

Scripture Consulting Essentials

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Jesus and Nicodemus

The Acceptable Year of the Lord (Franklin, Ohio: Scripture Consulting, 2005), Chapter 3
The Ministry of John the Baptist, pages 104-111.

John 2:18-22.

Verses 21 and 22 are a digression that adds information that was understood at the time of the writing of the Gospel of John, rather than at the time when Jesus was speaking to the Judeans in the Temple at the Passover recorded in this passage. It relates the fact that Jesus was referring to his body when he spoke of the temple at the Passover and that the disciples later remembered what Jesus had said and that they later believed the Scripture and the words which Jesus had spoken at that time when he was in the Temple. In English, we might enclose this kind of digression in parentheses.

John 11:1-2.

John 12:3.

John 2:23-25:

Jesus did not commit himself to other people, even those who believed in him. One such person came to Jesus during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, according to the following record.

John 3:1-7:

On this night during the feast, Jesus talked to one man about two births, one being of flesh and the other being of spirit. To be born of water or flesh refers the first birth. It is the physical birth of body and soul. The Greek words translated “be born again” in verses 3 and 7 literally mean “to be born from above.” That which is born from above is that which is born of the Spirit (God) and which is spirit, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus.

Just as the first birth is the beginning of a person’s soul life, so the second birth was to be the beginning of a person’s spirit life. Jesus also explained that a person could not see nor enter the kingdom of God unless he or she was born from above, that is, born by spirit. The gift of holy spirit was anticipated ever since Adam lost spirit life and transferred his dominion over all the earth to the Devil. Jesus Christ came to make available the gift of holy spirit and thus entrance into the kingdom of God. Yet Nicodemus, a ruler of the Judeans, did not understand the spiritual birth, and Jesus Christ had to carefully explain it to him.

Verse 8:

The Greek word translated “wind” in verse 8 is *pneuma*, and it should be translated “Spirit.” It is used here to refer to God. The Greek word translated “bloweth” may also be translated “breathes.” Thus the first part of verse 8 may be translated, “the Spirit [God] blows or breathes where He wills.” In this verse, “blows” or “breathes” is used as the figure of speech referred to as condescension, the ascribing of human and other physical attributes to God.

A person breathes to produce words. Similarly, God is spoken of as breathing to produce words. A person can hear the evidence of God’s breathing, that is, he can hear the words of God, but he cannot see God, Who is spirit. So it is with everyone who is born of God, which is to be born from above and to receive the gift of holy spirit. A person cannot see the spirit, but he can see the evidence of it when it is manifested. The context is dealing with the spiritual birth that Jesus Christ came to make available. Nicodemus did not understand this truth.

Verses 9-12:

The gift of holy spirit was a reality to come that God had spoken of previously, as we saw from our consideration of the reason for the life and earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. Looking back, we know that it became available to all people after Jesus Christ had accomplished what was necessary for mankind’s redemption and salvation. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Judeans and a master of Israel, should have been acquainted with the Scriptures, which spoke of the spirit that was to come. If he did not believe this foundational truth, then how would he ever believe regarding “heavenly things”?

Verse 13:

John 3:13 is often construed as part of the words that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus in the preceding passage. However, treating verse 13 as words that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus during the Feast of Unleavened Bread would seem to suggest that Jesus had already ascended and that he was in heaven at the time when he was speaking to Nicodemus.

Verse 13 is another digression like the one found earlier in John 2:21 and 22, and thus John 3:13 might also be enclosed in parentheses in English. The information contained in the digression was true at the time of the writing of the Gospel of John, rather than at the time when Jesus was talking with Nicodemus during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. At the time of the writing of the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ had already ascended into heaven and he was seated at the right hand of God. However, he had not ascended at the time of his speaking to Nicodemus.

The digression in verse 13 explains to the reader the new subject of “heavenly things,” which Jesus Christ had just mentioned to Nicodemus, as stated in verse 12. It explains that Jesus Christ is the only one so far who has ascended into heaven.

Following this digression, verse 14 returns to Jesus Christ’s teaching to Nicodemus.

Verses 14 and 15:

According to this record, Jesus compared Moses’ lifting up the serpent to Jesus Christ’s being lifted up in the future. This example of the serpent’s being lifted up refers to the following occasion recorded in the book of Numbers.

Numbers 21:5-9:

And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for *there is* no bread, neither *is there any* water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.

And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.

Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.

On the occasion referred to in Numbers 21:5-9, the people of Israel had spoken against God, and they were being bitten by snakes. Many of them died. Then God told Moses to make a brass serpent and to lift it up on a pole where everyone could see it. Those who were bitten and looked up at the brass serpent lived. Those who were bitten but did not look up at the serpent died.

[Added information from II Kings 18]

II Kings 18:1-4:

Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, *that* Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign.

Twenty and five years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty and nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also *was* Abi, the daughter of Zachariah.

And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did.

He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.

According to John 3:14, Jesus compared the incident of Moses' lifting up the brass serpent to Jesus Christ's being lifted up. In a later passage in the Gospel of John, the Greek word rendered "lifted up" in John 3:14 is used again.

John 12:32 and 33:

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me.

This he said, signifying what death he should die.

In that later passage, it is stated that Jesus Christ's being "lifted up" from the earth signified the manner of his death. This reference has been cited by some scholars as the significance of the words "lifted up" in John 3:14. However, the context of John 3:14 is different from the context of John 12:32. According to John 3:12, Jesus had introduced the subject of "heavenly things" to Nicodemus. Then the digression in verse 13 spoke of Jesus' ascension into heaven. Then verse 14 continues the record of his teaching to Nicodemus regarding his being lifted up. Thus the context of John 3:14 is dealing with Jesus Christ's later ascension into heaven.

The Greek word translated "lifted up" in John 3:14 is also used in Acts 2:33, where it is translated "exalted."

Acts 2:33:

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted [lifted up], and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he [Jesus] hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

The Greek word rendered "exalted" in Acts 2:33 is the same word that was rendered "lifted up" in John 3:14. In Acts 2:33 it is used of Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven. After Jesus Christ was lifted up to the right hand of God, he shed forth the gift of holy spirit, which God had promised, as explained in Acts 2:33.

In John 3:14, a comparison was made between Moses' lifting up the serpent and Jesus Christ's being lifted up, and the context dealt with his ascension into heaven, as explained to the reader of John 3:13. However, Jesus did not explain to Nicodemus, who may not have understood "heavenly things," what he meant by the implied comparison.

At the time when Jesus spoke those words to Nicodemus, his ascension was still a future reality, and so Jesus said, "even so must the Son of man be lifted up," as recorded in verse 14. Then Jesus told Nicodemus the purpose for his being lifted up, as recorded in verse 15: "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Those who looked up at the serpent lived. Those who would look up at the "lifted up" Christ and believe in him were to have eternal life. It was necessary for Jesus Christ to be lifted up into heaven so that those who believed in him could receive the gift of holy spirit and eternal life.

John 3:16-21:

At the time when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, God had "sent" His Son so that the world through him might be saved; however, God had not at that time "given" His Son so that those who believed in him could have everlasting life. Jesus Christ had not at that time offered himself for the sins of other people, and all people were still condemned and dead in sin as the result of Adam's disobedience.

The fact that God "gave his only begotten Son," as stated in verse 16, and that "He that believeth on him is not condemned," as stated in verse 18, were true at the time when the Gospel of John was written, but they were only anticipated realities at the time when Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus. Thus verses 16-21 contain information that was true at the time of the writing of the Gospel of John, rather than words that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Verses 16-21 are another digression, like verse 13, that more fully explains some things to the reader which Jesus had not explained to Nicodemus but which he had only briefly mentioned as recorded in verse 15: "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." The digression in verses 16-21, like the other digressions, might also be enclosed in parentheses in English.

Jesus Christ was not sent to condemn the world, but rather he was sent so that the world through him might be saved. Adam had brought condemnation and death into the world, and that condemnation and death had passed to all people, as we have seen. Jesus Christ came so that the world might be saved and so that people might have everlasting life. Those who were to believe regarding Jesus Christ were to have everlasting life, rather than condemnation and death.

However, before that life could become available, it was necessary for Jesus Christ to make the offering for the sins of other people, to be raised from the dead, and to ascend into heaven. After Jesus Christ had been lifted up, people could believe regarding his accomplishments. They could then receive the gift of holy spirit and entrance into the kingdom of God, about which Jesus Christ had talked to Nicodemus.

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Jesus Christ taught Nicodemus about the gift of holy spirit. Jesus told him that a person could not see the kingdom of God nor enter the kingdom of God unless that person was born by spirit. As a ruler of the Judeans, Nicodemus should have known this from the Scriptures. Jesus carefully explained it to him, and later Nicodemus was to be one of the few Judean rulers who believed regarding Jesus Christ's accomplishments.