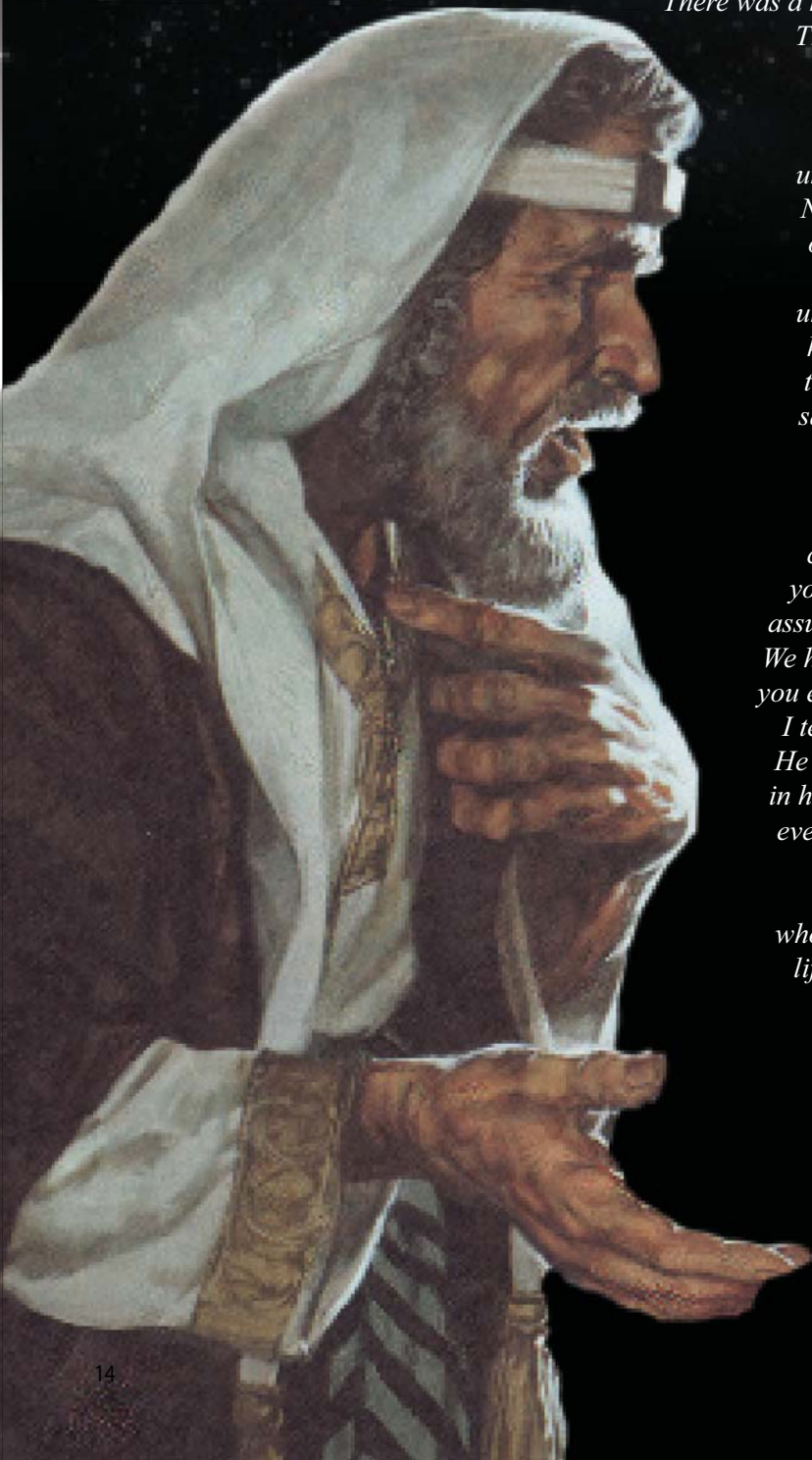


# What does



*There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." John 3:1-21*

# JESUS SAW to a very good man?

by Emad Massoud

One day a man named Nicodemus came at night to see our Lord. We learn from the Gospel story that he was a prominent elder, a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council. He came at night to keep this visit not only private, but also secret. Before we ask why he came to Jesus at night, we may wonder: ***What made him desire to see Jesus in the first place?***

This passage is found in the early chapters of the Gospel of John, which suggests that the visit took place at the beginning of our Lord's public ministry. We know from the Gospels that Christ started his ministry in Galilee, in the North of Israel. John 2 recounts Christ's first miracle at the wedding of Cana of Galilee. The reading of the Gospel of John shows that Jesus visited Jerusalem every Passover during the three years of His public ministry. This was the first of these visits. In short, Nicodemus could not have had the opportunity to get to know Jesus well. So what really made such a well-respected elder seek to meet with this 30 year old carpenter-turned-teacher? What wisdom is this wise Jewish leader seeking from this much younger "Rabbi"?

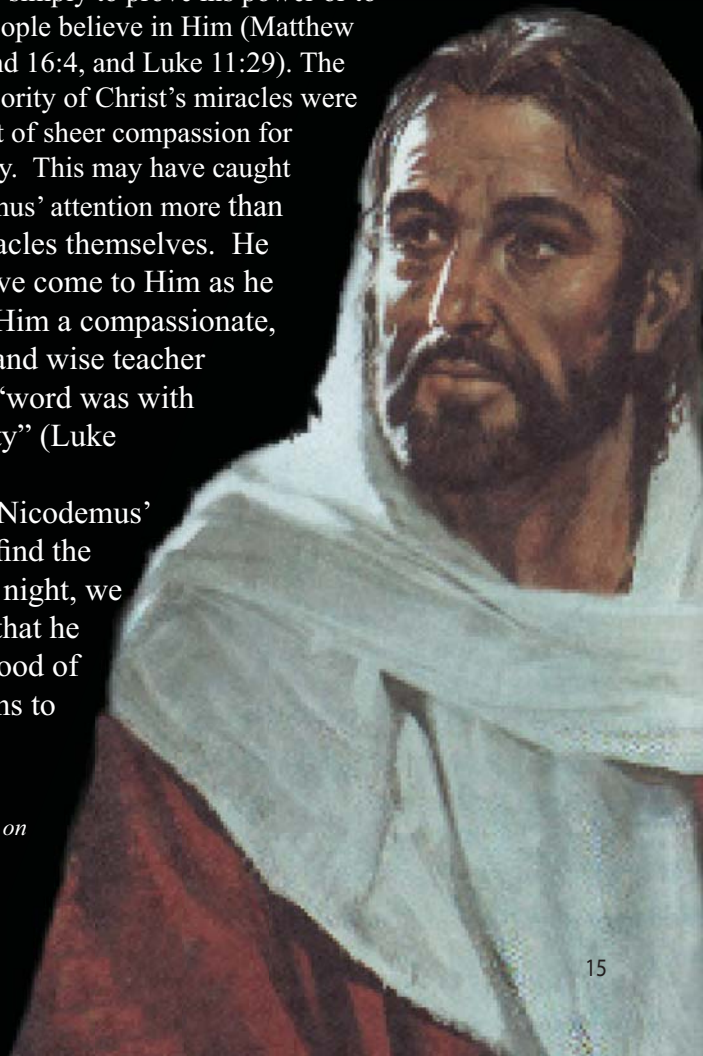
Nicodemus must have seen in Jesus something he hadn't found during his entire spiritual journey. We are told that he was a Pharisee. At the time of Christ there were several religious groups or sects. The two most prominent groups were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. This is in a way similar to what we might see today as liberal and conservative wings in Christianity. The Sadducees did not believe in angels or in eternal life. The Pharisees, on the contrary, believed in both. They were conservative in their beliefs. They adhered to the Word of God (even to excess), which they studied faithfully and knew well. They were also very strict with their lives (consequently many became judgmental). In many ways we can see that Christ ascribed doctrinally to the Pharisaic faith. He rebuked them not for their beliefs but for feeling justified through their deeds and becoming self-righteous, rather than seeking God's mercy (Luke 18:9-14). St. Paul was also a Pharisee. He believed in the resurrection and in angels and worked hard to abide by the strictest ways of life according to the traditions of his

fathers. It is interesting that Nicodemus, an elder Pharisee, recognized Jesus as the teacher who had answers to his many spiritual questions.

The passage tells us that Nicodemus saw in Jesus "a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). Nicodemus understood that no one could perform the miraculous signs Jesus was doing if God were not with him. By that time Jesus must have performed many miracles, which clearly could not be recorded in the gospels (John 20:30, 21:25). For Nicodemus these were a proof of the godliness of Jesus. It is interesting that when we read the gospels we see that our Lord not only avoided but also resented performing miracles simply to prove his power or to make people believe in Him (Matthew 12:39 and 16:4, and Luke 11:29). The vast majority of Christ's miracles were done out of sheer compassion for humanity. This may have caught Nicodemus' attention more than the miracles themselves. He may have come to Him as he saw in Him a compassionate, loving and wise teacher whose "word was with authority" (Luke 4:32).

Seeing Nicodemus' zeal to find the Lord at night, we expect that he had a flood of questions to ask.

*Article  
continued on  
p. 21*



# What does Jesus say to a good man?

Continued from p. 15

## ***We wonder however: What really was Nicodemus' initial question and why did he come to see Jesus at night?***

We can only guess what his initial question was since our Lord interrupted him after his brief introduction and responded to his greeting with a totally unrelated statement that came out of the blue. But did it really? We know that the Pharisees believed in eternal life, and it seems that Nicodemus was truly seeking eternal life like many who later asked Jesus the same question (Luke 10:25 and 18:18). He was, however, serious in his quest. He chose not to question Jesus in public but came by night since he did not want to show off nor test and embarrass Him. It is also quite possible he did not want to embarrass himself, as elder and leader of the council, by being seen seeking advice from this young controversial figure. It is as if Christ read his mind and wanted to spare him the pain of trying to find words to ask this difficult question.

## ***What did Jesus have to say to Nicodemus?***

Christ knew that Nicodemus had spent his life earnestly seeking to please God in order to inherit eternal life. Nicodemus, who knew the scriptures well, was no stranger to the concept of the Kingdom of God. In fact, like many godly Jews, he was awaiting the coming of the Kingdom of God. The real nature of this kingdom was totally obscure to them, however. Many were awaiting the Messiah, the son of David, who would deliver them from the oppression of the Romans and establish himself as monarch of the kingdom of God on the glorious throne of his father David.

Jesus knew that Nicodemus, a godly man, yearned, to see the Kingdom of God in his lifetime and to witness

the rule of justice and righteousness among his people. The way to see this kingdom, as Jesus described it, was quite incomprehensible to Nicodemus. Today we know that Jesus was speaking about baptism. However, Nicodemus was surprised at Christ's words and may have thought, "Boy, this is the weirdest thing I heard in my life!" or "Whoa! What is this man talking about?!" It seems that he could not hide his astonishment and maybe even his disapproval of what he heard. Could he have thought, "What kind of teacher is this?" or "Why did I come all this way to talk to this strange man?" We don't really know, and although it is unlikely he thought that way, it is possible. This would not have bothered Jesus, as he was probably trying to shock Nicodemus with a very strange concept, and it seems that He got what He wanted. Do you think Christ talks to us the same way today? Do you think He may sound weird or strange? Do you seek to go see Him at night and ask him your deepest questions?

## ***How can a man be born when he is old?***

This is certainly a very logical question to a most strange statement. It is certainly impossible. Without realizing, Nicodemus expressed the inability of mankind to bring about its own renewal. He was using the logic of a learned man and, in his wisdom, expressed our inability to bring about the one thing that would allow us to 'see the Kingdom of God'. This comes only from God: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13)

**Jesus answers:** This time Christ reworded his statement, after the “shock and awe” had already happened. He used a language Nicodemus was quite familiar with. He spoke of ritual washings for the sake of purification and baptism, which was practiced as a mark of repentance and a “new beginning with God”. He had probably seen many people going to be baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist. Who knows, he may have even wanted to go himself. Nicodemus could understand that Christ was talking about a new beginning with God, but he had never heard of rebirth through water and the Spirit. This really brought a new dimension to the conversation. *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* (John 3:6) This was a totally new concept for Nicodemus. Jesus here says that people born by natural procreation are not capable of entering the Kingdom of God, only “spiritual beings” can. Just as in natural birth a baby emerges from its mother’s body, in spiritual birth we are born, a new creation, from above. We cannot understand exactly how this happens, but we surely see the fruit of it in the lives of the believers. In the same manner that we cannot see the wind but we certainly recognize its presence.

### ***How can this be?***

Still baffled and maybe confused, Nicodemus asks for more clarification. It is comforting to witness such a conversation and to see an honest man’s eagerness to understand the truth.

**An unbelievable declaration:** Jesus’ answer to Nicodemus’ quest for the truth was an unveiling of His real identity as the incarnate Son of God.

*“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”* (John 3:13) As the only eyewitness of the heavenly places, Christ introduces his visitor to God’s inconceivable love for mankind and the cost He incurred to make this new birth possible for all who seek to enter the kingdom of heaven.

**Moses’ bronze snake:** *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:14-15) In order to prepare Nicodemus to hear the good news of God’s wonderful plan for him, our Lord reminded him of a story from the scripture he knew all too well: *“Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.” So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”* (Numbers 21:4-9)

The gist of the story is that the people rebelled unjustifiably against God shortly after He led them into victory over the Canaanite King of Arad. As a consequence, they were attacked by deadly desert snakes. Facing inescapable death, they begged for mercy. Their salvation came from God in the form of a bronze representation of the same deadly snake. All the dying person needed in order to live was to go and look at the bronze snake, in other words, they needed to trust in the healing power of the Lord.

Although Nicodemus knew the story well, like many Jews until this day, he must have simply taken it as a simple manifestation of God's mercy on his rebellious but beloved chosen people. Not in his wildest dreams would he have viewed it as foretelling the real story of God's love for him and for all mankind. Saint Paul, another Pharisee, made this wonderful discovery after it had been revealed to him: *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* (2 Corinthians 5:21)

**For God so loved the world:** Now Jesus reminds Nicodemus that the story of the bronze serpent was a deep expression of God's love and compassion. The real love of God, however will be fully manifested in the sacrificial death of God's only Son on the cross so that whoever believes in Him shall be saved from the inevitable fate of fallen humanity and have eternal life, the same eternal life which Nicodemus has been seeking all along. He learned though that this will not come through his self-righteous endeavors, since, like the people who were dying in the desert, he has no power to save himself. It is only through humbling himself before God and receiving His precious, yet free gift of love, that he can be given a new lease on life. His deeds will therefore be the fruits of his new birth from up high and will testify to his faith. Hence

his salvation can be completed.

We know from reading St. John's gospel that Nicodemus followed Jesus till the end. He defended Him before the High priest and the Pharisees (John 7:50-51) and helped in His burial with Joseph of Arimathea after He died on the Cross (John 19:38-40). There is no doubt that he had a flashback of this unforgettable encounter with the Savior while he was hurrying to put a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes on His body before wrapping Him and putting Him in the tomb. It is quite possible that, in the midst of all this, he shared the story, which he had kept to himself for fear of losing his prestigious place in the synagogue, with John, the only disciple who followed Jesus to the cross.

**Reader take note, this is the verdict:** *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."* (John 3:19-21)

The message of Christ comes with a stern warning. Throughout history people have frequently turned away from the Truth because they did not want God to change their lives. It is not uncommon that people may see the Light and turn their face away for fear of being exposed. Christ tells us today that, unless we allow His light to expose us to Him, we will remain in darkness. We need to trust that His light will cleanse us and enlighten us so we can see His face. He is the only one who has *"come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10)