

General Comments on John 3

Chapter 3 presents three characters revolving around a single theme of light. Two of the characters are compared and contrasted with the third, namely Jesus Christ. The characters of Nicodemus and John Baptist are presented as opposites. The text is arranged as follows:

v. 1-10 One who is in the dark
v. 11-22 The Light
v. 23-36 One who perceives the light

Note John's deliberate contrasts between the two opposites:

<u>Nicodemus</u>	<u>John Baptist</u>
Ruler among Jews (v. 1)	Nazarite cast into prison (v. 24)
At night, in private (v. 2)	During day in public (v. 23)
Not recognizing Christ, gospel, or the doctrine (v. 2-10)	Recognizes Christ, the gospel, and the doctrine (v. 28-36)
Asks questions (v. 4, 9)	Answers questions (v. 26)

John's portrayal of Nicodemus coming to him in the night has obvious symbolic implications of his spiritual condition aside from being indicative of his desire to keep his affiliation with Jesus secret. Also consider the imagery of Nicodemus coming in out of the dark night into Jesus' presence where it was lighted.

John Baptist is aware of the messianic import of the OT bridegroom metaphors, he perceives Jesus is the Messiah, and is baptizing. John Baptist understands and teaches the doctrines of the kingdom, he is filled with the Spirit, and his testimony parallels Jesus'. All this while Nicodemus is observing dead works and traditions of man that leave both the teacher and student blind.

Also note all three characters are identified as Rabbi, cf. v. 2, 10, 26. But, note the different connotations of it. Nicodemus confesses that Jesus is a Rabbi and from God. Jesus calls Nicodemus' title of Rabbi into question. And, John Baptist's disciples honor him with the title, yet he defers to Jesus.

The Inspired Version (IV) has a couple of minor changes over the KJV, which will be noted in the comments below.

Comments on John 3

1 THERE was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: 2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. 3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. 9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? 10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? 11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you [of] heavenly things?

v1-12 Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews, approaching Jesus at night in private and confessing that he is a teacher sent from God (v. 1-2). Jesus questions his motives (v. 3, 10), and teaches the alleged teacher concerning human behavior and spirituality (v. 4-9). Jesus then explains why it is he cannot perceive spiritual things (v. 10-12).

v1 "There was a man", note what 12:25 has to say about "man".

"a ruler of the Jews", a member of the Sanhedrin, the religio-political body governing the Jews at the time. At this point in history it was subordinate to Roman political authorities.

v2-5 The text is arranged in an A-B-A-B where Nicodemus' comments are positioned against Jesus':

- A - (v. 2) Nicodemus' flattering words, convictionless praise
- B - (3) Jesus says he must be born "another"
- A - (4) Nicodemus' doesn't understand, physical interpretation
- B - (5) Jesus says he must be born of water and Spirit

The text contrasts Nicodemus' physical/worldly view with Jesus' spiritual/heavenly view.

v2 Nicodemus privately confesses that Jesus is a teacher, where John Baptist confesses publicly that Jesus is Messiah in v. 28.

What is his motive in making such a confession? Was he out on his own to seek private counsel with Jesus, or was he an agent for someone else's agenda? While it is possible it is the former, the text suggests the latter. Note plurals "we" and "ye" are used and not singulars in this verse and in v. 11. Who would the plural be referring to? Those whom Nicodemus associates with, the Sanhedrin, who he is apparently representing. Given Jesus' rather terse reply in the next verse and subsequent condemnations for disbelief, it is likely his intent is to ingratiate themselves with Jesus, by praising him. Had the confession been an honest one, it hardly seems appropriate that Jesus would rebuke him personally and the Sanhedrin in general.

With the public becoming ever more aware of Jesus with the advent of his ministry, not to mention John Baptist's, the Sanhedrin must have been concerned about this apparent rival. So they seek to ally with him or at least keep him in good favor. The passages in 4:1-2 IV and 12:19 indicates they took him as a serious threat which they actively tried to deal with. This is apparently the first overt attempt they make. What would they have to offer him? An easy climb to power, the prestige of office, all the perks that went along with being tutelary to the Romans. But, Jesus isn't interested in any of that, like most men would be. His rejection of their overture eventually results in their assassination attempts.

But what of the man Nicodemus? Later in the text we see him defending Jesus (cf. 7:51), and ultimately doing him a public act of great respect (cf. 19:39-40). While he was acting as messenger for the Sanhedrin at this point, he appears to have had mixed motives. Perhaps he volunteered to be the messenger because some of his motives were genuinely good. Also note Nicodemus is addressed individually in v. 3, but then inclusively along with the Sanhedrin with v. 11. The statement in v. 3 is an admonition, where v. 11 is a rebuke. In v. 3 Jesus is telling him personally he needs to undergo a complete revolution from carnal to spiritual. It is safe to conclude from this Nicodemus was spiritually further along than the others, and his subsequent actions support such a conclusion.

"we know", note the plural. Nicodemus is confessing the entire Sanhedrin knows who Jesus is, but are unwilling to admit it. Why won't they admit it? Because then their power would be lost.

v3 Jesus' response is the confession is not enough. One must change their whole selves and shed the carnal instinct. One must

be born anew of spiritual things. Thus, it is an admonition and not a harsh rebuke.

"born again", the Greek term is "anothen" and is variously translated "again", "anew", "above", "heavenly". The term "anothen" most literally translated into English is "up-place". The term also appears in v. 31, 19:11, 19:23, James 1:17, James 3:15, 17. The idea is along the lines of transcending, as in rising above the earthly into the heavenly.

The idea of being "born again" is not a NT novelty. It is present throughout the entire OT, cf. Deut. 10:16, Deut. 30:6, Isa. 44:3, Isa. 53:8-10, Isa. 66:7, Jer. 4:4, Jer. 24:7, Ezek. 18:31.

"cannot see the kingdom", comparable translations for "see", which in the Greek is "eido", would be "experience", "perceive", or "know". Jesus is saying you cannot become intimately acquainted with the kingdom of heaven by only casual contact. It is by immersing yourself in things heavenly that you become heavenly. You cannot become heavenly by superficial observation, you've got to get involved and experience it. It is akin to the Hebrew "yada", which translates to "know" and means learning and perceiving by experiencing.

v4 This verse can be read two ways. Either Nicodemus is genuinely not understanding what Jesus is saying, or he is being a bit impudent. The context suggests the latter as it is obvious one cannot reenter the womb, and then in v. 12 Jesus chides him for his disbelief. Also, Nicodemus was probably more than a little insulted by Jesus' rejection of his praise in v. 2, so he is probably being a bit reactionary and defensive.

v5 This passage forwards not only the doctrine of baptism, it forwards the divine position on gender roles as well. Jesus makes it perfectly clear that baptism by water and Spirit are absolutely necessary.

The analogy of birth is employed following Nicodemus' very literal question in the preceding verse. Just as a person must be born physically, so must a person be born spiritually in order to inherit the kingdom. In order to be exalted a person must be resurrected and have eternal life, which requires a physical and spiritual birth. Who brings about the physical birth? The woman via Motherhood. Who brings about spiritual birth? The man via Priesthood. Just as the woman cannot ideally bring about the birth without the man, so too is the ideal of the man bringing about the spiritual birth with the woman, cf. Gen. 2:24.

Now, unfortunately, that ideal is not always met. But the ideal remains, with husband and wife united in both physical and

spiritual births to accomplish God's plan. In this rather short verse, God's view on gender roles is made quite plain.

v8-12 A difficult passage. Jesus says Nicodemus does not see the wind yet he knows its coming and goings by observation, similarly he doesn't see the Spirit. Yet he ignores the comings and goings of the Spirit while people testify of it and show forth its actions (cp. v. 2). Thus, his perception is limited to physical things and not spiritual things. Nicodemus is hearing the sound of those who are preaching by the Spirit but he is not perceiving its true source.

A common reading is that a person born "anothen" has the Spirit with them. They do not know in advance what they will do, but are like the wind. They don't know where the wind-spirit is coming from or where it is going, they follow it and are led along with it as it impels them. However, this reading is not contextual.

While the general idea of being impelled by the Spirit when sanctified is well attested to in the Scriptures, that is not what this passage is referring to. Nephi's comments on being led by the Spirit beforehand not knowing (cf. 1 Ne. 4:6), and the various statements in the D&C concerning the Spirit indwelling (cf. D&C 46:28-30, D&C 50:26-30) are better proof-texts.

Verse 8 is referring to perceiving versus non-perceiving invisible things. Nicodemus hears those preaching by the Spirit, but doesn't recognize the source (cp. v. 8 with v. 11-12 and note the repeated rhetorical pattern). The context is the uninitiated Nicodemus rejecting the initiated Jesus' testimony concerning spiritual things (ct. v. 32 where John Baptist's testimony is rejected). Thus, the indwelling Spirit interpretation to be acontextual.

Jesus is drawing a contrast between physical and spiritual things and is using the wind/Spirit symbolism as a play on physical/spiritual things. Nicodemus and these other physical rulers of Judah are only perceiving the physical wind (even though it is invisible), they are not perceiving the spiritual wind (i.e., the Spirit, which is also invisible), while those who are perceiving it are testifying of it. They perceive only the things they want to perceive, which has always been the case with human nature, cf. Isa. 6:9-10. In support of the above, compare the present text with a similar text (Revised Standard Version-RSV):

6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and
that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.'
8 The wind blows where it wills, and
you hear the sound of it, but

you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes;
so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."

9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can this be?"

10 Jesus answered him,
"Are you a teacher of Israel, and
yet you do not understand this?
11 Truly, truly, I say to you,
we speak of what we know, and
bear witness to what we have seen; but
you do not receive our testimony.
12 If I have told you earthly things and
you do not believe,
how can you believe
if I tell you heavenly things?"

Compare this with Matt. 16:

1 And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him
to show them a sign from heaven. 2 He answered them,
"When it is evening, you say,
'It will be fair weather;
for the sky is red.'
3 And in the morning,
'It will be stormy today,
for the sky is red and threatening.'
You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but
you cannot interpret the signs of the times.
4 An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but
no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah."
So he left them and departed.

Jesus is commenting on their ability to perceive the complexities
of nature and discern their meaning, yet when it comes to
spiritual things they demand signs. They see the signs in
nature, but ignore the spiritual signs of the times, the very
signs they have been studying for years. The issue is that of
deliberate ignorance. They are seeing only what they want to
see, and the result is they are left in the dark.

v8 "wind", the Greek term is "pneuma", and is translated to
"wind" or "spirit". The Greek "pneumatikon", is always
translated to "spiritual". The text plays on the Hebrew "ruach"
which has similar applications as both "wind" and "spirit" and
John captures it in the physical versus spiritual context of v.
2-5.

"sound", the Greek term is "phone" (pronounced: foe-nay).
This term translates to "voice" or "sound". Again, the text
plays on the spiritual versus physical applications of the same
term.

v10 Jesus is calling into question his position of such high regard, he being on the Sanhedrin. The very context of the conversation implies Jesus is the teacher and Nicodemus is the student. Also, Jesus is probably giving him a hard time because he is deliberately playing dumb rather than confess Jesus is right, cp. Matt. 16:1-4.

"master of Israel", a better translation would be "teacher" or "Rabbi".

v11 Contrast Nicodemus' rejection with the acceptance of John Baptist in v. 32.

The pronouns throughout this verse are all plural, both the "we" and the "ye". The "we" is referring to those born "anthen" and the "ye" is referring to Nicodemus and his "we" from v. 2. Who are the "we" in this verse? Jesus and John Baptist in specific.

v12 John Baptist (cf. v. 31-32) and Jesus tells him concerning spiritual things on the earth, namely the arrival of the Messiah, and he doesn't believe it, a simple spiritual thing upon the earth. How then could he possibly believe what Jesus says about spiritual things in heaven?

13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, [even] the Son of man which is in heaven. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. 17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

v13-21 Discourse on the transcendent nature of the Son (v. 13-14), the ministry of the Messiah and his relationship to the Father and his disciples (v. 15-18), and the nature of fallen man (v. 19-21).

Note the similarity between Jesus' discourse here and John's

in v. 29-36.

v13-17 The condescension and ascension of the Son (v. 13-14) permits the ascension of those who believe on the Son (v. 15-17).

v13 None will ascend into heaven except the one who descended out from it, namely the Lord. Because of the Fall, none may enter into the Father's presence aside from the intercessory actions of the Son. The Son must ascend up into heaven in order for the Spirit to be made available for people to be born "anothen", cp. 16:7.

v14-15 These verses are important in and of themselves because they establish the validity of typological interpretations. This is an important point given typological interpretations are always acontextual and extremely selective in their usage.

The passage presents a historical fact as a symbolic act in v. 14, and then interprets it in v. 14. Those who look to the Son, which Son will be lifted up, will live and not die, even as the Israelites lived if they looked at the brazen serpent.

v15-19 Compare 12:46-48 for similar statement.

v16-17 The offering of the Son by the Father invokes theme of the Akedah, the binding of Isaac by Abraham, cf. Gen. 22:2, 12.

v17 Jesus' primary purpose is to fulfill the covenants made with Abraham, the Redemption of Israel. All of the negative things like Judgement towards Damnation are simply a result of people's choosing to ignore and avoid Jesus.

v18 The IV appends "which before was preached by the mouth of the holy prophets; for they testify of me" to the end of the verse. The IV presents Jesus as bolder about professing he is the Messiah than does the KJV, cp. 4:26 IV.

v19 Jesus rebukes Nicodemus and the Sanhedrin more sharply for rejecting him not because he was false, but because they love evil more, cp. D&C 93:39.

v20-21 Nicodemus caricatured (v. 20) against John Baptist (v. 21), cp. 8:45, 9:39, 15:22.

Agency in doing good or evil is emphasized. People are making deliberate choices in whether to choose good or evil. This is a well known concept among the LDS, but not so for those who espouse the doctrine of predestination.

22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. 23 And

John also was baptizing in AEnon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. 24 For John was not yet cast into prison.

25 Then there arose a question between [some] of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. 26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all [men] come to him. 27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. 28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I [must] decrease. 31 He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.

32 And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. 33 He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. 34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure [unto him]. 35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. 36 He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

v22-36 Jesus and his disciples are baptizing among the Jews (v. 22), as is John Baptist (v. 23-24). Some of John's disciples are jealous for him because Jesus is becoming more well known than he is (v. 25-26). John tells them that is the way Heaven intends it (v. 27) and he reminds them he told them himself that he was not the Messiah (v. 28). John defers to the Messiah (v. 29-30) because the Messiah is over all men (v. 31). He then explains to them the Messiah's teachings are those things which either give eternal life, or eternal judgement (v. 32-36).

v22-23 Jesus, his disciples, and John Baptist are all doing the same things, while Nicodemus is not.

v23-36 In sharp contrast to the politically powerful Nicodemus, here is the politically powerless John Baptist, the ideal disciple of Jesus Christ. John is baptizing (v. 23), he is perceiving the nature of the gospel and answering questions and eliminating contention, he is bearing witness of and deferring to the Messiah (v. 25-36). And, ultimately, John Baptist suffers death at the hands of the politically powerful.

v23 "Aenon", Hebrew for "springs" as in springs of water.

"Salim", derivative of "shalom", meaning "peace". As John typically only includes details for a purpose, it is likely he included these names for their spiritual applications. John is baptizing in what can be called "springs of peace" for those baptized there. All this while Nicodemus and the Sanhedrin are resorting to ingratiating and conspiracy by night in order to preserve their power.

v25 The question is not explicitly stated, but it may be inferred from v. 26 and John's answer in v. 27-28 what the question was. They were probably asking to which a person should resort for their ritual purification of baptism, to John or to Jesus?

v26 The IV emends the KJV "and all men come unto him" to "and he receiveth of all people who come unto him". The IV is emphasizing that Jesus is taking away disciples from John Baptist, and everyone else for that matter, because he receives all who come unto him.

v27-36 Contrast John Baptist (a true and selfless witness) against Nicodemus (a secularized self-promoter). In this discourse John Baptist is aware of the messianic symbolism of the bridegroom, a complex doctrine from the OT, and knows that Jesus is Messiah. Contrast this with Nicodemus who cannot even perceive the concept of being born "anothen", and will not admit Jesus is Messiah.

John Baptist's statements are also similar to Jesus' in this chapter, indicating they are both taught by the same source, the Spirit, where Nicodemus is largely ignorant.

v28 John Baptist defers to the Messiah as being the predicted forerunner per Mal. 3:1.

v29 John defers to Jesus in public in front of his disciples. Nicodemus visits Jesus at night in secret.

Note John Baptist's role in the this text diminishes as the chapters proceed, the author uses this to be symbolic of his deference to Jesus.

v31 John recognizes and perceives who he is with respect to the Messiah. The similar rhetoric in this verse also serves to establish who is being referred to in v. 12.

v32 This verse parallels the subject of v. 11.

v34 "giveth not the Spirit by measure", in other words, the Spirit is poured about abundantly, it is not doled out little by

little as with a ladle. Unlike other men, Jesus receives of the Spirit without limitation.

v36 "believeth not", a poor translation in the KJV. The New American Standard (NAS) renders it "does not obey", the Concordant Literal NT (CLNT) renders it "stubborn towards".

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