

Lifted Up: The Serpent in the Wilderness & the Son of Man
John 3:9-15 (Page 72 in the NT section of the BPB)
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³⁰Therefore, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31)

Background (2:23-3:1-8)

Nicodemus (also in 7:50; 19:39), **a man** of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, **we know** that You have come from God as **a teacher**; for no one can do these signs unless God is with Him.”

Jesus’ teaching on the necessity of the new birth in 3:3, 5-8.

Unless one is born again, born of water and the Spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God....

Nicodemus’ Lack of Understanding (3:9)

⁹Nicodemus said to Him, “How can these things be?”

“these things” refer to 3:3-8

Jesus Rebukes Nicodemus for Not Believing His Testimony (3:10-13)

¹⁰Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you **the teacher** of Israel and do not understand these things?”

Jesus refers to Nicodemus as “the teacher of Israel” whereas Nicodemus had referred to Jesus as “a teacher from God.”

“the teacher of Israel” The article with “teacher” suggests that Nicodemus was recognized as a prominent scholar/teacher of the Old Testament. (3:1)

Nicodemus should have understood what Jesus was teaching because it was based on the Scriptures he should have known and understood.

Ezekiel 36:25-27

²⁵Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put My Spirit within you and bring it about that you walk in My statutes, and are careful and follow My ordinances.

¹¹“Truly, truly, I say to you, [Nicodemus]

“We speak of what we know and [we] testify of what we have seen and you [plural] do not accept our testimony.

Nicodemus had used the first person plural pronoun, “we,” when he addressed Jesus in verse 2 (“we know”), to include those he represented. Now Jesus uses “we” as a way to emphasize His qualifications and authority to testify to the truth.

Who does the “we” represent? Disciples (1John 1:1-2), John the Baptist, O.T. Prophets, Jesus Himself, by employing a literary plural for emphasis, or does it represent the Godhead? See 3:31-34

The plural, “you,” is used once in verse 11 and four times inverse 12; (It is also used in verse 7, “You must be born again”). The plural “you” shows that Nicodemus is functioning as a representative of the Jewish leaders and the nation.

“You do not accept our testimony” John 1:5, 9-13

¹²“If I told **you [plural]** earthly things and **you [plural]** do not believe,
how will **you [plural]** believe
if I tell **you [plural]** heavenly things?”

“**Earthly things**” (things that take place on the earth) are in reference to the things Jesus has said in the previous verses (3:3, 5-8) and the “**heavenly things**” (things which take place in heaven) are in reference to the things Jesus will say in other verses (3:13, 16, etc.).

¹³No one has ascended into heaven,
but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.

Jesus is the One who is fully qualified to testify of both earthly things and heavenly things since he descended from heaven. No one else could claim to have descended from heaven.

John 1:1-4, 10-14, 18; 3:31-36 (Philippians 2:6-8)

Son of Man – John 9:35-37

It is the most used title used by Jesus of Himself. In the Gospels the title occurs 83 times (Hendricksen, NTC, John, p. 205).

“The title *Son of Man* appears 13 times in John’s Gospel. It is associated especially with the themes of crucifixion ([3:14](#); [8:28](#)), revelation ([6:27](#); [6:53](#)), and eschatological authority ([5:27](#); [9:35](#)). The title as used in John’s Gospel has for its background the son of man figure who appears in [Dan 7:13-14](#) and is granted universal regal authority. Thus for the author, the emphasis in this title is not on Jesus’ humanity, but on his heavenly origin and divine authority.” (<https://netbible.org/bible/John+1>)

An Analogy from Scripture (3:14-15)

¹⁴“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,

The story is found in Numbers 21:5-9 (p. 117 BPB)

(See also 2 Kings 18:1-4 (p. 288 BPB) for an interesting reference to the Brass Serpent)

even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;

“Lifted up” – (John 8:28; 12:32, 34) – a word not only connected to the cross but Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation (Acts 2:32-33; 5:30-31)

John 12:32-33 - ³²And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *people* to Myself.” ³³Now He was saying this to indicate what kind of death He was going to die.

Points of comparison:

The judgment of death comes as a result of sin.

Someone is needed to intercede on the behalf of those who sinned.

It is God who provides the remedy.

The remedy involves something or Someone being lifted up so sinners can by faith be healed/saved.

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The Purpose of Jesus Being Lifted Up

¹⁵so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.”

“Eternal life” - This is the first use of the word “eternal” with the word “life” in John’s Gospel, although the word “life” was used in John 1:4. “Eternal life” is more than a life that goes on forever. It also refers to the quality of that life. It is spiritual life as opposed to spiritual death and enmity with God (Eph. 2:1-9).

We are not told how the conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 ended. Was he by God’s grace born again by the Holy Spirit through the witness of Jesus or did he leave unregenerate?

Nicodemus is mentioned two other times in John’s Gospel (7:50 & 19:39) and we are left with the impression that he did believe more fully who Jesus was and what He came to accomplish by being lifted up on the cross.

Are you trusting in Jesus Christ so that you will in Him have eternal life? If not, call upon the name of the Lord so that you will be saved.