

## **The Cloud of Witnesses**

### **Nicodemus**

#### **Lesson 1: Nicodemus – Abraham’s Descendant**

##### **Reading**

John 3:1-12.

##### **Abraham’s Descendant**

Like most of the religious leaders of his day, Nicodemus was very proud of his heritage – being a true natural descendent of Abraham. That gave him kudos and religious superiority and status. He considered he had a ‘claim’ on God because God told Abraham that his descendants would be as vast as the grains of sand on the seashore and that God would especially bless them. He considered his pedigree to be immaculate.

Not only that but he was a Pharisee – one of only 6000 in the *brotherhood*. He upheld the sacred law and helped both administer and interpret it. The Pharisees were the custodians of the Truth in all religious matters. He was not only a descendant of Abraham; he was a Pharisee plus he was one of the religious leaders - one of only 70 who was allowed to occupy a seat in the sacred Sanhedrin. Why was he not good enough for Jesus and God?

You can imagine his and his fellow Pharisees’ chagrin when Jesus seemed to be totally unimpressed with their position and status, and to add to the ignominy, spent most of his time with fishermen and other ‘low-life’.

Nevertheless, there was an ache in his heart. Something was missing – and that something was of tremendous significance. All the religious piety could not fill the ache for something more. There had to be another answer – something even more important than religion – even Judaism.

He began to see something in Jesus that intrigued him. Jesus was different. He was different from the people. He was different from the other religious leaders. He was even different from the Pharisees. He had an authority that was disturbing, yet appeared genuine. He performed miracles, which was the prerogative of God – and yet He was so human – not a bit like his or their concept of God.

Feeling conspicuous and not wanting others to see him, he decided to seek a quiet individual audience with Jesus. He started off well enough trying to show respect to Jesus but was *hit right between the eyes* by Jesus’ response. *I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again.* Wow – that was direct.

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### **Lesson 1 continued: Nicodemus – Abraham’s Descendant**

Nicodemus heard the words “*born again*” and would have been struck by 3 options. First – to be born all over again from scratch; secondly, to be born a second time; and thirdly, to be born of God. He realised that Jesus was talking of a completely radical change in his lifestyle. The ache within him said, “*Yes, I want it – but how can I have it? I don’t have the ability, energy or capability in myself. How can I get there? It’s necessary but in my experience it’s impossible!*”

Jesus revealed to him that it was not by any natural experience – not by becoming a baby again, not by trying his hardest, not following a set of rules or religion, but only by spiritual birth. He had to submit his life to God – to be open to receive the Spirit of God into his life - and then the transformation could take place.

Just in natural conception the human sperm has to impregnate the egg to form a new human being so the Spirit of God has to impregnate our spirit so we become Children of God. It’s the only way we get to know God and go to Heaven.

#### **Nicodemus would say to us today...**

It’s not your natural birth that counts – it’s your new birth in Christ Jesus, through the power and presence of Holy Spirit that really matters.

#### **Prayer**

*Father, thank you so much that because Jesus Christ, the Word of God, died on the Cross for me, my sins are forgiven, I have peace with You and I am now a Child of God by the Holy Spirit living in me. Please help me never forget the wonderful privilege that is mine – to be able to call You – Abba Father. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

Matthew 3:1-12; Galatians 3:1-14; 2 Corinthians 5:10-21.

#### **Questions**

How does the Bible tell us we become “*children of Abraham*”?

Why must we be “*born again of the Spirit of God*”?

Why are we not good enough as we are to get into Heaven?

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### **Lesson 2: Nicodemus – Received God’s Love**

#### **Reading**

John 3:13-21.

#### **Received God’s Love**

When Jesus heard Nicodemus’ question, He saw into his heart. He saw the longing for the answer to reality and the purpose for life itself. Nicodemus knew the Torah. He wasn’t ignorant of the law of God or the history of God’s people, the Jews. He just knew there had to be more to life than tradition and religion. He knew what existing without life is all about.

In order to reach into Nicodemus’ mind, Jesus went from where Nicodemus was and took Him forward to where He would satisfy the claims of an Almighty and Holy God. Jesus took Nicodemus back to Moses and the people of Israel in the wilderness. He reminded him that the people had rebelled – yet again, and God had to intervene and sent snakes in to get the people’s attention.

God then told Moses to make a snake out of bronze and to attach it to a tall pole so everyone could see it. He then had to tell the people that whoever looked at the snake would be healed and live. And that’s how it worked. Those that looked lived! Those that didn’t look died. The people were reconciled to God once more, by faith.

Jesus said in effect – Nicodemus, you remember what Moses did in the wilderness to reconcile the people to God. He took a snake, representing their sentence and punishment, and put it high up on a pole and whoever looked - by faith, would be forgiven – the bronze snake would be their substitute and bear their sin and rebellion for them and they would be healed, forgiven and set free.

Well, time had gone on and the people still rebelled against God so He had to step in to save the people once more. Jesus said to Nicodemus – just as the snake was used to forgive the people and reconcile them to God, in a similar way I am going to die for their sins.

I’m going to die on a Cross to bring hope, forgiveness and healing. A permanent reconciliation with God for all mankind – whoever looks to the Son of God will be saved, healed and live life to the full. It will take faith, but it is the answer you are looking for.

I’m going to give them eternal life, which is not just ongoing for ever, but life in a whole new dimension. Without Me you don’t know what it is to live. I am the only One who can satisfy the deep hunger in your heart. It’s a spiritual hunger that can only be satisfied by a spiritual answer.

I am the Answer to your need and longing. I didn’t come to judge or condemn the world but to save it.

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### **Lesson 2 continued: Nicodemus – Received God’s Love**

*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Put your faith and trust in Me, Nicodemus, because then and then alone will you live the life you long to live. You will experience forgiveness for your sins, peace with God and a whole new joy you have never known before.

Why don't you try it and give God a go?

#### **Nicodemus would say to us today...**

Jesus didn't die on a pole. He not only died to bring reconciliation vertically between God and mankind, He died on a Cross. That had the added dimension – it brought us reconciliation man to man, man to spouse, parents to children, family to family, tribe to tribe, and nation to nation. Outside the Cross there is no forgiveness and no real and lasting reconciliation.

#### **Prayer**

*Thank You Jesus for dying on the Cross for me. Thank You that through Your death, not only do I have reconciliation and access to God as my loving Heavenly Father but You have opened up the way for me to have reconciliation with everyone else on earth. Help me to release my so-called rights and receive Your love so that I can love my fellow pilgrims on this earth. Help me realise that outside of the Cross there is no forgiveness and no reconciliation with others. Help me live in the forgiveness I have received and to give forgiveness to all those who need it from me. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

Numbers 21:4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

#### **Questions**

How is Christ's death on the Cross similar to the raising of the serpent on the pole by Moses?

How is it different?

Why is it a stumbling block to both Jews and Gentiles?

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### **Lesson 3: Nicodemus – The Advocate Of Jesus**

#### **Reading**

John 7:25-52.

#### **The Advocate Of Jesus**

This is only the second time we learn anything about Nicodemus in the Bible. It's part of the ongoing 'battle' between Jesus and the religious leaders of the day. They despised Jesus because He claimed to be God. They would have accepted another Rabbi, prophet or leader of the people much easier – Jesus got right up their noses by continually claiming to be God.

He claimed to have been alive before Abraham was born. He claimed to have been the spiritual food that God had given the people in the wilderness journey.

He performed miracles that they knew could only have been performed by God – God incarnate – as no one else could have done them. Yet, He was so human. He didn't have a 'regular' background. He wasn't a college graduate – He seemed to be just like everyone else but claimed to be God Himself. That was blasphemy and deserved death.

Yes, the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to a coming Messiah but it couldn't have been Jesus. The promised Messiah would be a king. Jesus had no royal birth, didn't live in a palace and wasn't talking of overthrowing the Romans - all of which would have helped them accept Him.

Instead, Jesus had no apparent interest in politics or power and spent his time with the common people sorting out their petty illnesses and injustices, and trying to get them believe in some kind of happy ever-after. Of course, they had far more important issues to deal with.

Jesus kept saying that the people had to put into practice what He preached. He criticised the religious leaders for not doing so and denounced them as hypocrites.

The Pharisees and Scribes sent the Temple guards to arrest Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles but they were afraid to do so because the crowd was hanging on His every word. Even the guards were impressed by His teaching so failed to carry out their orders.

The religious leaders scorned and mocked the guards for their timidity and became angry. However, Nicodemus challenged them saying, *"Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?"* That made him a scapegoat so they addressed all their venom at him and told him in no uncertain terms that the Christ would not come out of Galilee.

Nicodemus had changed. He went to Jesus by night so as to hide from the public eye when he went to investigate this man Jesus for himself. Having satisfied himself that Jesus was genuine

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### **Lesson 3 continued: Nicodemus – The Advocate Of Jesus**

and the promised Messiah, he then did what he could to protect Him and cause others to think before making quick and erroneous judgements.

Sooner or later those who trust in Jesus will be exposed because the enemy and this world do not honour Him or want Him to reign in the hearts of people.

#### **Nicodemus would say to us today...**

Don't just read the Bible – understand who Jesus is and follow Him. It's only as we put our faith into practice that we really prove we believe it. It's also then we show the rest of our family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues that Jesus is real to us and the answer to finding the life they are looking for.

#### **Prayer**

*Father, please reveal Yourself to me through Your Word, the Bible – so that it is not just another book but a source of all wisdom, love and life. Help me see Jesus on every page and also help me put what it says into practice so I become more and more like the Jesus of the Bible. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

John 5:16-40; Matthew 7:15-29; Matthew 16:13-20.

#### **Questions**

How do the Scriptures portray Jesus?

Why is believing in Jesus not enough?

In what ways do you need to change to become more like Jesus?

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### **Lesson 4: Nicodemus – The Worshipper Of Jesus**

#### **Reading**

John 19:28-42.

#### **The Worshipper Of Jesus**

At first Nicodemus visited Jesus at night. Then he tried to stand up for Him in the Sanhedrin. In the end, he joined Joseph of Arimathea and went to see Pilate in order to recover the body of Jesus so it could be given a respectable burial. Yes, the Cross made both these secret disciples nail their colours to the mast.

Joseph asked for the body so he could bury it in a new tomb. Yes, he might have covered in the back when Jesus was alive but in death he would speak up and make sure Christ's body was buried with respect.

As most of Jesus' followers were poor; had not Joseph and Nicodemus come forward, His body may well have been left to rot on the ground. But no, from among the secret disciples emerged a rich landowner who would provide the holy resting place.

And what of Nicodemus? We can read the script so quickly and pass over it but what it says is – *Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen.* There were enough spices for the burial of a king! Yes, Joseph provided the tomb and Nicodemus the clothes to wear within it.

Do you remember the gifts the young Jesus was given by the Magi? One was myrrh – declaring how He would save the world and restore our relationship with God as Father – by dying in our place. He was given myrrh – the burial ointment. Nicodemus provided it yet again at the very burial of the Son of God.

Why did he do that? Yes, to provide a decent burial. Yes, to bring closure to an ugly scene. But more than that - it was the very least he could do for someone who had come to mean so much to him. Yes, he would now stand up and be counted. Yes, he would provide what was needed in the hour of Jesus' greatest shame.

Even more than that – at last from out of his heart would flow that worship he had so desperately longed to give and yet held back. The Cross had challenged him; the Cross had spoken so eloquently to him; the Cross had released him from the fear of man - and as Jesus was lifted up, He drew Nicodemus to Himself – just as He promised.

Now as Jesus' body lay motionless and dead, Nicodemus could at last express his devotion to Jesus the way he knew best. Not in words alone but through his actions. No longer in fear and in

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### **Lesson 4 continued: Nicodemus – The Worshipper Of Jesus**

secret – but now with an overflowing and generous heart. Only the best was good enough for his King. He may have failed Jesus during his life but he would surely do all he could to make amends at His death.

#### **Nicodemus would say to us today...**

Jesus is worthy of all our service because He is God. I saw the Man, I heard Him speak and I saw Him die – take it from me – He is God, He is the King of kings and most worthy of your thanks, praise and worship. By the way - don't leave your worship until it's too late for Him to receive it.

#### **Prayer**

*Lord Jesus, thank You that I can become a worshipper. I thank You from the bottom of my heart for all You have done for me – redeeming me and saving me – and I thank You for all You continue to do for me every day. However, I want to learn to worship You more for who You are – The Eternal Word of God, The Way, the Truth and The Life, the Ultimate Authority, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords, the Altogether Lovely One, the One before whom every knee shall bow and to whom every tongue in Heaven and on earth shall proclaim – Jesus Christ is Lord. Amen.*

#### **Additional readings**

Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8; Romans 12:1-2.

#### **Questions**

How do you worship Jesus?

What is the best way to worship Jesus?

Why do we need to be able to worship Jesus for who He is as well as for what He has done for us?