the wind, but they can see [experience or fully know] the effects of wind.
8. Jesus refers to [Numbers 21:4–8](#), when the grumbling, complaining Israelites were in the wilderness, as a picture of the punishment for sin and the God-provided remedy!
  - a. The Israelites, recognizing their sin, looked upon [by faith] the bronze snake for their healing.
    - i. The serpent is a symbol of sin.
    - ii. The brass/bronze is a symbol of judgment.
    - iii. The pole is a symbol of the cross.
  - b. Jesus took on our sin and was lifted up from the earth on a cross; God judged him in our place so that we might be spared the punishment intended for us, that we might have eternal life.

## The Conclusion for Nicodemus

9. Born once, die twice; born twice, die once.
  - a. When you're born physically, but not spiritually, you'll die physically and spiritually. If you are born physically and spiritually, you'll only die physically.
10. Jesus tells Nicodemus about God's plan for spiritual birth in [John 3:16–18](#).
11. Many believe Nicodemus came to faith in Christ as a result of this encounter with Jesus.
  - a. In [John 19:38–42](#), we read about Nicodemus' involvement with Joseph of Arimathea in preparing Jesus' body for burial.
12. The second death, referred to in [Revelation 2:11](#), will be the experience of all who reject Christ as Savior.

## Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [John 1:1–21](#) to provide an overview of today's study.
3. Pastor Gary mentioned the recent “outing” of Reba McEntire's belief in reincarnation. Do you know people who believe in reincarnation?
  - a. What is the basis for the bad theology of reincarnation?
  - b. Are you aware of any so-called Biblical evidence for reincarnation?
  - c. Do you think
    - i. The Bible supports regeneration<sup>3</sup>, but it does not support reincarnation!
      1. Read and discuss [Hebrews 9:27](#).
      2. Read and discuss [Titus 3:4–7](#).
4. Spend time talking about the risk Nicodemus took the night he came to speak with Jesus.
  - a. What were the risks?
  - b. What did he stand to gain from this meeting?
  - c. Do you think he came to faith in Christ as a result of this conversation with Jesus?
5. Read and discuss [Luke 17:20–21](#).
  - a. Is it your understanding that the kingdom of God is not only a destination but also a transformation?
  - b. What does it mean in your life to have the Lord rule and reign?

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<sup>3</sup> [http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/search/word\\_regeneration](http://1828.mshaffer.com/d/search/word_regeneration) 1. Reproduction; the act of producing anew. 2. In theology, new birth by the grace of God; that change by which the will and natural enmity of man to God and his law are subdued, and a principle of supreme love to God and his law, or holy affections, are implanted in the heart. He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

- c. Are you aware of a discernable difference in your life because you are a subject of the king, so to speak?
6. Read and discuss **John 3:3–8**.
    - a. Do you think the term “born again” is largely misunderstood?
    - b. Has it been your experience that this term is used derisively when used by people making reference to Christians?
    - c. Do you think unbelievers think these words are only meaningful to “Bible-thumpers”?
    - d. Do you use this term when telling others about your coming to faith in Christ?
    - e. Is there a way to translate “born again” into language that unbelievers can understand?
  7. Read and discuss **Numbers 21:4–8**.
    - a. Spend time talking about the symbols in this account and the way they parallel the work of Jesus on the cross.
  8. Read and discuss **John 3:16–18** – *“For God so loved \_\_\_\_\_ that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn \_\_\_\_\_, but to save \_\_\_\_\_ through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”*
    - a. Read these verses out loud and allow the people in your group to insert their name in the places marked above.
      - i. When you hear your name in these verses, do you have a greater sense of God’s love?
    - b. People like Rollen Stewart<sup>4</sup>, the John 3:16 guy, seem to have created a situation in which many people seem to have dismissed the wonderful truth found in this verse.
      - i. Do you think unbelievers take these verses seriously today?
      - ii. Is there a way to navigate around the “bad press” to communicate the gospel effectively?
  9. Close your time by allowing everyone in your group to: realize that the kingdom of God is not just a destination, it’s also being yielded to the rule and reign of God in this life; thank God for the incredible plan of salvation that was completed when Christ paid the penalty for sin by dying on the cross; thank God for the resurrection of Christ, which demonstrates his power over sin, death and the grave, that we might have the promise of eternal life; purpose in their heart to be involved in sharing the Good News of God’s love in a personal and meaningful way in the lives of unbelievers.

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<sup>4</sup> Use this link to watch an ESPN story on Rollen Stewart:

<http://vids.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=vids.individual&videoID=1054353848>