

The Gospel According to

SAINT MATTHEW

SAINT MARK

SAINT LUKE

SAINT JOHN

NOTHING RECORDED	NOTHING RECORDED	NOTHING RECORDED	CHAPTER 3, VERSES 1-21
			<p>3:1 - There was a man of the Pharisees¹, named Nicodemus², a ruler³ of the Jews⁴.</p> <p>3:2 - The same came⁵ to Jesus by night⁶, and said unto him, Rabbi⁷, we know⁸ that thou art a teacher⁹ come from God¹⁰: for no man¹¹ can do these miracles¹² that thou doest¹³, except God be with him¹⁴.</p> <p>3:3 - Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily¹⁵, verily¹⁵, I say unto thee, Except¹⁶ a man¹⁷ be born¹⁸ again¹⁹, he cannot see²⁰ the kingdom of God²¹.</p> <p>3:4 - Nicodemus² saith unto him, How²² can a man¹⁷ be born¹⁸ when he is old²³? can he enter²⁴ the second time²⁵ into his mother's womb²⁶, and be born¹⁸?</p> <p>3:5 - Jesus answered²⁷, Verily¹⁵, verily¹⁵, I say unto thee, Except¹⁶ a man¹⁷ be born¹⁸ of water²⁸ and of the Spirit²⁹, he cannot enter³⁰ into the kingdom of God²¹.</p> <p>3:6 - That which is born¹⁸ of the flesh³¹ is flesh³¹; and that which is born¹⁸ of the Spirit²⁹ is spirit²⁹.</p> <p>3:7 - Marvel not³² that I said unto thee, Ye must³³ be born¹⁸ again¹⁹.</p> <p>3:8 - The wind³⁴ bloweth³⁵ where it listeth³⁶, and thou hearest³⁷ the sound³⁸ thereof, but canst not tell³⁹ whence it cometh⁴⁰, and whither it goeth⁴¹: so is every one⁴² that is born¹⁸ of the Spirit²⁹.</p> <p>3:9 - Nicodemus² answered and said unto him, How can these things be⁴³?</p> <p>3:10 - Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou⁴⁴ a master⁴⁵ of Israel⁴⁶, and knowest not these things⁴⁷?</p> <p>3:11 - Verily¹⁵, verily¹⁵, I say unto thee, We speak⁴⁸ that we do know⁴⁹, and testify⁵⁰ that we have seen⁵¹; and ye receive not⁵² our witness⁵³.</p> <p>3:12 - If I have told you⁵⁵ earthly things⁵⁴, and ye believe⁵⁶ not⁵², how shall ye believe⁵⁶, if I tell you of heavenly things⁵⁷?</p> <p>3:13 - And no man hath ascended up to heaven⁵⁸, but he that came down from heaven⁵⁹, even the Son of man⁶⁰ which is in heaven⁶¹.</p> <p>3:14 - And as Moses⁶² lifted up⁶³ the serpent⁶⁴ in the wilderness⁶⁵, even so must⁶⁶ the Son of man⁶⁰ be lifted up⁶³:</p> <p>3:15 - That whosoever believeth in him⁶⁷ should not perish⁶⁸, but have eternal life⁶⁹.</p> <p>3:16 - For God⁷⁰ so loved⁷¹ the world⁷², that he gave⁷³ his only begotten Son⁷⁴, that whosoever believeth in him⁶⁷ should not perish⁶⁸, but have everlasting life⁶⁹.</p> <p>3:17 - For God⁷⁰ sent not⁷⁵ his Son⁷⁶ into the world⁷² to condemn⁷⁷ the world⁷²; but that the world⁷² through him⁷⁸ might be saved⁷⁹.</p>

3:18 - He that believeth⁸⁰ on him is not⁸¹ condemned: but he that believeth⁸⁰ not⁸² is condemned⁸¹ already⁸³, because he hath not believed⁸⁴ in the name⁸⁵ of the only begotten Son of God⁸⁶.

3:19 - And this is the condemnation⁸⁷, that light⁸⁸ is come into the world⁷², and men loved darkness⁸⁹ rather⁹⁰ than light⁸⁸, because their deeds were evil⁹¹.

3:20 - For every one that doeth evil⁹² hateth⁹³ the light⁸⁸, neither cometh to the light⁸⁸, lest his deeds should be reproved⁹⁴.

3:21 - But he that doeth truth⁹⁵ cometh to the light⁸⁸, that his deeds may be made manifest⁹⁶, that they are wrought⁹⁷ in God.

CHRONOLOGY: Between 07 April 27CE and 15 April 27CE

LOCATION: Jerusalem or in near vicinity of Jerusalem

COMMENTARY: Jesus has just began His formal ministry. He has quickly gained a reputation among the people. The people are talking about his magnificent miracles and profound teachings. He has already drawn the attention of the Jewish leaders. We know that many of the Jewish leaders are opposed to Jesus, even this early on. Even so, there are some Jewish leaders who are intrigued by the young Galilean. One such leader was a man name Nicodemus. He sat on the Great Sanhedrin, as one of its elite 70 member governing counsel. He would have been rich, powerful, and of great reputation. It is no surprise that he comes to find the Savior during the night hours. Under the cover of night, he came privately to meet with the Savior and satisfy his curiosity. The Savior was welcoming. But quickly introduces Nicodemus to the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel and instructs Nicodemus of the need for spiritual rebirth. Nicodemus struggles to comprehend. Confused by a life time of apostate teachings, and corrupt religion, Nicodemus is confused by the Savior's simple teachings. Jesus tells Nicodemus that the things of heaven cannot be understood with the knowledge of this world. To understand the things of Heaven, one must look to heaven. Jesus recounts the story of Moses and the Brazen Serpent. He testifies that He is the Son of God. He explains His mission to Nicodemus, and teaches him the fundamentals of salvation. He explains that His Father loves the world so much that He sent His only begotten Son, that all who believe in Him might be saved.

FOOTNOTES:

1- **a man of the Pharisees** – The word "Pharisee" is translated from the Greek word "Φαρισαῖος" or "Pharisaios". The Greek word is a name for a Jewish religious sect at the time of Jesus. It is a transliteration of the Hebrew word "פְּרִישִׁי" or "parash" The Hebrew word means to make distinct, declare, distinguish or separate.

To better understand who and what a Pharisee is, it would make sense to look at their beginning. "The first appearance of the Pharisees, in the second century BC, shows them already as an organized group. The first mention of them is in the two books of Maccabees, and I Mac. 2.42 calls them 'a company of Assideai' who were mighty men of Israel, even all such as were voluntarily devoted unto the Law.'" (Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period, Joachim Jeremias, page 247). The Pharisees appeared to begin as a scholastic group rather than a political one. Of course, this is somewhat confusing since the Jewish political structure was the religious structure as well. Even so, the Pharisees started with spiritual aspirations. The Pharisees were a community of believers in the law. "According to the later interpretation which the Midrash puts on the term 'holy community', it was claimed that this meant the two teachers R. Jose b. Mesullam and R. Simeon b. Menasiah, who lived about AD 180, probably in Sepphoris. Both were said to have dedicated a third of each day to study, a third to prayer and a third to manual work, and so were given the epithet 'holy community' (ibid.)" (Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period, Joachim Jeremias, page 247).

The original Pharisees believed that there needed to be a revival in the Jewish State of spirituality, the study and understanding of the Law, and practice of the Law in the day to day life of the covenant people. Becoming a Pharisee was not a simple act. One didn't just join. One made application, and then demonstrated ability to follow the pattern established by the "community" of Pharisees. This often took years. Once qualified, the community would offer acceptance and the candidate became part of the "community" through a sacred pledge. Jeremias wrote, "The Pharisaic communities of Jerusalem, several of which are known as we have seen, had strict rules of admission, which again shows their character as a closed society. Before admission there was a period of probation, one month or one year, during the course of which the postulant had to prove his ability to follow the ritual laws. Josephus for example tells us how he submitted himself successively the Pharisaic, to Sadducean and to Essene laws, and finally at the age of nineteen chose the Pharisees (Vita ioff.). This specific example confirms that there was a probationary period before admission to a Pharisaic community. Once this period was over, the candidate committed himself to observe the rules of the community. In the earlier period, which is the only time to concern us here, this pledge was taken before a member who was a scribe. The new member of the community bound himself to observe the Pharisaic laws on purity and tithes.

The Pharisee



Henceforward the Pharisee was a member of an association. These associations had their leaders (Ant. 15.370; BJ 2 . 4 1 1 ; Luke i4.iff.: 'a chief Pharisee', et passim) and their assemblies (Matt. 22.15 and par.; cf. 12.14; 22.41); these last it seems, were linked with a common meal, particularly on Friday evening at the beginning of the sabbath (b. Erub. 85b, see n. 25). It seems that Pharisaic associations sometimes made a public appearance, e.g. to express condolences or to take part in festal occasions (p. 249). They had their own internal code of rules, and could agree among other things on the expulsion of a member (b. Bekh. 31a Bar.)." (Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period, Joachim Jeremias, pages 250-251).



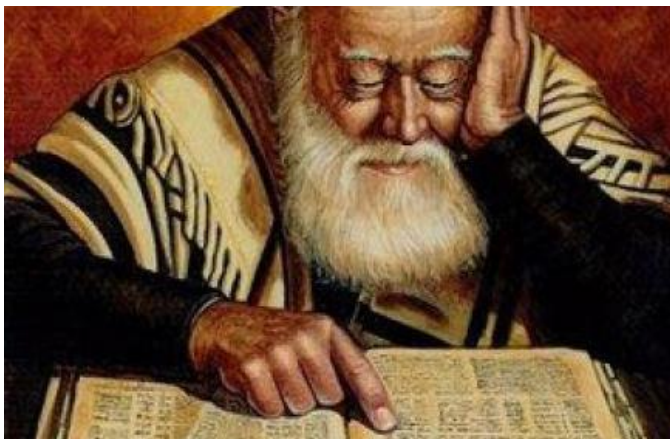
Over time, the Pharisees grew in number, though it is believed that they never numbered greater than 6,000 members. Therefore, it was an elite group. They developed an organizational structure outside of the Priesthood, an indication that they were apostate. Their structure resembled a club or influential organization. Jeremias clarified, "As for the administration, there was at the head of each 'camp' a supervisor (mebaqqer) who had to be between thirty and fifty years old (CD xiv.8f.). He was a scribe, who could inform on the exact meaning of the Law (xiii.yf.). Transgressions had to be reported to him (ix.i8f., 22). He alone had the right to admit a candidate to the community (xii.i2f.); he examined and classified the new recruits (xiii. 1 if.; cf. xv.8.11). Moreover he was the spiritual father of the community; he had 'pity on them like a father upon his sons' (xiii.9). His dealings with the community were pictured as those of a shepherd with his sheep (ibid.); and that is why he took care that no one in the community was oppressed or beaten, in that he loosed 'all the fetters that tie them (xiii.io; with 'bind' and 'loose' cf. Matt. 16.19). He, with the judges, received gifts for charity from the community and saw to their distribution (xiv.13)." (Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period, Joachim Jeremias, pages 260-261). Though they professed an adherence to the law and spirituality, they lacked an authorized Priesthood leader.

Like most apostate groups, the Pharisees had mingled truths into their organization. They believed in pray, and therefore assigned set times. They believed in gathering often, so they created pomp and circumstance in their going. "We must take into account too the customs of life and the traditions of the 'holy community', in particular their

faithful observance of fixed times for prayer, which is universally praised (Eccles. R. 9.7 on 9.9, Son. 237; b. Ber. 9b; see p. 248 n. 9); we must compare this with the fact that in the first century AD the observance of fixed hours of prayer was recognized as a distinctive sign of a Pharisee. All this leads inevitably to the conclusion that in all probability the 'holy community of Jerusalem' was a Pharisaic community in the Holy City in the first century AD. It is the period before the destruction of the Temple, too, which is suggested by the following Tosephta: 'R. Eleazar b. Zadoq said: This is the custom of the haburot [communities] in Jerusalem: some [of the members of a haburdh] go to a betrothal feast, others to a wedding feast, others to a feast of circumcision, others to a gathering of bones [for the purpose of final burial]; the first go to a joyful feast, the others to a house of mourning' (T. Meg. iv.15; Semahot xii)." (Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period, Joachim Jeremias, page 249). It was apparently important for the Pharisees to be seen by the populace, displaying the signs of their devotion and perceived righteousness.

The Pharisees contained many different and divers members, though they were all required to be sons of the covenant of Abraham. There were members who were lay men, but this was not the norm. It was far more likely that a Pharisee was, by genealogical rights and occupation, a Scribe or a Priest. "We must therefore make a distinction between scribes and Pharisees, and reject the completely false idea that the Pharisees were the same as the scribes. One point only is true: that the leaders and influential members of Pharisaic communities were scribes. Tradition tells us that the following scribes belonged to a Pharisaic community or ruled their lives according to Pharisaic laws: before 162 BC, Jose b. Joezer (M. Hag. ii.7); about 50 BC Abtalion and Shemaiah (Ant. 15.3 and 370); about 20 BC perhaps Hillel; 3 2 about AD 30, in the time of Jesus and the early Christian Church, Nicodemus (John 3.iff.)." (Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period, Joachim Jeremias, pages 254-255). The scribes were equivalent to religious lawyers. They were experts in the written law. They knew the loopholes, and the intricate details of the regulations of the scriptures. "It was the scribes who worked out these regulations; it was the Pharisees who dedicated their lives to keeping them. Obviously, however misguided a man might be, he must be desperately in earnest if he proposed to undertake obedience to every one of the thousands of rules. That is precisely what the Pharisees did. The name Pharisee means the Separated One; and the Pharisees were those who had separated themselves from all ordinary life in order to keep every detail of the law of the scribes." (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 122-123). The Priests worked out the ordinances and sacrifices contained in the scriptures. They were the officiators and in some respects the judges of Israel. "The priests took part to a great extent in the Pharisaic movement, and this is explained by the fact that this movement had its origin in the Temple. It sought to raise to the level of a general norm the practice of purity laws even among non-priestly folk, those laws which need only be enforced for priests." (Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period, Joachim Jeremias, page 257).

Interestingly, the Pharisees wore aprons as part of their robes. They were symbols of their authority. Unfortunately, much of the symbols of righteous were displayed by the Pharisees to show their piety and greatness. Jeremias wrote, "The conscientiousness of the members of the priesthood in matters of Pharisaic demands on purity is shown very informatively in the following quotation from M. Hag. ii.7: Jose b. Joezer [before 162 BC] was the most pious in the priesthood, yet for them that ate of Hallowed Things his apron counted as suffering midrds uncleanness. Johanan b. Gudgeda [about AD 40] always ate [his common food] in accordance with [the rules governing] the cleanness of Hallowed Things, yet for them that occupied themselves with the sin offering water his apron counted as suffering midrds uncleanness.'" (Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period, Joachim Jeremias, page 257).



Regardless of how they started, by the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were a prideful, and consequently wicked group of men. They sought their own gain, authority, and personal praise. They were self proclaimed spiritual giants, but in reality they were spiritually impotent. The country was so apostate, that the Pharisees might have been the best source of enlightenment to the people. Sadly, "Nicodemus was a Pharisee. In many ways the Pharisees were the best people in the whole country. There were never more than 6,000 of them; they were what was known as a chaburah, or brotherhood. They entered into this brotherhood by taking a pledge in front of three witnesses that they would spend all their lives observing every detail of the scribal law." (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 120).

It seems almost out of character for a Pharisee to approach a non-member of the holy community for any kind of spiritual guidance. Nicodemus was more than a Pharisee, he was a member of the ruling class and sat on the great and governing Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. This would make his visit to Jesus even more unlikely. One must consider that all Pharisees were not created equal. Some were more pious than other. Some were more open to the workings of the spirit. Farrar said, **"A CASTE or a sect may consist for the most part of haughty fanatics and obstinate bigots, but it will be strange indeed if there are to be found among them no exceptions to the general characteristics; strange if honest, candor, sensibility, are utterly dead among them all. Even among rulers, scribes, Pharisees, and wealthy members of the Sanhedrin, Christ found believers and followers. The earliest and most remarkable of these was Nicodemus, a rich man, a ruler, a Pharisee, and a member of the Sanhedrin."** (The Story of a Beautiful Life: Farrar's Life of Christ, The New 20th Century Edition, 1900, Canon Farrar, D.D., F.R.S., page 143).

- 2- **Nicodemus** – The name "Nicodemus" is translated from the Greek word "Νικόδημος" or "Nikodēmos". The name is Greek in origin, and means "conqueror". **"There is no reason to regard him as purely symbolic. 'Nicodemus' was a Greek name that was not unusual among the Jews as 'Naqdimon'. Talbab Taaniith 20a knows of a Naqdimon ben Gurion (or Bunai) who was a wealthy and generous man in Jerusalem in the years before 70; he was probably not the Nicodemus of John."** (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., pages 129-130).

We know very little about the man named Nicodemus. We do not know what year he was born, or where. We know that he was over 30 years of age at the time of Jesus, probably closer to 50. We don't know the name of his parents, or his genealogical line, which would have been imperative to a Jew at the time of Jesus. We surmise that it was an esteemed line because of his position. We don't know the occupation taught to him of his father, or how he arrived at the position of ruler, and a Pharisee. We know only the following:

- He was a son of the Covenant, and from a distinguished Jewish family. We know this because no man could ascend to the position of ruler without a noble pedigree. Barclay wrote, **"It may well be that Nicodemus belonged to a distinguished Jewish family."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 123).
- He underwent the initiation, and study required to be a Pharisee. One would then assume that he was very well versed in the scriptures. He would have spent years studying with no less than a third of his day in the study of Holy Scripture. One needed to be at least 19 years old to become a Pharisee, but no younger than 30 years old to be a Rabbi. There is a good possibility that Nicodemus had spent over a decade of intense study by the time he approached Jesus. He was definitely learned.
- He had committed to the Pharisees pledge, and was approved by the head of the "Holy Community". This was a personal pledge, before three judges, and to the Semites your word was your bond. A Semite would rather die than break his word. Nicodemus had given his word to follow the Pharisees code of living. This was serious. **"Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and it is astonishing that a man who regarded goodness in that light and who had given himself to that kind of life in the conviction that he was pleasing God should wish to talk to Jesus as all."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 123).
- He was one of the seventy rulers of the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. **"Nicodemus was a puzzled man, a man with many honours and yet with something lacking in his life. He came to Jesus for a talk so that somehow in the darkness of the night he might find light."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 124). Even with great earthly power, Nicodemus was found wanting.
- He was wealthy. **"Nicodemus must have been wealthy. When Jesus died Nicodemus brought for his body 'a mixture of myrrh and aloes about an hundred pound weight' (John 19:39), and only a wealthy man could have brought that."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 120).
- He was a man of great reputation and status. **"The fact that Nicodemus came to Jesus alone and by night would suggest that he was sensitive about his reputation."** (The Days of the Living Christ: Volume 1, W. Cleon Skousen, page 137).
- Nicodemus showed signs of belief in Jesus Christ, but lacked the faith to bring forth the fruits of conversion. Sadly, he was probably like so many today. There are many, even in the church, who believe but lack the conviction to let go of the things of this world and follow the master. They know the church is true, but don't have time to serve. They know the doctrines, but are not willing to make all the sacrifices necessary to keep them. Elder Talmage wrote, **"The course followed by this man evidences at once that he really believed in Jesus as one sent of God, and that his belief failed of development into a condition of true faith, which, had it but been realized, might have led to a life of devoted service in the Master's cause. When at a later stage than that of his interview with Christ the chief priests and Pharisees upbraided the officers whom they had sent to take Jesus into custody and who returned to report their failure, Nicodemus, one of the council, ventured to mildly expostulate against the murderous determination of the rulers, by stating a general proposition in interrogative form: "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth?" He was answered by his colleagues with contempt, and appears to have abandoned his well-intended effort (John 7:50-53; read preceding verses 30-49). We next hear of him bringing a costly contribution of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred-weight, to be used in the burial of Christ's then crucified body; but even in this deed of liberality and devotion, in which his sincerity of purpose cannot well be questioned, he had been preceded by Joseph of Arimathea, a man of rank, who had boldly asked for and secured the body for reverent burial (John 19:38-42). Nevertheless Nicodemus did more than did most of his believing associates among the noble and great ones; and to him let all due credit be given; he will not fail of his reward."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, pages 140-141).



- Nicodemus was present at the Savior's death. He bought oils and aloes to anoint the Savior's lifeless body. **"And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight."** (John 19:39). Tradition says that Nicodemus was instrumental in getting the Roman's to release his body, and the he and Joseph of Arimathea took Christ down from the cross. **"Later, when officers of that body were reporting upon their failure to take Jesus into custody, it was Nicodemus who queried his colleagues of the Sanhedrin by saying: 'Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?'"** (John 7:30-39, 50-53)." (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Volume 1: The Gospels, Bruce R. McConkie, page 141). Nicodemus may have lacked the conviction to become the disciple he could have been, but there was a belief in his heart that apparently worked within him.
- We do not know if Nicodemus ever received baptism as the Lord instructed. **"To a limited extent this ruler of the Jews manifested faith in Christ, but as far as the New Testament record reveals, he never quite attained that state of valiant devotion which would classify him as a true disciple... Whether he himself was ever born of water and of the Spirit remains unknown."** (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Volume 1: The Gospels, Bruce R. McConkie, page 141). Elder Talmage implies that Nicodemus never fully converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ. He said, **"Later mention of Nicodemus tends to confirm the estimate of the man as he appears in this meeting with Jesus--that of one who was conscious of a belief in the Christ, but whose belief was never developed into such genuine and virile faith as would impel to acceptance and compliance irrespective of cost or consequence."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 136).
- Nicodemus was not a forward and aggression personality. He appears to be a kind and quite soul. **"From the Gospel-history we know him to have been cautious by nature and education, and timid of character."** (The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Volume 1, Alfred Edersheim, page 381).

On the surface, it would appear that the meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus was private, and somewhat secluded. The question then arises, how did John get the story in such detail to include it in his gospel account. Many speculate that John was present. Others speculate that the Savior shared the story with John in great detail. Elder Talmage taught that John was merely informed of the events. He wrote, **"If Jesus and Nicodemus were the only persons present at the interview, John, the writer, must have been informed thereof by one of the two. As John was one of the early disciples, afterward one of the apostles, and as he was distinguished in the apostolic company by his close personal companionship with the Lord, it is highly probable that he heard the account from the lips of Jesus. It was evidently John's purpose to record the great lesson of the occasion rather than to tell the circumstantial story. The record begins and ends with equal abruptness; unimportant incidents are omitted; every line is of significance; the writer fully realized the deep import of his subject and treated it accordingly."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 136). Elder McConkie taught otherwise. He taught, **"This interview, at which presumably John and others were present, took place at night, away from the prying eyes of other members of the Sanhedrin."** (The Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, Volume 1: The Gospels, Bruce R. McConkie, page 141).

3- **a ruler** – The word "ruler" is translated from the Greek word " ἄρχων " or "archōn". It means a ruler, commander, chief or leader. It can be used for a magistrate or a ruler of a nation. That would make him a member of the Sanhedrin.

The word "Sanhedrin" is derived from the Greek word "Sunedrin"; which means "a council-chamber". We commonly, but incorrectly, transliterate the Greek word as "Sanhedrin". One must understand that there was local, and smaller Sanhedrins, and then there was the Great Sanhedrin. Each town, of reasonable size, assembled a "council-chamber" or "Sanhedrin" to manage the affairs of their town. The size of the smaller Sanhedrins depended on the size of the town. The smaller, local Sanhedrins typically met at the gates of the city, the home of its chief member or a building dedicated for their meeting. The Talmud also mentions a lesser Sanhedrin of twenty-three members in every city in Palestine in which were not less than 120 householders. The Great Sanhedrin was the supreme council of the Jewish people, in all the land and for Jews in every nation, at the time of Christ and earlier.

The Sanhedrin was deeply rooted in the Mishnah (the oral law), and traces back Biblically to the seventy elders whom Moses was directed, by the Lord (Numbers 11:16-17), to assist with in the governing of the Israelites. Even so, this tribunal or council appears to have been temporary, and did not continue to exist after the Israelites had entered the promised land. There is a lack of definitive historical facts needed to establish that the Sanhedrin existed in promised land after Moses was translated. It can only be said, in general, that the Greek form of the name seems to point to a period after the Macedonian or Greek rule of Palestine. From the few incidental mentions in the New Testament, we gather that the re-assembled, post Greece, Sanhedrin consisted of chief priests, or the heads of the twenty-four classes into which the priests were divided, elders, men of age and experience, and scribes, lawyers, or those learned in the Jewish law (Matthew 26:57; 26:59; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66; Acts 5:21). Zondervan records, **"The Talmud connects the Sanhedrin with Moses' 70 elders, then with the alleged Great Synagogue of Ezra's time; but the truth is that the origin of the Sanhedrin is unknown, and there is no historical evidence for its existence before the Greek period. During the reign of the Hellenistic kings Palestine was practically under home rule, and was governed by an aristocratic council of elders which was presided over by the hereditary high priest. The council was called 'Gerousia', which always signifies an aristocratic body. This later developed into the Sanhedrin. During most of the Roman period the internal government of the country was practically in its hands, and its influence was recognized even in the Diaspora. After the death of Herod the Great, however, during the reign of Archelaus and the Roman procurators, the civil authority of the Sanhedrin was probably restricted to Judaea proper, which is very likely the reason why it had no judicial authority over our Lord so long as He remained in Galilee. The Sanhedrin was abolished after the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70)."** (The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, General Editor – Merrill C. Tenney, page 752).



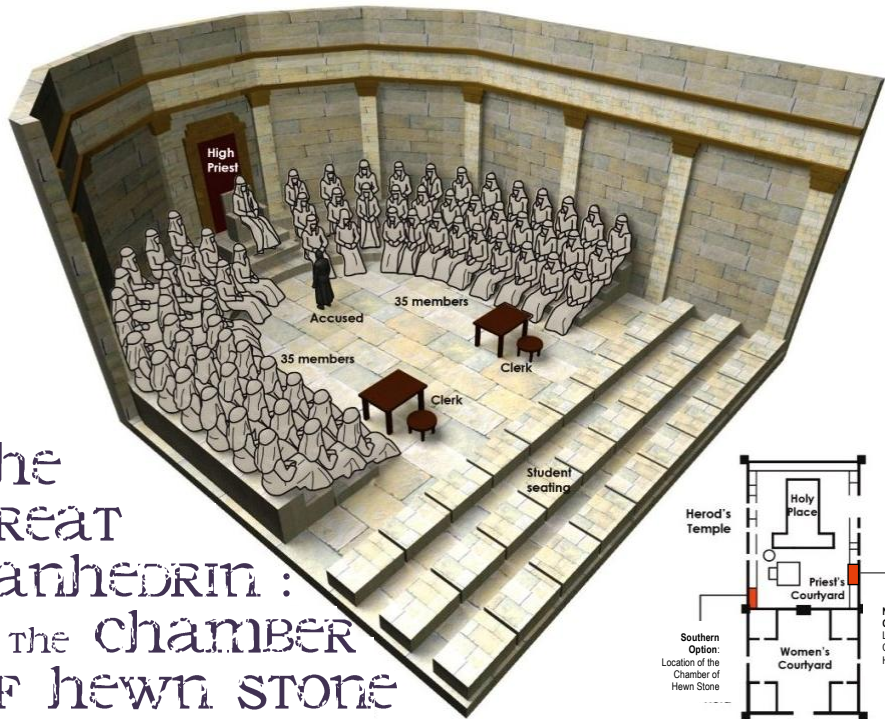
At the time of Jesus, the Sanhedrin consisted of 72 members, though it was traditionally 71. Zondervan records, **"The Sanhedrin was composed of 70 members, plus the president, who was the high priest. Nothing is known as to the way in which vacancies were filled. The members probably held office for life, and successors were likely appointed either by the existing members themselves or by the supreme political authorities (Herod and the Romans).**

Since only pure-blooded Jews were eligible for the office of judge in a criminal court, the same principle was probably followed in the case of the Sanhedrin. New members were formally admitted by the ceremony of the laying on of hands." (The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, General Editor – Merrill C. Tenney, page 752). The presiding member of this body was called the "nasi", and occupied a position that should have been held by the "prophet" and presiding high priest. In their apostate condition, the "nasi" was selected by government appointment. Herod was instrumental in placing wicked men in the position of "nasi". The Jews believed that the "nasi" was chosen for his eminence in worth and wisdom. The "nasi" was added to the government when distrust emerged with the High Priest. Technically, and according to the law, the 'Nasi' was not a member of the council. Traditionally, the presiding High Priest led the Sanhedrin. At the time of Jesus, the High Priest occupied a position of second seat. We might consider him the vice-president of the Sanhedrin. In the Talmud, he was called the "Av-beit-din", or the "father of the house of judgment", and he sat at the right hand of the "nasi". Zondervan explains, "Besides the president, there were also a vice-president, called the 'head or father of the house of judgment'; and another important official, whose business it was, in all probability, to assist in the declaration of the law. There were also two or three secretaries, and other subordinate officials, or which 'constables' and 'servants of the high priests' are mentioned in the New Testament." (The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, General Editor – Merrill C. Tenney, page 752).

Most believe that the Great Sanhedrin met in a large stone hall just off the Court of the Priests, in the inner Temple precinct. The hall was called the "Chamber of Hewn Stone" or "Gazzith". Most scholars place the "Gazzith" just north of the Temple itself, while others place it on the southern retaining wall. Some believe that the Sanhedrin moved out of the Chamber of Hewn Stone during the time of Christ and relocated to the temple courts near the market. "Later, the place of meeting was somewhere in the court of the Gentiles, although they were not confined to it." (The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, General Editor – Merrill C. Tenney, page 753).

While in session, the Sanhedrin sat in the form of half-circle, with the "Nasi" and "Av beit din" seated on the stand at the head of its 70 members. These were the rulers of Israel. They sat in positions of great power and authority. With that power and authority, they could bring to pass much good, or they could take personal advantage for wealth, praise and prestige. Many of the council members of Jesus' time chose the latter. "They could meet on any day except the Sabbath and holy days, and they met from the time of the offering of the daily morning sacrifice till that of the evening sacrifice. The meetings were conducted according to strict rules and were enlivened by stirring debates. Twenty-three members formed a quorum. While a bare majority might acquit, a majority of two was necessary to secure condemnation, although if all 71 members were present, a majority of one was decisive on either side. To avoid any hasty condemnation, where life was involved judgment was passed the same day only when it was a judgment of acquittal. If it was a judgment of condemnation, it might not be passed till the day after. For this reason, cases involving capital punishment were not tried on a Friday or on any day before a feast. A herald went before the condemned one as he was led to execution, and cried out: 'So-and-so has been found guilty of death. If anyone knows anything to clear him, let him come forward and declare it'." (The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, General Editor – Merrill C. Tenney, page 753).

The GREAT Sanhedrin : in the Chamber OF hewn stone



The last uncontested Av Beth Din in Jewish tradition is "Menahem the Essene" who abdicated to "serve the King" in 20CE. Some Jews recognized the apostasy of their leaders. Caiaphas was set to be next Av Beth Din but was opposed by the House of Shammai until Gamaliel became Nasi. Talmudic Judaism does not recognize any Av Beit Din after Menachem.

The Gospel of John refers to Nicodemus as a ruler. "Literally 'a ruler'. Nicodemus almost certainly belonged to the highest governing body of the Jewish people composed of priests (Sadducees), scribes (Pharisees), and lay elders of the aristocracy. Its seventy members were presided over by the high priests." (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 130). Nicodemus was apparently one of the elite members of the Great Sanhedrin. He would have been very well known. He would have been a man of great influence and power. His was a life-long position of prestige and wealth. Had the Roman's not conquered Palestine, the Sanhedrin would have been the supreme rule. Barclay writes, "Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews. The word is archon. That is to say that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a court of seventy members and was the supreme court of the Jews. Of course under the Romans its powers were more limited than once they had been; but they were still extensive. In particular the Sanhedrin had religious jurisdiction over every Jew in the world; and one of its duties was to examine and deal with anyone suspected of being a false prophet." (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, page 123).

4- **of the Jews** – The word "Jews" is translated from the Greek word "Ἰουδαῖος" or "Ioudaios". It means Jewish, as in belonging to the Jewish nation. It can also mean Jewish, as in by birth, origin or religion. The term "Jews" is such a broad term it is difficult to know exactly what John is referring to when he uses the term. Elder Talmage claries, "Bearing in mind that the expression "the Jews" is very commonly used by the author of the fourth Gospel to designate the officials or rulers among the people..." (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 141).

5- **The same came** – The term "the same" is translated from the Greek word "οὗτος" or "houtos". It means this, these, etc. The word "came" is translated from the Greek word "ἔρχομαι" or "erchomai". It means for a person to come from one place to another.

The fact that Nicodemus came to the Savior was a bold move, regardless of his motives. "We can scarcely realise the difficulties which he had to overcome. It must have been a mighty power of conviction, to break down prejudice so far as to lead this old Sanhedrist to acknowledge a Galilean, untrained in the Schools, as a Teacher come from God, and to repair to Him for direction on, perhaps, the most delicate and important point in Jewish theology. But, even so, we cannot wonder that he should have



wished to shroud his first visit in the utmost possible secrecy. It was a most compromising step for a Sanhedrist to take." (The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Volume 1, Alfred Edersheim, page 381).

Many have given much speculation as to the motives of Nicodemus in visiting Jesus in the night. These motives are interwoven into this entire chapter, even though we are not sure as to what they were. Most theories fall into one of the following options:

1. Some theorize that Nicodemus was sent by the Sanhedrin itself. The Savior had made a bold entrance onto the Jewish stage. The Sanhedrin would have great interest in Jesus' goals, desires, and motives. It could very well be that the Sanhedrin sent an emissary to interview Jesus. His opening statement to Jesus appears to use the word "we" indicating that he was there on behalf of more than just himself. It would have been in the Sanhedrin's best interest to ascertain if Jesus was a threat to their political power. They would have wanted this meeting to take place outside of the public eye lest the populace begin to make false assumptions. **"It was by night that Nicodemus came to Jesus...It may have been a sign of caution. Nicodemus quite frankly may not have wished to commit himself by coming to Jesus that day..."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, pages 123-124).
2. Some theorize that Nicodemus was a believer. Possibly he had seen the works of heaven administered by the Messiah, and wanted to believe. Perhaps he came during the night as an investigator with a beginning of faith. He came in the evening to avoid the judgment of his peers on the Sanhedrin. Elder McConkie taught, **"In effect Nicodemus wanted to investigate the gospel in secret, lest his associates turn against him and his worldly influence wane."** (The Mortal Messiah: Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 314).
3. Some believe that Nicodemus was not necessarily a believer, but rather a curious bystander. He came to Jesus as a matter of curiosity and for no other reason.
4. Some speculate that Nicodemus came to Jesus to be taught. The Pharisees used the evening as a time of spiritual study. Nicodemus came to Jesus in the evening, and may have come to Jesus for spiritual discussion. **"It was by night that Nicodemus came to Jesus... The rabbis declared that the best time to study the law was at night when a man was undisturbed... it may well be that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night because he wanted an absolutely private and completely undisturbed time with Jesus."** (The Gospel of John, Volume 1, William Barclay, pages 123-124).

There is no factual information that would prove or disprove any of the above theories. We know that Nicodemus helped arrange the burial of the Savior and was at the very least sympathetic to Jesus' mission. There is no reason to suspect that Nicodemus was every adversarial towards the Savior. At the same time, it does not appear that Nicodemus became a devoted and committed follower.

Another point of speculation is that if Nicodemus came to Jesus, where was Jesus staying? Again Elder McConkie has some clarification. He said, **"John tells us that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, and we are left to assume the meeting took place in a house owned or occupied by John in Jerusalem. If so, the interview may well have taken place in the guest chamber on the roof, which would have been accessible via outside stairs. John was either present or Jesus recounted to him what was said. The scriptural account is clearly a digest and recitation of the chief points made in what has come to be called our Lord's first great recorded discourse."** (The Mortal Messiah: Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 315). Skousen doesn't identify the temporary residence of Jesus as John's house, but he believes that Jesus was staying in lodging belonging to one or more disciples. Skousen wrote, **"After Jesus disappeared from among the crowd at the temple, he probably took up residence with his disciples where curiosity seekers were not likely to find him."** (The Days of the Living Christ: Volume 1, W. Cleon Skousen, page 137).

- 6- **by night** – The word "night" is translated from the Greek word "νύξ" or "nyx". The word means night, or the time when work ceases. On a purely symbolic level, **"Darkness and night symbolize the realm of evil, untruth, and ignorance."** (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 130). Night can carry many symbolic meanings. **"Like darkness, night signifies the precosmogenic, prenatal darkness preceding rebirth or initiation and illumination; but it is also chaos, death, madness, disintegration, and reversion to the fetal state of the world."** (An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, J.C. Cooper, page 112). This is especially significant since Jesus' response to Nicodemus' night visit was centered on rebirth. **"On a purely natural level, the nighttime visit may have been a stealthy expedient 'for fear of the Jews' (xix 38); or it may reflect the rabbinic custom of staying up at night to study the Law."** (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 130).

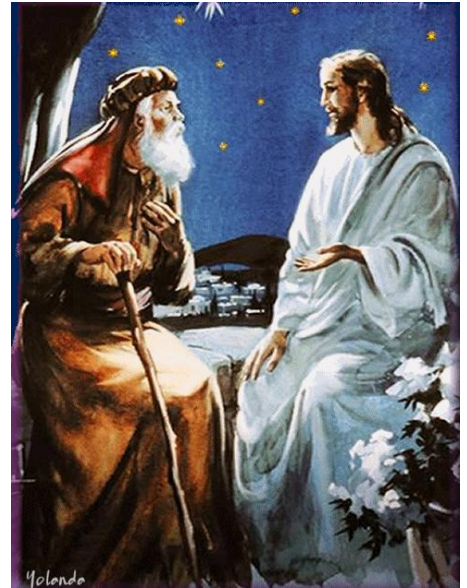
There is some underlying symbolism that is worth mentioning. Nicodemus was in spiritual darkness, as was his whole society. The Jews were in a state of apostasy, having abandoned the truth many generations before Jesus. Nicodemus came out of the darkness, or apostasy, and came into the light by visiting Jesus who is the light of the whole world. Similarly, Judas would later leave the light and enter the darkness, when he left the Savior and entered the darkness by following the desires of evil men and betrayed Jesus.

Elder Talmage believes that Nicodemus' coming to Jesus during the night is an indication that Nicodemus was afraid of what society would think of him visiting with a man who was not endorsed by the ruling class. Talmage wrote, **"There is significance in the circumstance that this visit was made at night. Apparently the man was impelled by a genuine desire to learn more of the Galilean, whose works could not be ignored; though pride of office and fear of possible suspicion that he had become attached to the new Prophet led him to veil his undertaking with privacy."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 135). President John Taylor taught that Nicodemus lacked courage, and therefore took a concealed approach in visiting Jesus. He said, **"You have all read about Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night. Nicodemus thought there was something good about Jesus, but there was not enough manhood about himself. He was something of a sneak, the same as you sometimes see some men now. He wanted to come to Jesus, but he had not manhood to do so by daylight, so he came by night – under cover of darkness..."** (Journal of Discourses, Volume 15, John Taylor, May 16, 1872, page 169). President Joseph F. Smith said that Nicodemus was a believer, but was ashamed of his belief. President Smith taught, **"Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, who evidently believed that Jesus was sent of God, but who went to him by night, being ashamed to be seen seeking so humble a person in the day**



time, having, no doubt, that feeling of worldly pride which animates the bosoms of many of the present generation, he dared not identify himself with the Savior of the world, because his reputation and standing in society would be sacrificed. But he marvelled at the saying of Christ" (Journal of Discourses, Volume 18, General Conference, Joseph F. Smith, April 8, 1876, page 272).

We should not be too quick in our judgment of Nicodemus. There is no doubt that we should not be ashamed of Jesus Christ or His doctrine. Even so, a common temptation among men is to be swayed by the opinions of society or their peers. It would appear that Nicodemus fell into this common pitfall. When we start to be swayed by men, we begin to see things through the eyes of mortal men. When this happens, we see things through clouded lenses. President John Taylor taught, "They do not see things as we see them; there is a thick veil over them; they are something like the people that Jesus spoke about in his day when he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." They know not the light and intelligence of the Holy Ghost, and, consequently, they do not understand our position, and they are led by other influences they know nothing about. They do not see the kingdom of God, nor can they. I do not care what their wisdom is, nor their intelligence; I do not care what school they were taught in, or who was their teacher; I care nothing about the extent of their capacity, reading, or intelligence acquired or possessed; unless they have possessed the Spirit of the living God, they cannot comprehend the affairs pertaining to the kingdom of God. Well, but are there not many very honorable and high-minded men in the world that are not Latter-day Saints? Yes; but they do not see the kingdom of God any more than Nicodemus did when he came to Jesus by night." (Journal of Discourses, Volume 11, General Conference, John Taylor, October 7, 1865, page 163). Poor Nicodemus. He appears to be a man of good intentions, but cared too much about the opinions of men.



- 7- **Rabbi** – The word "Rabbi" is a Hebrew title transliterated into the Greek as "ῥαββί" or "rhabbi". The Greek word means "my great one", "my honorable sir", or a title used by the Jews to address their teachers. The Hebrew origin is the word "רַב" or "rab". The word means much, many, great, strong, or exceeding. Zondervan defines a Rabbi as follows; "Rabbi, a title given by the Jews to the teachers of their law...The term Rabbi literally means 'master'. The use of the term cannot be verified before the time of Christ." (The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, General Editor – Merrill C. Tenney, page 598).

It is interesting that Nicodemus is found "addressing Jesus by the title he himself bore, and which he regarded as one of honor and respect..." (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 135). Not just anyone could take the title of Rabbi. A Rabbi was a man of letters. He would have been schooled in the law, and most rabbi's of the day were schooled in the prestigious school of Hillel or Shammai. He was required to be at least thirty years of age, and a married man of one wife. Rabbi's were revered as men of wisdom, respect, integrity, and learning. "Such was the Rabbi who, with that mingled candor and fear of man which characterized all that we know of him, came indeed to Jesus, but came cautiously by night. He was anxious to know more of this young Galilean prophet whom he was too honest not to recognize as a teacher come from God; but he thought himself too eminent a person among his sect to compromise his dignity, and possibly even his safety, by visiting Him in public." (The Story of a Beautiful Life: Farrar's Life of Christ, The New 20th Century Edition, 1900, Canon Farrar, D.D., F.R.S., page 144).

- 8- **we know** – The word "know" is translated from the Greek word "εἶδω" or "eidō". The word actually means to see, or perceive by the senses. The first point of interest here is the term "we". It is plural rather than singular. We assume that Nicodemus was alone when he visited Jesus, and there is no mention of any other visitors. The "we" indicates that Nicodemus may have been a representative of others. Talmage wrote, "Whether his use of the plural pronoun 'we' indicates that he was sent by the Sanhedrin, or by the society of Pharisees--the members of which were accustomed to so speak, as representatives of the order--or was employed in the rhetorical sense as indicating himself alone, is of little importance. He acknowledged Jesus as a "teacher come from God," and gave reasons for so regarding Him. Whatever of feeble faith might have been stirring in the heart of the man, such was founded on the evidence of miracles, supported mainly by the psychological effect of signs and wonders. We must accord him credit for sincerity and honesty of purpose." (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 135).

The fact that there may have been others who had the similar feelings towards Jesus message and work might be surprising. We typically see the Jewish hierarchy as lost and oppositional, but surely not all of them had hearts of stone. His message would surely have penetrated a heart or two among the ruling class. The problem was that those that believed lack the conviction to act. Elder Talmage wrote, "Nicodemus was not the only one among the ruling classes who believed in Jesus; but of most of these we learn nothing to indicate that they had sufficient courage to come even by night to make independent and personal inquiry. They feared the result in loss of popularity and standing. We read in John 12:42, 43: "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Note also the instance of the scribe who proffered to become a professed disciple, but, probably because of some degree of insincerity or unfitness, was rather discouraged than approved by Jesus. (Matt. 8:19, 20.)" (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 140).

Edersheim takes things one step further. He believes that Nicodemus was not alone in his visit to Jesus, but rather the only one that John mentions. He wrote, "Such an observer was Nicodemus (Naqdimon), one of the Pharisees and a member of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. And, as we gather from his mode of expression, not he only, but others with him." (The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Volume 1, Alfred Edersheim, page 381).

We have spent some time discussing the term "we" when the important word in this footnote is the word "know". The only way that we "know" anything of the spirit is by the spirit. The blessings of the spirit are only obtained by one who is humble, teachable, and aligned with God, at least in desire. It is then that testimony begins to grow. It is then that we know of things that cannot be seen or understood physically. Nicodemus says "we know". They had a testimony of truth. "...'we know' - perhaps indicating that he and others of the Sanhedrin had like feelings." (The Mortal Messiah: Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 315). Even so, there understanding was not complete. As with all spiritual truth, it plants a desire for further light and knowledge. Perhaps that is why Nicodemus and the others sought Jesus out; "they" desired to know more.



- 9 - **a teacher** – The word "teacher" is translated from the Greek word "διδάσκαλος" or "didaskalos". The word means teacher. Zondervan defines the word as follows; **"Teacher, one who imparts instruction, and communicates knowledge of religious truth and other matters."** (The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, General Editor – Merrill C. Tenney, page 598).

Jesus clearly demonstrated that he had a knowledge of Jewish law, and things of a spiritual nature. He was constantly teaching, in both word and deed. He taught everyone who would listen. His teachings and works had reached the ears of the Jewish leaders. They were unsure as to who He was, but they could not ignore Him. He was quickly being accepted as an authority on the scriptures. He taught with power and conviction. His teachings and understanding were so profound that even the intellectuals and teachers of the day acknowledged him as a teacher. Nicodemus is a fine example of this. Marion G. Romney taught, **"In the third chapter of John, it is written that Nicodemus, a very wise man, in fact a member of the Sanhedrin, came to see Jesus by night—he did not yet have enough courage to come to see him during the daytime. But he came to Jesus by night, and said: '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.'** (John 3:2). In this statement Nicodemus unwittingly but clearly revealed the fact that he did not know who Jesus was. All he could see in the Son of God was a great teacher. This was all he could be expected to see, however, because he based his knowledge of who Jesus was upon what he had seen and heard of the Master's miracles. Perceiving this, Jesus informed him that the knowledge of divine things could not be had through man's normal senses." (General Conference, "Except a man be born again", Marion G. Romney, October 1981).

Jesus was, and is, the master teacher. In other words, He knows and understands beyond the knowledge of mortal man. Nicodemus recognized the he was in the presence of One who was superior to him in knowledge. Relative to worldly knowledge, Nicodemus would have been considered a scholar and a master. He could not have held his position as a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin anymore than a supreme court justice could serve without a knowledge of constitutional law. By the same token, Nicodemus had very little knowledge of spiritual matters. He may have understood the historical and written word, but the doctrine and principles that they were built upon were a mystery to him. When Jesus taught Nicodemus marveled. Brigham Young taught, **"How difficult it is to teach the natural man, who comprehends nothing more than that which he sees with the natural eye! How hard it is for him to believe! How difficult would be the task to make the philosopher, who, for many years, has argued himself into the belief that his spirit is no more after his body sleeps in the grave, believe that his intelligence came from eternity, and is as eternal, in its nature, as the elements, or as the Gods. Such doctrine by him would be considered vanity and foolishness, it would be entirely beyond his comprehension. It is difficult, indeed, to remove an opinion or belief into which he has argued himself from the mind of the natural man. Talk to him about angels, heavens, God, immortality, and eternal lives, and it is like sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal to his ears; it has no music to him; there is nothing in it that charms his senses, soothes his feelings, attracts his attention, or engages his affections, in the least; to him it is all vanity."** (Journal of Discourses, Volume 1, Page 2, "Salvation", Salt Lake City Tabernacle, Brigham Young, January 16, 1853).

- 10 - **come from God** – The word "God" is translated from the Greek word "θεός" or "theos". It is a generic term for deity. It is often used in reference to the true and living God, and seldom used in reference to idols or false Gods. Though Nicodemus was greatly handicapped by his lack of knowledge of things spiritual, he could feel the spirit that accompanied the Savior, to the point that he could testify that Jesus came from God.

- 11 - **no man** – The phrase "no man" is translated from a single Greek word; "οὐδεὶς" or "oudeis". It means no one or nothing. Only the power and knowledge of God could teach as Jesus did. Only the power of God could perform the miracles that Jesus did. Nicodemus was at least humble enough to recognize Jesus' divine nature.

- 12 - **these miracles** – The word "miracles" is translated from the Greek word "σημεῖον" or "sēmeion". It means sign or mark. The Codex Sinaiticus translated the phrase "these miracles" as "these signs". (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 2, page 167). Miracles are acts that cannot be explained by natural law or scientific knowledge. A miracle is typically something brought about by the power and will of God. Jesus was ALWAYS about His Father's work. It follows then that His works would be ones of miracles and consequently, signs that He was indeed the Son of God.



Jesus' ministry has just begun, and yet word of his works had already spread. **"People began to flock to his standard because of his gracious words and his mighty miracles. Many began to believe the reports they had heard of a voice from heaven at his baptism; of a miracle performed in an obscure Galilean city; of disciples who testifies openly that he was David's Son, the one of whom Moses and the prophets had written, the Promised Messiah."** (The Mortal Messiah: Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 314).

- 13 - **thou doest** – The word "doest" is translated from the Greek word "ποιέω" or "poieō". It means to make, prepare, acquire, produce, or construct. Nicodemus acknowledged that Jesus brought about these miracles. He did not believe them to be works of deception or trickery. **"Obviously, Jesus had an admiring friend in this Nicodemus, but not a convert. Jesus read his mind and knew he had come out of intellectual curiosity."** (The Days of the Living Christ: Volume 1, W. Cleon Skousen, page 138).

- 14 - **except God be with them** – The word "except" is translated from the Greek phrase "ἐὰν μὴ" or "ean mē". It means if not, unless, or whoever...not. The term "be" is translated from the Greek word "ᾧ" or "ō". The word means be, may, be, etc. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the word "except" as "unless" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 2, page 167).

Signs or miracles have always accompanied the servants of God. Even the wicked can acknowledge the miracles of God. When Moses performed miracles before the courts of Egypt, the Pharaoh's magicians acknowledged that such signs could only come from God. The Old Testament records, **"Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said."** (Exodus 8:19). Jesus testified of this truth later in His ministry when he taught, **"But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you."** (Luke 11:20). It is one of the signs of the true church. Miracles will follow God's work as a sign of its divinity.

After the death of Jesus, the apostles taught that the miracles Jesus performed were a sign of His divinity. It is written, **"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:"** (Acts 2:22). It is also written, **"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."** (Acts 10:38). The bottom line is, except God was with Him, He could not have performed such miracles.

15 - **Verily** – The word "Verily" is translated from the Greek word "ἀμήν" or "amēn". This is the word we are familiar with at the closing of a prayer; however, in this passage it is not used in this way. The word means firm, surely, truly, or of a truth. When used at the end of a dialog it means so it is, so be it, or may it be fulfilled. It has Hebrew origin. The Hebrew word is "אָמֵן" or "amen". It has the same meaning as the Greek; however, the Paleo-Hebrew of the word amen is quite interesting.



The word "amen" in Paleo-hebrew means in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. In Semitic, it was the closure of an oath. When Jesus starts His statement with "Verily, verily", we are to understand that what follows will be the terms or actions associated with a covenant.

16 - **Except** – The word "except" is translated from the Greek word "ἐξὐ μὴ" or "ean mē". It means if not, unless, or whoever...not. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the word "except" as "unless" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 3, page 167).

17 - **a man** – The word "man" is translated from the Greek word "τις" or "tis". It means a certain, or a certain one. This is an indication that symbolic language is being employed to represent any man, or more specifically it can be applied to you and I.

18 - **be born** – The word "born" is translated from the Greek word "γεννάω" or "gennaō". The word means to be born. In a literal sense, it is the process of a spirit entering into mortality. Such a birth is a physical birth, as the spirit receives a physical body. However, Jesus is not speaking of physical birth. He is speaking of something quite different. "The passive of the verb 'gennan' can mean either 'to be born', as of a feminine principle, or 'to be begotten', as of a masculine principle; the same two meanings are possible for the Hebrew root yld. The early versions too gennan here in the sense 'to be born', and, more precisely, in the OL, 'to be reborn' (renasi=anagennan - there are traces of this interpretation also in OS^{sin}, Vulg., Greek Fathers). Despite the fact that the Spirit, mentioned in vs. 5 as the agent of this birth or begetting, is feminine in Hebrew (neuter in Greek), the primary meaning seems to be 'begotten'. In the Gospels there is no attribution of feminine characteristics to the Spirit; and there are Johannine parallels that clearly refer to being begotten rather than being born (i 12; I John iii 9)." (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 130). So let's see if we can break this down into simple terms. The feminine form of the word means to be born. Children are literally born from a woman's womb. On the other hand, children are begotten of a father. Fathers do not bear children, but they are begotten of a father. They belong to him.

Mankind is physically born as the literal offspring of mortal men. "Since the fall of Adam, all accountable men are by nature carnal, sensual, and devilish. In this fallen state, as enemies to God, they are spiritually dead. To gain salvation, they must put off the natural man and become saints; they must become new creatures of the Holy Ghost, thereby attaining a state of spiritual life. They must be born again." (The Doctrine New Testament Commentary - The Gospels, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 141). Not a feminine rebirth, as Nicodemus supposed, but a masculine rebirth. We must cease to be the children of man, and become the children of Christ. "We know a birth to be a passage from one element into another; hence if he be born of the water he must be completely immersed therein, and pass from that element into another. The same with the birth of the Spirit - he or she who is born of it must be completely enveloped in it. Jesus says a man cannot see the kingdom of God unless he is born again, and he further says, a man cannot enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of the water and of the Spirit, not only of the Spirit, but also of the water." (Journal of Discourses, Volume 15, George Q. Cannon, July 14, 1872, page 117).

The symbolism is perfect. At our physical birth, we pass from the world of the spirits into mortality. The process causes us to forget our spiritual roots as our mortal bodies take control of our actions. We become fallen and carnal. We are born into mortality. In this state, the spirit lives in a state of suppression, until the body becomes subject to the spirit. The body must learn to obey the promptings of the spirit, or it becomes and remains spiritually dead. Such a state requires a spiritual re-birth. Such a rebirth changes our allegiance from the physical to the spiritual. We divorce ourselves from the carnal ways of our fathers, and adopt the spiritual ways of Jesus. We follow His example, and He becomes our spiritual Father. President Cannon wrote, "This, as I understand the Scriptures, and as the Latter-day Saints testify, was the new birth. He went down into one element, was buried in that element, and, emerging there from, was born again, in other words was born of the water. Can you imagine a new birth more perfectly represented than by this act which I have described, performed by John upon



Jesus? After this birth of the water had taken place, the birth of the Spirit followed, for as soon as he came up out of the water, the Holy Ghost, in the likeness of a dove, descended upon him, and a voice was heard from heaven testifying that he was the beloved son in whom the Father was well pleased. Jesus was enveloped in that spiritual element, and was born of the Spirit as he had been born of the water. Thus, in his own case, he illustrated, by his obedience and humility to the will of his Father, the doctrine which he taught to Nicodemus, and which he declared was necessary to prepare not only him but all the children of men to enter into the kingdom of God. Paul, also, in one place, speaks of being buried with Christ in baptism in the likeness of his burial, in the likeness also of his resurrection; the burial in the liquid grave being symbolical of the death and burial of the Son of God, and the coming forth there from of his resurrection." (Journal of Discourses, Volume 14, George Q. Cannon, December 3, 1871, page 314).

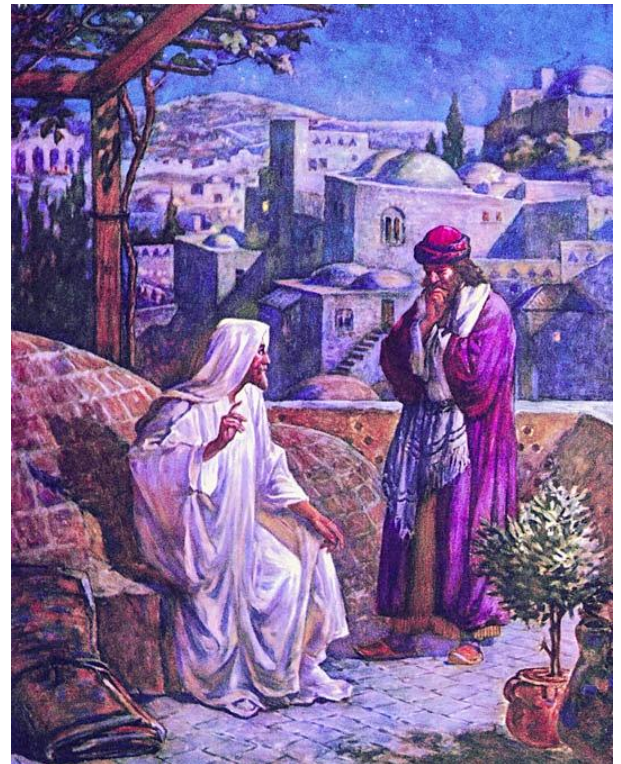
The Book of Mormon restored, to the world, a proper understanding of spiritual rebirth. This is why members of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have such a clear understanding of the dialog between Jesus and Nicodemus. The Book of Mormon teaches, "For, said he, I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit. And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off. Nevertheless, after wading through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the Lord in mercy hath seen fit to snatch me out of an everlasting burning, and I am born of God. My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more." (Mosiah 27:24-29).

One might ask why Jesus chose to speak of rebirth instead of merely discussing baptism with Nicodemus. The Jews were acquainted with baptism. Even so, Jesus knew that the Jews believed that only converts had need of baptism. Nicodemus would have had a difficult time seeing his need for baptism, but Jesus was speaking of more than the outward ordinance. He was talking about a total spiritual rebirth. A complete change of heart. "Nicodemus could only answer by an expression of incredulous amazement. A Gentile might need, as it were, a new birth when admitted into the Jewish communion; but he - a son of Abraham, a Rabbi, a zealous keeper of the Law - could need that new birth? How could such things be?" (The Story of a Beautiful Life: Farrar's Life of Christ, The New 20th Century Edition, 1900, Canon Farrar, D.D., F.R.S., page 144). There was a false doctrine adopted by the Jews that taught the spiritual rebirth that their forefathers had undergone was good enough to cover their salvation. They were of the chosen people and therefore saved. Jesus wanted Nicodemus to understand that he needed not only to be baptized; but he needed the spiritual rebirth that must necessarily accompany it for the ordinance to be binding. "On this particular occasion the Savior was speaking of Baptism, and in order to impress it upon Nicodemus, that it might be understood then, as well as to be in force in all future time, so that people need not be deceived, he spoke thus emphatically on this point of doctrine. It therefore matters not how devout, honest, or sincere we might be in the profession of our faith in God, or in the system of religion we might have adopted, and which we believe to be the everlasting Gospel, without this ordinance of baptism we cannot be saved - but first having repented of our sins with that repentance which needeth not to be repented of, in other words, putting away from us every evil, and shunning even the appearance of sin, then to be baptized by one authorized of God for the remission of those sins, and for the reception of the Holy Ghost, we thus becoming heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ; true branches, having been grafted into the true vine, bearing fruit of the good seed, bringing forth and hundred fold to the honor and glory of God. I repeat, it matters not how honest we may be or profess to be in our convictions, without this repentance and baptism and reception of the Holy Ghost, which constitute the new birth, we are not the family of Christ, but are aliens, estranged from God and his laws, and in this fallen condition we shall remain whether in the body or in the spirit, for time and for eternity, unless we render obedience to the plan devised in the heavens for the redemption and salvation of the human family." (Journal of Discourses, Volume 18, General Conference, Joseph F. Smith, April 8, 1876, pages 272-273).

There is much for us to learn from the dialog between Jesus and Nicodemus. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints we can easily fall into a similar trap, It is easy to live under a pretense that once we have received the ordinances of salvation, we are therefore saved. The fact is, spiritual rebirth is more of a process than something that took place at baptism. Though baptism is a vital part of the process, we cannot end the process there and hope to be complete. Ogden and Skinner wrote, "A recent official Church publication teaches: 'To be able to receive the blessing of eternal life, we need to be 'spiritually minded' and conquer our unrighteous desires. We need to change. More accurately, we need to be changed, or converted, through the power of the Savior's Atonement and through the power of the Holy Ghost. This process is called conversion. Conversion is a process, not an event. You become converted as a result of your righteous efforts to follow the Savior (True to the Faith, pages 40-41)' (The Four Gospels - Verse by verse, D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, pages 118-119). The fact is, until we have become totally spiritually minded, the process is not complete. Elder McConkie taught, "Man must be born again; he must receive the promptings of the Spirit; he must turn from darkness to light; he must die as to carnal things and live again as to the things of righteousness; he must rise from spiritual death and go forth in spiritual life - all this if he is to 'see' the truth; if he is to gain a testimony; if he is to know where the truth is and the course he must pursue to gain peace here and eternal reward hereafter." (The Mortal Messiah: Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 315).

- 19 - again – The word "again" is translated from the Greek word "ἀνωθεν" or "anōthen". It means from above, or from a higher place. It can also mean from the first, from the beginning, anew, or over again. Probably a better translation would be "born of God" or "born spiritually". Whatever the case, the doctrine is unchanging. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: "We begin the process of being born again through exercising faith in Christ, repenting of our sins, and being baptized by immersion for the remission of sins by one having priesthood authority. ... Total immersion in and saturation with the Savior's gospel are essential steps in the process of being born again" ("Ye Must Be Born Again," Ensign or Liahona, May 2007, 21).

According to Edersheim, the Jews did in fact have a doctrine of rebirth, but understood it to be more in line with exaltation or one dying and entering into the Kingdom of God. Thinking that the doctrine of rebirth had anything to do with mortal probation was outside of their understanding. Edersheim wrote, "According to the Jewish view, this second birth was the consequence of having taken upon oneself 'the kingdom'; not, as Jesus put it, the cause and condition of it. The proselyte had taken upon himself 'the Kingdom', and therefore he was 'born' anew, while Jesus put it that he must be born again in order to see the Kingdom of God. Lastly, it was 'a birth from above' to which reference was made. Judaism could understand a new relationship towards God and man, and even the forgiveness of sins. But it had no conception of a moral renovation, a spiritual birth, as the initial condition for reformation, far less as that for seeing the Kingdom of God." (The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Volume 1, Alfred Edersheim, pages 384-385). Perhaps this is why Nicodemus seemed so surprised when Jesus emphatically declared that unless one is reborn, he cannot even see the Kingdom of God. Rebirth is obviously not resurrection or exaltation, but part of the process of spiritual growth. It is the process by which we perfect ourselves and become more like God. Elder Kimball taught, "And our Savior speaking to Nicodemus, says, 'Verily I say unto thee,



except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In another place Jesus says: – "Verily I say unto you, that ye which followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." – Matt. xix. 28. Many other passages might be quoted to show how the doctrine of regeneration was taught by Christ and his Apostles, but these will be sufficient for my purpose at the present. I know that we, the Elders of Israel, are walking with Jesus in the regeneration, and we are becoming regenerated in Christ Jesus, and the blessings of the kingdom are being multiplied unto us day by day, and we shall continue to be enriched for ever and for ever. What! in property? Yes, and in every thing that is good. If it were not so, how could you possess all things, which are certainly promised through progression and faithfulness." (Journal of Discourses, Volume 10, Heber C. Kimball, October 6, 1862, page 76).

- 20 - **cannot see** – The word "see" is translated from the Greek word "εἶδω" or "eidō". The word means to see, to perceive with the eyes or other senses. We cannot see spiritual things except through spiritual eyes. Such abilities develop as we develop spiritually. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches some of the attributes that accompany a spiritual rebirth. It says, **"But blessed are the poor who are pure in heart, whose hearts are broken, and whose spirits are contrite, for they shall see the kingdom of God coming in power and great glory unto their deliverance; for the fatness of the earth shall be theirs."** (Doctrine and Covenants 56:18). Obviously, spiritual rebirth requires humility, it requires that one be teachable and submissive to God's will. Only then can we "see" things as they really are.
- 21 - **the kingdom of God** – The word "kingdom" is translated from the Greek word "βασιλεία" or "basileia". It means royal power, kingship, dominion, or rule. In the New Testament, it is often used to refer to the reign of the Messiah. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the phrase "kingdom of God" as "kingdom of heaven" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 5, page 167). Elder McConkie defines the "kingdom of God" as the **"Celestial kingdom of heaven"** (The Doctrine New Testament Commentary - The Gospels, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 141).

The grand question of all who have considered God and His abode is "who can enter his kingdom, and what must that person do?". Elder Orson Pratt taught, **"But, says one, did not the thief of the cross get there? No. He turned to Jesus in his expiring moments, and said unto him, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him – "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." And where is that? Is it in the kingdom of God? Let us inquire into this matter. We find that paradise, according to the definitions given by the most eminent writers, is a place of departed spirits. Where did Jesus go? Peter said he went to preach to the spirits in prison, while his body was in the tomb. The Church of England, in one of their articles, say that Jesus Christ suffered death and descended into hell, and after three days he rose again and ascended to his Father. What did he go there for? Peter says to preach the Gospel to them that were dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh. Did the thief go with him? Yes: "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise;" and there I will preach to you among the rest. But to enter the mansion where God dwells, and where the holy angels dwell, you must be born of water and of the Spirit, or you cannot enter that kingdom. Adam could not go there; Enoch could not; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the Prophets, none of them could get into that kingdom without being born of water and the Spirit. This astonished Nicodemus; and Jesus said – "Art thou master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" – as much as to say, the new birth had been unfolded to the people since the beginning of man, and handed down from generation to generation, and yet you are "a master in Israel," and do not know these things! It was the only way of salvation before Jesus came, and it was the only way after he came. And these ordinances must be administered by properly authorized persons."** (The Journal of Discourses, Volume 7, Orson Pratt, September 11, 1859, pages 264-265).

- 22 - **How** – The word "How" is translated from the Greek word "πῶς" or "pōs". It means how or in what way.

Nicodemus was puzzled, to say the least, about Jesus' statement regarding rebirth. He apparently took the statement literal, and asked how someone could undergo the process of birth a second time. **"We do Nicodemus no injustice in assuming that he as a rabbi, a man learned in the scriptures, ought to have known that there was other meaning in the words of Jesus than that of a mortal, literal birth. Moreover, were it possible that a man could be born a second time literally and in the flesh, how could such a birth profit him in spiritual growth? It would be but a reentrance on the stage of physical existence, not an advancement. The man knew that the figure of a new birth was common in the teachings of his day. Every proselyte to Judaism was spoken of at the time of his conversion as one new-born."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 135). Nicodemus did not connect the dots. He could not fathom that a Jew would need any sort of conversion, much less a rebirth.

- 23 - **when he is old** – The word "old" is translated from the Greek word "γέρων" or "gerōn". It means an old man. I think there is an underlying message here. Jesus was insinuating that Nicodemus, arguably an old man, could be reborn. The beautiful message of the gospel is that no one is too old for rebirth. The saving power of the atonement is extended to all man, regardless of age or for that matter sin. Isaiah wrote, **"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."** (Isaiah 1:18).
- 24 - **he enter** – The word "enter" is translated from the Greek word "εἰσέρχομαι" or "eiserchomai". It means to go out or come in: to enter. It can be used of men, spirits, or things.

Nicodemus is expressing the physical impossibility for a man to re-enter his mother's womb and be born again. In reality, the impossibility associated with this conversation is for man to enter the kingdom of God without being re-born. Paul taught, **"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,"** (1 Corinthians 6:9). Later he teaches, **"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."** (1 Corinthians 15:50). Only the spiritually re-born can enter the kingdom of heaven, such re-birth does not have anything to do with a mortal re-birth.

- 25 - **the second time** – The term "second time" is translated from the Greek word "δεύτερος" or "deuteros". It means the second, or the other of two.
- 26 - **his mother's womb** – The term "womb" is translated from The Greek word "κοιλία" or "koilia". It means the whole belly; the entire cavity. It can be used of a woman's womb, the place where the fetus is conceived and nourished until birth. Symbolically, the womb symbolizes many things. Cooper says, **"The Matrix; the Great Mother...waters...birth."** (An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, J.C. Cooper, page 194). The womb represents the origin from whence one came.
- 27 - **Jesus answered** – The word "answered" is translated from the Greek word "ἀποκρίνομαι" or "apokrinomai". The word means to give an answer to a question proposed; to answer. It can also mean to begin to speak.
- 28 - **of water** – The word "water" is translated from the Greek word "ὑδωρ" or "hydōr". The word meant water, whether from rain, rivers, pools, or seas. Water is used as a symbol for adoption, atonement, conversion, death, feminine, fertility, God, holiness, motherhood, life, birth, purification, resurrection, the law, the Torah, and transition. (Encyclopedia of Traditional Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Deutsch, page 189). **"The waters are the source of all potentialities in existence...The waters of the Torah are the life-giving waters of the sacred**



law." (An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, J.C. Cooper, pages 188-189).

Water is a sacred symbol to the Jews. One secular author wrote, "One of the most ancient and enduring rituals in Jewish life is immersion in the mikvah, usually translated as 'ritual bath', but actually identical to the word used in Genesis to describe the primeval 'Gathering of the waters'. The mikvah is either a natural water source, such as a spring, lake, or stream, or an artificial pool containing freely flowing undrawn (rain or spring) water. Immersion in the mikvah brings about spiritual purification, not physical cleanness. Although Judaism does not celebrate birth with baptism, it does welcome 'new-born' Jews - converts and non-Jewish adopted children - into the community through the ritual of 'mikvah'." (Encyclopedia of Traditional Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, page 187). It is easy to see the apostate nature of Judaism at the time of Jesus. They had pieces of the truth, but much of the doctrines were connected by false dogma and erroneous traditions. They had lost the fact that Adam was baptized, as were all the ancient prophets. Their baptism was more of a rite of passage for non-jews converting to Judaism, rather than a sacred ordinance required for salvation. Elder McConkie taught the true nature of baptism when he wrote that ALL those seeking spiritual rebirth submit to "Baptism by immersion in water, so that the person comes forth from the watery womb, and baptism of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. (Moses 6:59-60). Those who go through the form of baptism in water and by the spirit, under the hands of legal administrators, thus becoming members of the Church, by such course have power given them to be born again in the full sense that is required for salvation. Church members are not born again by the mere fact of baptism alone; rather, after baptism, they must so live as to experience a 'mighty change' in their hearts. (Alma 5:14-31)." (The Doctrine New Testament Commentary - The Gospels, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, pages 141-142). Joseph Smith taught, "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. This strong and positive answer of Jesus, as to water baptism, settles the question: If God is the same yesterday, today, and forever: it is no wonder He is so positive in the great declaration: He that believes and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believes not shall be damned! There was no other name given under heaven, nor no other ordinance admitted, whereby men could be saved:" (Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Joseph Smith, Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith, pages 264-265).

29 - **(of) spirit** – The word "spirit" is translated from the Greek word "πνεῦμα" or "pneuma". It is used in reference to the third member of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost. The Codex Sinaiticus deletes the word "of" and simply states "and the spirit" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 5, page 167). Though we can clearly understand that the spiritual rebirth is required for exaltation, understanding the details of how the spirit purifies us and make us worthy to stand in God's presence is a difficult concept to comprehend. The Old Testament teaches, "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all." (Ecclesiastes 11:5). It is not necessary for us to understand all things at this point in our development. We need only have the testifying power of the spirit to know what is fact and what is not. Over time, that same testifying spirit will teach us, line upon line, and precept upon precept until the point that we can understand all things.

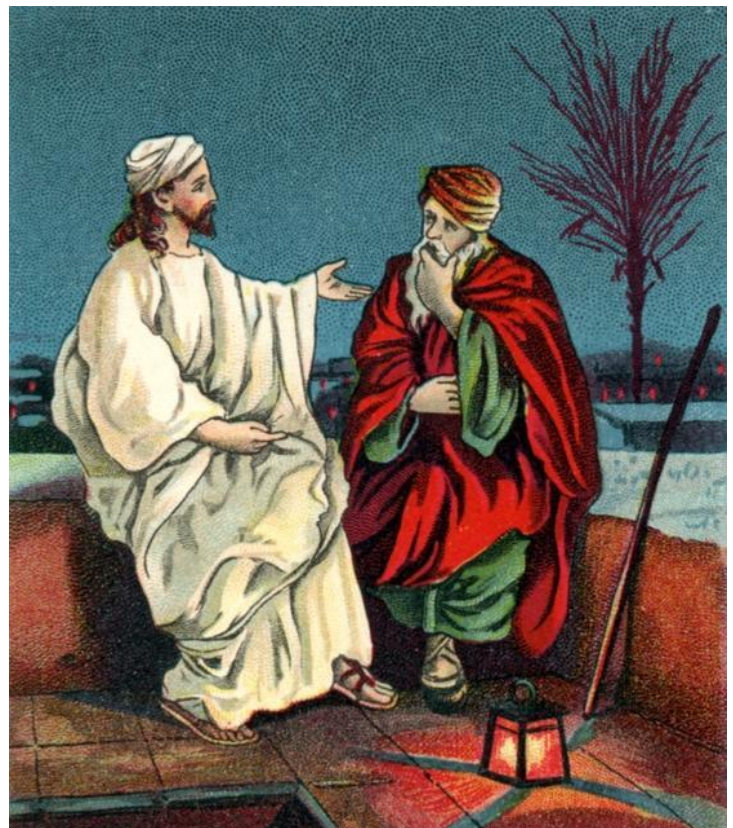
30 - **he cannot enter** – The Prophet Joseph Smith taught about the Savior's words in verses 3 and 5, which speaks of "seeing" and "entering" the kingdom of God: "It is one thing to see the kingdom of God, and another thing to enter into it. We must have a change of heart to see the kingdom of God, and subscribe the articles of adoption to enter therein" (in History of the Church, 6:58). The natural man cannot return to God. The natural man is carnal and limited to the things of this world. We must shed that person from our character if we have any hope of returning to our Father in Heaven. Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles confirmed: "We were born again when we entered into a covenant relationship with our Savior by being born of water and of the Spirit and by taking upon us the name of Jesus Christ. ... Latter-day Saints affirm that those who have been born again in this way are spiritually begotten sons and daughters of Jesus Christ (see Mosiah 5:7; 15:9-13; 27:25). Nevertheless, in order to realize the intended blessings of this born-again status, we must still keep our covenants and endure to the end. In the meantime, through the grace of God, we have been born again as new creatures with new spiritual parentage and the prospects of a glorious inheritance" ("Have You Been Saved?" Ensign, May 1998, 56).

31 - **of the flesh** – The word "flesh" is translated from the Greek word "σάρξ" or "sarx". It means the flesh of man or beasts. It references the mortal tabernacle. "For John 'flesh' emphasizes the weakness and mortality of the creature; Spirit, as opposed to flesh, is the principle of divine power and life operating in the human sphere." (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 131).

32 - **Marvel not** – The word "Marvel" is translated from the Greek word "θαυμάζω" or "thaumazō". It means to wonder at, or marvel. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the word "marvel" as "wonder" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 7, page 167). Marvel not or be not surprise, "This is a characteristic rabbinic usage." (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 131). It is used by the Rabbi's to proceed something that would be considered a well established truth, i.e. marvel not, for this is an eternal truth. Jesus was conveying to Nicodemus that the doctrine He was presenting was eternal in nature and should not be received with surprise. "The surprize manifested by Nicodemus was probably due, in part at least, to the universality of the requirement as announced by Christ. Were the children of Abraham included? The traditionalism of centuries was opposed to any such view. Pagans had to be born again through a formal acceptance of Judaism, if they would become even small sharers of the blessings that belonged as a heritage to the house of Israel; but Jesus seemed to treat all alike, Jews and Gentiles, heathen idolaters and the people who with their lips at least called Jehovah, God." (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 135).

33 - **Ye must** – The word "must" is translated from the Greek word "δεῖ" or "dei". The word means it is necessary, there is need of, it behooves, or it is right or proper. "The pronoun in 'I told you' is singular; that in 'you must all be begotten' is plural. Nicodemus came speaking as 'we'; so through him Jesus addresses a wider audience." (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 131). Most assume that Nicodemus came alone, and represented a group that was at least curious as to who Jesus was. It is also possible that others accompanied Nicodemus but were not mentioned. The latter seems very unlikely. Nicodemus spoke freely and candid. A man of his stature most likely would not have spoken this way with an audience.

34 - **The wind** – The word "wind" is translated from the same Greek word used for the Holy Ghost; "πνεῦμα" or "pneuma". Though the word is generally translated in the New Testament as spirit, one of its means is a movement of air, the wind, a gentle breeze, or the breath of the nostrils or mouth. There is a significant play on words



here. Brown wrote, "The Gr. pneuma, as well as its Hebrew counterpart ruah, means both 'wind' and 'spirit'; and there is a clever play on both meanings here, a play that cannot be reproduced in English." (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 131).

The wind symbolizes "The spirit, the vital breath of the universe; the power of the spirit in sustaining life and holding it together." (An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, J.C. Cooper, page 192). An expert on Jewish symbols wrote, "The Hebrew word for wind, ruah, also means 'spirit', 'ghost', 'enthusiasm', and 'breath'. It refers to natural forces as well as divine. From earliest times, 'ruah' symbolized the connection between natural, human, and divine realms. Because it seems moved by an invisible hand, the wind symbolizes God's agency in the natural world. God is described as riding upon the wings of the wind. In liturgy, God is characterized as the One 'Who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall.'" (Encyclopedia of Traditional Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, page 193).

Such symbolism and the subtle play on words further reinforces the fact that Jesus is indeed the master teacher. He taught doctrine, and then brought the concepts to the level of Nicodemus' understanding. Elder Talmage wrote, "Possibly the sound of the night breeze was heard at that moment; if so, Jesus was but utilizing the incident as a skilful teacher would do to impress a lesson when He continued: '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.' Plainly stated, Nicodemus was given to understand that his worldly learning and official status availed him nothing in any effort to understand the things of God; through the physical sense of hearing he knew that the wind blew; by sight he could be informed of its passage: yet what did he know of the ultimate cause of even this simple phenomenon? If Nicodemus would really be instructed in spiritual matters, he had to divest himself of the bias due to his professed knowledge of lesser things." (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, pages 135-136).



35 - bloweth – The word "bloweth" is translated from the Greek word "πνέω" or "pneō". It means to breathe, or to blow i.e. the blowing of the wind. The breath symbolizes "life; the soul; life giving power..the power of the spirit." (An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, J.C. Cooper, page 25).

36 - it listeth – The word "listeth" is translated from the Greek word "θέλω" or "thelō". It means to intend, desire, wish, love or want. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the word "listeth" as "pleases" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 8, page 168).

37 - Thou hearest – The word "hearest" is translated from the Greek word "ἀκούω" or "akouō". It means to hear, or be endowed with the faculty of hearing; not deaf.

38 - the sound – The word "sound" is translated from the Greek word "φωνή" or "phōnē". It means a sound or tone. It can also mean a voice. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the phrase "thou hearest the sound thereof" as "the sound of it thou hearest" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 8, page 168).

Again, we find Jesus using another play on words. The word for "sound" and "voice" come from the same word. Brown says the literal translation for phone is "Literally 'voice; this is part of the play on the double meaning: the sound of the wind; the voice of the spirit.'" (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 131).

39 - canst not tell – The phrase "canst tell" is translated from a single Greek word, and is the same word used for "see"; "εἶδω" or "eidō". It means to see or perceive with the eyes or by any of the senses. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the phrase "canst not tell whence it cometh" as "thou knowest not whence it comes" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 8, page 168).

Jesus taught Nicodemus according to Jewish tradition and culture. "To the ancients with no profound knowledge of scientific meteorology, the invisible movement of the wind had a divine and mysterious quality. In primitive thought the wind was described as God's breath. In the late Jewish apocalyptic, among the mysteries revealed to the seer in his guided tour of the heavens was the dwelling place of the winds." (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 131). Nicodemus was having a difficult time understanding the workings of the spirit. Jesus compared the wind, which cannot be seen, to the spirit of God. The wind is not controlled by man. It blows as it wills, without any influence of man. Though it cannot be seen, the wind can be heard and felt. There is no doubt to the existence of the wind. Similarly, the influence of the spirit of God exists as God pleases. It cannot be dictated by man, but operates by the will of the Almighty. The spirit of God is not seen, and cannot be measured by science, and yet it exists. Like the wind, the spirit can be felt and heard. Those that have felt the spirit of God know that it exists.

40 - whence it cometh – The word "whence" is translated from the Greek word "πόθεν" or "pothen". It means from or of an origin, from where, from what condition, or from what cause.

- 41 - **whither it goeth** – The word "goeth" is translated from the Greek word "ὑπάγω" or "hypagō". It means to lead under, bring under, or to draw one's self, to go away or to depart.
- 42 - **is everyone** – The word "everyone" is translated from the Greek word "πᾶς" or "pas". Individually it means each, every, any, all, the whole, everyone, all things, or everything. Collectively it means some of all types.
- 43 - **How can these things be?** – The phrase "these things" is translated from the Greek word "ταῦτα" or "tauta". It means these. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the phrase "how can these things be?" as "how can these things take place?" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 9, page 168).

Why did Nicodemus not understand? Jesus not only taught pure doctrine, but He carefully explained in terms that Nicodemus should have understood. The answer lies in Nicodemus' spiritual state. Things of the spirit can only be fully understood by the spirit. If we try to understand the things of God using the knowledge we have obtained in mortality, we will surely ask "how can these things be?"

John Taylor, while serving as an Apostle, taught, "Jesus said to Nicodemus, when he came to talk with Him concerning the things of the kingdom of God, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And if he cannot see it, how can he comprehend it? How can a man comprehend a thing which he cannot see? So it is with the truth, because no man knows the things of God but by the Spirit of God. "Then you place yourselves on a more elevated platform than anybody else?" This we have the arrogance to do; but we have the honesty to acknowledge that it is from God we receive all, and not through ourselves; and that is why the world will not acknowledge nor believe in the philosophy of the heavens and the earth, of time and eternity; that all things are within the grasp of the intelligence of that mind that is lighted up by the light of the Spirit of God. But how vague and uncertain are the ideas of those who have not that Spirit! Look at the arguments, not only of the divines of the present day but of past ages, in regard to their religious views; look also at the difference of opinion of the best philosophers in regard to the science of life. There is nothing tangible, nothing real, nothing certain. Nothing but the Spirit of God can enlighten men's minds. Standing on this platform, we view all things of a political and religious nature associated with the earth we are living on as being very uncertain, intangible, and unphilosophical. We expect to see the nations waste, crumble, and decay. We expect to see a universal chaos of religious and political sentiment, and an uncertainty much more serious than anything that exists at the present time. We look forward to the time, and try to help it on, when God will assert his own right with regard to the government of the earth; when, as in religious matters so in political matters, he will enlighten the minds of those that bear rule, he will teach the kings wisdom and instruct the senators by the Spirit of eternal truth; when to him "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ." Then "shall the earth be full of knowledge like as the waters cover the sea." Then shall the mists of darkness be swept away by the light of eternal truth. Then will the intelligence of Heaven beam forth on the human mind, and by it they will comprehend everything that is great, and good, and glorious." (Journal of Discourses, Volume 11, John Taylor, March 5, 1865, page 94).

- 44 - **Art thou** – The phrase "art thou" can be put into modern English as "Are you".

- 45 - **a master** – The word "master" is translated from the same Greek word previously translated as "teacher"; "διδάσκαλος" or "didaskalos". Master is not a common translation of the Greek word; however, the translators might be implying the term master teacher. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the word "master" as "teacher" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 10, page 168).

A master teacher of things spiritual has a responsibility to teach the things of God, and lead people in God's ways. Jesus had just reviewed with Nicodemus the first ordinance of the Gospel. This should have been the basics. Baptism is the entry point to all the necessary ordinances and covenants necessary for exaltation. A master teacher should have a firm understanding of "being reborn". "Nicodemus, himself a teacher and a leader of the people, one who should have been guiding them toward the spiritual rebirth they so much needed, should have known they could not save themselves by continuing in the Herodian course of darkness and rebellion.



If the people were to rise again to the heights attained by some under Moses and Joshua, and in the days of Samuel and David and of Isaiah, they must once more live in the Spirit as the ancients had." (The Mortal Messiah: Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, pages 315-316).

- 46 - **Israel** – The name "Israel" is translated from the Greek word "Ἰσραήλ" or "Israēl". Translated literally it means "he shall be a prince of God". The Greek term is a transliteration of the Hebrew word "יִשְׂרָאֵל" or "Yisra'el". The literal translation of the Hebrew form of the name is "God prevails". The name Israel implies those that have partaken of the ordinances and covenants established through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel). Nicodemus was a master in Israel. He was a master teachers of the covenant, and yet he failed to understand the covenants associated with Israel.
- 47 - **knowest not these things** – The word "knowest" is translated from the Greek word "γινώσκω" or "ginōskō". It means to learn to know, to come to know, get a knowledge of, perceive or feel.

Should Nicodemus have known these things? The Jews were in a fallen state of apostasy, and many of the truths of God had been lost and adulterated. One might argue that he was a product of his society and consequently could not have understood these things properly. Nicodemus was indeed schooled by the greatest scholars of the apostate Jews. "In the famous rabbinical school of Hillel - where Nicodemus was probably trained - the advanced students were infatuated with mysteries in the scriptures. The commentaries of the Torah were elaborately woven into over-arching shadows of mystical speculation that sometimes transformed the simplest truth into a phantom of obscure perplexity." (The Days of the Living Christ: Volume 1, W. Cleon Skousen, page 138). Nicodemus surely had a vast and powerful knowledge of the teachings of the Jews. What he lacked was the teachings of the spirit. One gets the impression from Jesus that these things were not out of Nicodemus' reach. "Evidently a knowledge of the

OT should have enabled Nicodemus to understand." (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 131). And, of course, Nicodemus could have sought divine clarification and received understanding beyond the lost Jews. He failed to do so, and therefore "knew not these things".

How apostate and lost were the Jews? The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob explained their state hundreds of years prior, and they had fallen further by the time of Jesus. Jacob records, **"But behold, the Jews were a stiffnecked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not understand. Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall; for God hath taken away his plainness from them, and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it. And because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble."** (Jacob 4:14).

- 48 - **We speak** – The word "speak" is translated from the Greek word "λαλέω" or "laleō". It means to utter a voice or emit a sound.
- 49 - **we do know** – The Lord is trying to help Nicodemus see that there is much that he doesn't know. He explains that we can only know and testify of the things we have learned. If we only learn the things of men, we are then limited to that knowledge. If we learn the things of heaven, then all things can be available to us.
- 50 - **testify** – The word "testify" is translated from the Greek word "μαρτυρέω" or "martyreō". It means to be a witness, to bear witness, i.e. to affirm that one has seen or heard or experienced something, or that he knows it because taught by divine revelation or inspiration. **"Jesus and his disciples were teaching by testimony; that is, they were proclaiming what the Holy Ghost had revealed to them. Such is the only way gospel truths can be conveyed, if they are to convert those who hear."** (The Doctrine and Covenants - The Gospels, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 142).
- 51 - **we have seen** – The phrase "we have seen" is translated from the Greek word "ὄραω" or "horaō". It means to see with the eyes, to know by experience.
- 52 - **ye receive not** – The word "received" is translated from the Greek word "λαμβάνω" or "lambanō". It means to take, to lay hold of, or to use. Divine teachings must be taken hold of through the spirit. Should we try to understand spiritual things through mortal understanding, we will fail to understand and consequently reject them.
- 53 - **our witness** – The word "witness" is translated from the Greek word "μαρτυρία" or "martyria". It means a testifying either before a judge, or of divine or future events. This phrase would lead us to believe that Nicodemus had received more than one witness. The Lord's way is to establish his truth with multiple witnesses. The Lord himself taught **"in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."** (Matthew 18:16). But who was Nicodemus' other witness? Skousen wrote, **"Nicodemus had already heard the simple invitation of John the Baptist, and Jesus knew that he had rejected it."** (The Days of the Living Christ: Volume 1, W. Cleon Skousen, page 140). We know that Nicodemus had rejected whatever witness he had received, because had he received it he would have followed Jesus and become a disciple.
- 54 - **earthly things** – The phrase "earthly things" is translated from the Greek word "ἐπίγειος" or "epigeios". It means to exist upon the earth, earthly, or terrestrial. Earthly things are those things that exist in our realm of knowledge. It is the knowledge of man, and what do mortal men know of God? Those that only have knowledge of earthly things know nothing of God.
- 55 - **told you** – The phrase "told you" is translated from the Greek word "εἶπον" or "eipon". It means to speak or say.
- 56 - **ye believe** – The word "believe" is translated from the Greek word "πιστεύω" or "pisteuō". It means to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, or place confidence in. Note the subtle and purposeful use of the word "know" and "believe". Jesus explains that Nicodemus knew the things of man, but only believed in heavenly things. Those that receive the witness of the spirit "know" of heavenly things.
- 57 - **heavenly things** – The phrase "heavenly things" is translated from the Greek word "ἐπουράνιος" or "epouranios". It means to exist in heaven, or to be of heavenly origin or nature.

Heavenly things lead men to the waters of baptism. They cause a mighty change to take place in their hearts. They desire to cast away the worldly beliefs, attitudes, and customs of man and live a life that continually strives to become like our Heavenly Father. This process is a spiritual rebirth. This rebirth is a spiritual one, that is eternally bound by covenant. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, **"Being born again, comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances"** (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith, 2007, page 95). President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declared: **"Good conduct without the ordinances of the gospel will neither redeem nor exalt mankind; covenants and the ordinances are essential"** (Ensign, "The Only True Church", Boyd K. Packer, November 1985, page 82). President Packer further taught: **"Ordinances and covenants become our credentials for admission into His presence. To worthily receive them is the quest of a lifetime; to keep them thereafter is the challenge of mortality"** (Ensign, "Covenants", Boyd K. Packer, May 1987, page 24).

- 58 - **ascended up to heaven** – The word "ascended" is translated from the Greek word "ἀναβαίνω" or "anabainō". It means to go up, ascend, to rise, mount, be borne up, or spring up. The term "heaven" is translated from the Greek word "οὐρανός" or "ouranos". It means the vaulted expanse of the sky with all things visible in it. It can mean the universe, the world, stars and the constellations. It is often used in reference to the dwelling place of God. **"Every man lives for himself. Adam was made to open the way of the world, and for dressing the garden. Noah was born to save seed of everything, when the earth was washed of its wickedness by the flood; and the Son of God came into the world to redeem it from the fall. But except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. This eternal truth settles the question of all men's religion. A man may be saved, after the judgment, in the terrestrial kingdom, or in the celestial kingdom, but he can never see the celestial kingdom of God, without being born of the water and the Spirit. He may receive a glory like unto the moon, [i.e., of which the light of the moon is typical], or a star, [i.e., of which the light of the stars is typical], but he can never come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, unless he becomes as a little child, and is taught by the Spirit of God. Wherefore, we again say, search the revelations of God; study the prophecies, and rejoice that God grants unto the world Seers and Prophets. They are they who saw the mysteries of godliness; they saw the flood before it came; they saw angels ascending and descending upon a ladder that reached from earth to heaven; they saw the stone cut out of the mountain, which filled the whole earth; they saw the Son of God**



come from the regions of bliss and dwell with men on earth." (Scriptural Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Joseph Smith, Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith, pages 12-13).

- 59 - **came down from heaven** – The phrase "came down from" is translated from the Greek word "καταβαίνω" or "katabainō". It means to go down, come down, or descend. It is used figuratively to mean being cast out or cast down to the lowest state of wretchedness and shame.

Jesus is now going to teach Nicodemus His true identity. Jesus was indeed the Son of the Almighty God. He descended from the presence of His Heavenly Father. This was a spiritual doctrine that could only be understood by the spirit. Jesus would later teach, **"What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?"** (John 6:62).

- 60 - **the Son of man** – The word "man" is translated from the Greek word "ἄνθρωπος" or "anthrōpos". It is used to mean a human being, whether male or female. It includes all human beings, but the word excludes all other forms of life.

The term "son of man" can be confusing in scripture. Ezekiel often refers to himself as the "son of man". All mortal men can make this claim. We are begotten of mortal men, and therefore we are the sons of mortals. This is not confusing, and pretty straightforward. Jesus, however, was the son of an immortal being. He was the son of a man of holiness. His Father was not mortal. When referring to the Savior, it is considered a sign of reverence to capitalize titles or words that refer to Him. Hence, the "Son of man" rather than "son of man". The "man" being referred to in the title "Son of man" is generally the "Man of Holiness", and is most often capitalized as well. Man of Holiness is God the Father. Therefore the appropriate title for Jesus is "Son of Man". Jesus clarified this title when he taught, **"Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time."** (John 6:57).

If you study the secular books of this world, you will find those that claim Jesus never declared himself the Messiah or the Son of God. In my study, I have found that Jesus bore testimony of His true nature continually. **"He began very early in his mission to indicate who he was. As he went north after the Passover, he saw Nicodemus and to Nicodemus he indicated that he was the Christ. Nicodemus did not understand."** (Behold the Lamb of God, J. Reuben Clark, Jr., page 22).

- 61 - **is in heaven** – This is a clarifying statement to reinforce the fact that Jesus is not of this world, nor are His teachings. He came from Heaven, He was in and part of Heaven, and the things He teaches are heavenly.
- 62 - **Moses** – The name "Moses" is translated from the Greek word "Μωϋσῆς" or "Mōysēs". The Greek word means literally "drawing out". The Greek is a transliteration of the Hebrew name "מֹשֶׁה" or "Mosheh". The Hebrew name means literally "drawn".



Jesus knew that Nicodemus was very knowledgeable of the words of the Old Testament. To help Nicodemus understand Jesus' divine nature, He turns Nicodemus' thoughts to the Jews greatest prophet. Moses was highly revered among the Jews.

63 - lifted up – The phrase "lifted up" is translated from the Greek word "ὑψῶω" or "hypsōō". It means to lift up on high, or to exalt.

Jesus illustrates an Old Testament story that Nicodemus could have probably recited by memory. "In both MT and LXX of Num xxi 9 ff. we hear that Moses placed a serpent on a standard-bearing pole; but the Targums have that he 'placed the serpent on an elevated place' or that he 'suspended' it....Jesus may be citing the Targum. The word in both MT and LXX for 'standard-bearing pole' is literally the word for 'sign'...This fits the Johannine thought that Jesus lifted up becomes the source of salvation to all and whoever sees Jesus sees the Father. The Targum, too, interprets the meaning of looking on the serpent: it means turning one's heart toward ... God." (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 133).

Jesus was clearly showing Nicodemus, whether he comprehended or not, that Jesus himself would be "lifted up". The Serpent, as we shall see in the next footnote, is a sign and a foreshadowing of the Messiah. Jesus is prophesying that He Himself would be lifted up on the cross that all who would look to Him would be saved.

64 - the serpent – The term "serpent" is translated from the Greek word "ὄφις" or "ophis". It means a snake or serpent. The ancients typically saw the serpent as an emblem of cunning and wisdom. Satan was symbolized as a serpent as he appeared before Eve and beguiled her. The serpent can symbolize "Evil; temptation; sin, sexual passion; the souls of the damned". (An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, J.C. Cooper, page 150). Since the days of Adam, the serpent is seen as a wicked symbol.

The fact is, the serpent was not originally a symbol of wickedness. One of the Hebrew words for "a divine messenger" or "one who prophesies" is "שַׁחֲשׁוּ" or "nā khash' ". Translated literally it means "to whisper". The word associates closely with the still small voice that we associate with the Holy Ghost. One of the Hebrew words for "serpent" is "אֲשַׁחֲשׁוּ" or "nā khāsh' ". There is only a small inflection that differentiate the two words. The early patriarchs used the symbol of a snake or serpent as a symbol for heavenly messengers. Satan was an imposter.

Satan is the great imitator. He was a liar from the beginning. Is it any wonder that while Adam was waiting in the Garden of Eden for messengers from heaven to guide and direct him, Satan would come as an imposter. If he follows his own pattern, he would come claiming to be a messenger of God. He did, and so early man used an inflection change to note that Satan was not a messenger but just a normal snake.

The snake actually has attributes that make it a great symbol of the Savior. "Because of its capacity to shed its skin, the serpent is also a symbol of immortality and resurrection." (Encyclopedia of Traditional Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, page 149). Early reformist recognized this truth, and saw the wonderful message contained in the story of Moses and the brazen serpent. "The brazen serpent became a symbol of salvation on the three grounds which Luther pointed out. In the first place, the serpent which Moses was to make by the command of God was to be of brass or copper, that is to say, of a reddish colour, and (although without poison) altogether like the persons who were red and burning with heat because of the bite of the fiery serpents. In the second place, the brazen serpent was to be set up upon a pole for a sign. And in the third place, those who desired to recover from the fiery serpent's bite and live, were to look at the brazen serpent upon the pole, otherwise they could not recover of live (Luther's Sermon on John 3:1-15). It was in these three points, as Luther has also clearly shown, that the typical character of this symbol lay, to which Christ referred in His conversion with Nicodemus (John 3:14). The brazen serpent had the form of a real serpent, but was 'without poison, and altogether harmless'. So God sent His Son in the form of sinful flesh, and yet without sin (Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22-24). - 2. In the lifting up of the serpent as a standard. This was a δειγματίζειν ἐν παρηγοίᾳ ἢ θριαμβεύειν (a 'showing openly', or 'triumphing'), a triumphal exhibition of the poisonous serpents as put to death in the brazen image, just as the lifting up of Christ upon the cross was a public triumph over the evil principalities and powers below the sky (Col. 2:14-15). - 3. In the cure effected through looking at the image of the serpent. Just as the Israelites had to turn their eyes to the brazen serpents in believing obedience to the word of the Lord, in order to be cured of the bite of the poisonous serpents, so much we look with faith at the Son of man lifted up upon the cross, if we would be delivered from the bite of the old serpent, from sin, death, the devil, and hell. 'Christ is the antitype of the serpent, inasmuch as He took upon Himself the most pernicious of all the pernicious potencies, viz., sin, and made a vicarious atonement for it' (Hengstenberg on John 3:14). The brazen image of the serpent was taken by the Israelites to Canaan, and preserved till the time of Hezekiah, who had it broken in pieces, because the idolatrous people had presented incense-offerings of this holy relic (2 Kings 18:4)." (Commentary on the Old Testament: Pentateuch, Volume 1, C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, pages 746-747).



Quetzacoatl

Today, modern doctors are symbolized by serpents on a standard pole. It is a sign of healing. Ancient Americans worshiped a great white bearded God that they believed visited them and promised to return some day. The symbol of the white bearded man is a serpent, often adorned with feathers which are a sign of kingship among them. Even the ancient Egyptians worshipped a winged serpent, which they considered a mighty God. Though it might surprise many to hear that the serpent is a sign of righteousness, it is a common among us and many other cultures both ancient and modern.



The Egyptian winged serpent God Melsokar



The Book of Mormon make a clear distinction between the imposter serpents that follow Satan and the divine role of Jesus Christ. It teaches, "And now, my brethren, I have spoken plainly that ye cannot err. And as the Lord God liveth that brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt, and gave unto Moses power that he should heal the nations after they had been bitten by the poisonous serpents, if they would cast their eyes unto the serpent which he did raise up before them, and also gave him

power that he should smite the rock and the water should come forth; yea, behold I say unto you, that as these things are true, and as the Lord God liveth, there is none other name given under heaven save it be this Jesus Christ, of which I have spoken, whereby man can be saved." (2nd Nephi 25:20)

- 65 - **the wilderness** – The word "wilderness" is translated from the Greek word "ἔρημος" or "erēmos". It means a solitary, lonely, desolate, and uninhabited place. **"In Jewish tradition, the wilderness has been both a positive and negative symbol."** (Encyclopedia of Traditional Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, page 192). It symbolizes covenant and danger, freedom and punishment, purity and sin, and simplicity and universalism. (Encyclopedia of Traditional Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, page 192). While looking at the symbols associated with the story of Moses and the serpents, we are to understand that the wilderness represents the fallen world that we live in. It is dangerous spiritually, and if we are not careful we could find our self lost and in danger of spiritual death. An ensign or standard pole is used to lead people or troops. The standard of the Gospel is our way to safety out of the wilderness. It is only by looking to the standard that we can be led safely out. The standard pole is the pole without the standard banner or flag. A standard is the flag or emblem that hangs from the pole. The standard represents everything that the followers embrace, and it symbolizes the methods and actions that the people will follow. Moses raised a standard on the standard pole. It was a brazen serpent. It was a symbol of the Holy Messiah.
- 66 - **even so must** – The term "even so" is translated from the Greek word "οὕτω(ς)" or "houtō(s)". It means in this manner, thus or so.
- 67 - **believeth in him** – The word believe is translated from the Greek word "πιστεύω" or "pisteuō". It means to think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, or place confidence in. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the passage "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" as "that everyone that believes in him may have eternal life" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 15, page 168). It would be unthinkable to follow an enemy's standard. One would only follow a standard that one believed in. This was a given among ancient people. So it is with Jesus. We must believe first, and then we must follow.

- 68 - **should not perish** – The phrase "should perish" is translated from the Greek word "ἀπόλλυμι" or "apollymi". It means to destroy, render useless, abolish, to kill, or put an end to. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the word "should" as "might" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 16, page 168). Elder McConkie says that the word perish means to **"lose salvation"** (The Doctrine New Testament Commentary - The Gospels, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 143). Those that choose not to follow the standard of Jesus Christ cannot obtain salvation. He is the only standard the save. ALL other standards are false standards and will leave one stranded in the wilderness.

- 69 - **eternal life** – The word "eternal" is translated from the Greek word "αἰώνιος" or "aiōnios". It means without beginning and end. It is that which has always been and always shall be. The word "life" is translated from the Greek word "ζωή" or "zōē". The word means life, and is associated with a living soul. Elder McConkie defines the term **"eternal life"** as **"an inheritance in the highest heaven of the celestial world."** (The Doctrine New Testament Commentary - The Gospels, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 143). Eternal life should not be confused with immortality. Immortality is the gift of living after death, while eternal life is living forever with God. All mankind, who chose to come to earth will be granted immortality as a free gift from Jesus. **"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."** (1 John 4:9). Jesus' atonement sealed that gift.

There is a higher gift than immortality. To those that believe, those that look unto the brazen serpent, Jesus offers the gift of eternal life. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches, **"Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life."** (Doctrine and Covenants 45:5). Elder McConkie clarified that eternal life is more than just being with God, but one of eternal increase. He wrote, **"Eternal life - life in the highest heaven; the kind of life enjoyed by Deity himself; life reserved for those who receive, inherit, and possess all things - this glorious type and kind of everlasting existence comes to those who believe in the Son of Man!"** (The Mortal Messiah: Volume 1, Collector's Edition, Bruce R. McConkie, page 318).

- 70 - **For God** – The word "for" is translated from the Greek word "γάρ" or "gar". The word means for or because.
- 71 - **so loved** – The word "loved" is translated from the Greek word "ἀγαπάω" or "agapaō". The word means, when used in reference to a person, to welcome, to entertain, to be fond of, or to love dearly. **"The orates implies a supreme act of love."** (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 133). Our Father in Heaven loves us!
- 72 - **the world** – The term "world" is translated from the Greek word "κόσμος" or "kosmos". It means the world or the universe.
- 73 - **he gave** – The word "gave" is translated from the Greek word "δίδωμι" or "didōmi". It means to give, or to bestow a gift.
- 74 - **his only begotten Son** – The phrase "only begotten" is translated from the Greek word "μονογενής" or "monogenēs". It means only child, a single of its kind, or the only offspring. In the Old Testament, the God of Heaven foreshadowed the sacrifice he would make by offering His only begotten Son, even Jesus Christ. He did so by giving Abraham an only begotten and then commanded, **"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."** (Genesis 22:2). Abraham learned, in an intimate way, of the sacrifice that our Heaven Father would make in offering Jesus as a sacrifice for mankind. Abraham was further taught as his son was spared, and a sacrifice was offered in his place. Jesus dies to save our sons and daughters. It is a miracle beyond comprehension. The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob taught, **"Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son."** (Jacob 4:5).

Jesus was and is the only begotten son of God. Though we are all offspring of God in the spirit, Jesus is the only Son in the Flesh. Elder McConkie wrote, **"Only Begotten in the flesh, meaning in mortality. This designation of our Lord signifies that he was begotten by Man of Holiness as literally as any mortal father begets a son. The natural processes of procreation were involved; Jesus was begotten by his Father as literally as he was conceived by his mother."** (The Doctrine New Testament Commentary - The Gospels, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie, page 144).



- 75 - sent not** – The phrase "sent" is translated from the Greek word "ἀποστέλλω" or "apostellō". The Greek word is closely related to our word "Apostle". It means to send away, to dismiss, to drive away or to order to go to a place appointed. Apostles are sent forth.
- 76 - his Son** – The word "son" is translated from the Greek word "υἱός" or "huios". It means a son. In a wider sense of the word, it can mean a male descendant. We find the word son capitalized. This is a typical sign of reverence to any title or reference to Jesus or His Father. Brown writes, "**John has probably capitalized on an ancient, but occasional, usage attributed to Jesus.**" (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 134). The term son is not a casual word. In this passage it is literal in nature. Jesus is the Son of God the Father. "**Jesus Christ is the only person ever born into mortality of whose physical body God our Father in Heaven is the biological father.**" (The Four Gospels - Verse by verse, D. Kelly Ogden and Andrew C. Skinner, page 123).
- 77 - condemn** – The word "condemn" is translated from the Greek word "κρίνω" or "krinō". It means to separate, to put asunder, to pick out, select or choose. It can also mean to judge, dispute, or preside over. We are condemned or cut off from heaven through our actions. Jesus came not to condemn us, we have already done that. Jesus taught, "**For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.**" (Luke 9:56)
- 78 - through him** – The word "through" is translated from the Greek word "διὰ" or "dia". It means through, by, by reason of, or on account of. There is no salvation, no other way, no other method, no other person by which we can be save except by and through Jesus Christ.
- 79 - might be saved** – The phrase "might be saved" is translated from the Greek word "σῶζω" or "sōzō". The Greek word means to save, keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction, or to save one from suffering. Jesus is the way to salvation. We obtain that salvation through covenant and change. It starts with baptism. Brigham Young taught, "**It may be asked whether any person can be saved, except those who are baptized. Yes, all the inhabitants of the earth will be saved, except those that sin against the Holy Ghost. Will they come into the presence of the Father and the Son? Not unless they are baptized for the remission of sins, and live faithfully in the observance of the words of life, all the rest of their days. "In my Father's house are many mansions." "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at; because straight is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." A question was asked Joseph Smith if all would be damned, except the Latter-day Saints. He answered "yes and most of the Latter-day Saints, unless they repent and do better than they have done."**" (Journal of Discourses, Volume 9, Brigham Young, July 13, 1862, page 315).

What does it mean to be saved? Does it mean that we receive immortality. I suppose that to a certain extent immortality is a form of salvation. All men are saved from physical death through the atonement of Jesus Christ. In a broader sense, salvation is something greater. "**A comparison with vs. 16 shows that 'to be saved' means to receive eternal life.**" (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 134). Salvation, in the full sense of the word, is coming home to God and becoming heirs to His Kingdom.

- 80 - He that believeth** – Belief or faith is a requirement for salvation. It is the motivating power that effects change and generates commitment.
- 81 - not** – The word "not" is translated from the Greek word "οὐ" or "ou". The Greek word means no, not; in direct questions expecting an affirmative answer.
- 82 - not** – The word "not" is translated from the Greek word "μή" or "mē". It means no, or not lest.
- 83 - already** – The word "already" is translated from the Greek word "ἤδη" or "ēdē". It means now or already.
- 84 - not believed** – Faith is so important in the process of salvation that Jesus declares that the lack of faith condemns a man. It will cut him off from God.
- 85 - in the name** – The word "name" is translated from the Greek word "ὄνομα" or "onoma". The Greek word is used as a proper name. It references everything which the name covers, everything the thought or feeling of which is aroused in the mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering, the name, i.e. for one's rank, authority, interests, pleasure, command, excellences, or deeds etc.
- 86 - Son of God** – The Joseph Smith Translation changes this passage to read, "**Son of God, which before was preached by the mouth of the holy prophets; for they testified of me.**" (Joseph Smith Translation of John 3:18).
- 87 - condemnation** – The word "condemnation" is translated from the Greek word "κρίσις" or "krisis". It means a separating, sundering, separation, a trial, a contest, or a judgment. Condemnation is not being worthy to be in our Heaven Father's presence again. When we are condemned, we are cut off from Him.
- 88 - light** – The word "light" is translated from the Greek word "φῶς" or "phōs". The word means light. Light symbolizes "**the manifestation of divinity**". (An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols, J.C. Cooper, page 96). "**Just as the light of the sun nourishes life on earth, so the image of light nourishes Jewish symbolism...Creation begins with God's command...Light as an expression of Divine Spirit is central to Jewish teachings. Not only did the material world emerge out of light, but light continues to represent God's Presence and protection in the world.**" (Encyclopedia of Traditional Jewish Symbols, Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, page 96-97).

The Jews clearly understood the symbol of light. Every year at Passover, the Jews lit lights as symbols of God's presence in their homes. Edersheim explains, "**On the evening of the 13th Nisan, with which the 14th, or 'preparation-day' commenced, the head of each household would, with lighted candle and in solemn silence, search out all leaven in his house, prefacing his search with solemn thanksgiving and appeal to God.**" (The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Volume 1, Alfred Edersheim, page 378).

- 89 - men loved darkness** – The word "darkness" is translated from the Greek word "σκότος" or "skotos". It means darkness. It symbolizes sin, wickedness, false teachings, lies and anything that is not of God.

Men love darkness. How can that be? Because darkness often offers us the easy way to pleasures, riches, and the things of this world. We love the things we gain by a little lie, or seemingly harmless deceit. Because of our physical bodies we are carnal beings. The natural man seems to have a natural tendency to pursue carnal desires.



It should be noted that Nicodemus came out of the darkness and found the Savior who sat in the light. There is an interesting symbolic message here. We cannot hold onto evil ways and think we can find the Savior. **"Nicodemus experienced a twinge of conscience, for had not he been afraid to come in the light, and had he not chosen the dark hours for his visit? Our Lord's concluding words combined both instruction and reproof: 'But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.'"** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 136).

- 90 - **rather** – The word "rather" is translated from the Greek word "μᾶλλον" or "mallon". It means more, to a greater degree, or rather.
- 91 - **deeds were evil** – The word "deeds" is translated from the Greek word "ἔργον" or "ergon". It means business, employment, or that which any one is occupied. It is an act, a deed, or thing done. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the word "deeds" as "works" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 19, page 168). The word "evil" is translated from the Greek word "πονηρός" or "ponēros". It means full of labors, annoyances, hardship, bad, of a bad nature or condition, diseased, blind or wicked.

How can you tell whether you love the light or the darkness? Take an inventory of your action. What do you do each day? How would you classify those works? Do we counsel with God in all that we do? The Doctrine and Covenant explains, **"And their hearts are corrupt, and full of wickedness and abominations; and they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; therefore they will not ask of me."** (Doctrine and Covenants 10:21). We can also gauge our hearts by the consequences of our lives. Satan's rewards are empty. He seeks for all souls to be miserable like unto himself. He who love darkness will find his life to be empty and void of spirit. **"For they love darkness rather than light, and their deeds are evil, and they receive their wages of whom they list to obey."** (Doctrine and Covenants 29:45).
- 92 - **that doeth evil** – The word "doeth" is translated from the Greek word "πράσσω" or "prassō". It means to exercise, practise, to be busy with or carry one. **"The use of a verb 'to do, practice' with 'good' or 'truth' or 'evil' (here phaula prassein; in vs. 21 'acts in truth' is literally 'to do the truth' - ten aletheian poiein) is a Semitism. The usage in the NT is peculiar to John (see v. 29); Rev xxii 15 has 'to do falsehood' - poiein pseudos."** (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 134).
- 93 - **hateth** – The word "hateth" is translated from the Greek word "μισέω" or "miseō". It means to hate, detest, or pursue with hatred.
- 94 - **deeds should be reprov'd** – The word "reprov'd" is translated from the Greek word "ἐλέγχω" or "elegchō". The Greek word means to convict, refute, confute, to find fault with, or to correct. The Codex Sinaiticus translates the word "deeds" as "works" (Codex Sinaiticus: The H.T. Anderson New Testament, Translated by Henry Tompkins Anderson, John, Chapter 3, Verse 20, page 168). **"The Gr. elenkein means 'to expose, convict, reprimand' and thus is very hard to capture in one English expression. Its positive counterpart in vs. 21 is phaneroun, 'shown'. We hear similar language in the Dead Sea Scrolls, for CDC xx 2-4 speaks of the deeds of the wicked man being exposed and his being reprimanded."** (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 135).
- 95 - **doeth truth** – The word "truth" is translated from the Greek word "ἀλήθεια" or "alētheia". The Greek word means objectively. It means of a truth, in reality, or for certainty. **"Literally 'does the truth'...In the OT 'to do truth' (asah emet) means 'to keep faith'."** (The Gospel according to John: I-XII, Anchor-Yale Bible, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., page 135).

The Hebrews believed that their language was sacred and testified of divines truths. The original Hebrew was pictorial in nature, and can often be referenced for such truths. The word truth can be looked at as well. Here is what we have learned;



The word "truth" or "emet", when looked at through the Paleo-Hebrew characters, shows the oneness of the Father and the Son. We know that Jesus is often called the "truth".

- 96 - **made manifest** – The word "manifest" is translated from the Greek word "φανερώω" or "phaneroō". The Greek word means to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden or unknown, or to manifest, whether by words, or deeds, or in any other way. **"The narrative of this interview between Nicodemus and the Christ constitutes one of our most instructive and precious scriptures relating to the absolute necessity of unreserved compliance with the laws and ordinances of the gospel, as the means indispensable to salvation. Faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, through whom alone men may gain eternal life; the forsaking of sin by resolute turning away from the gross darkness of evil to the saving light of righteousness; the unqualified requirement of a new birth through baptism in water, and this of necessity by the mode of immersion, since otherwise the figure of a birth would be meaningless; and the completion of the new birth through baptism by the Spirit--all these principles are taught herein in such simplicity and plainness as to make plausible no man's excuse for ignorance."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 136)
- 97 - **wrought** – The word "wrought" is translated from the Greek word "ἐργάζομαι" or "ergazomai". It means to work, labor, do work, to trade, or to work out.

