

Jewish Rabbi Becomes A Disciple of Jesus

John 3:1-2

Jewish Rabbi Becomes A Disciple of Jesus (John 3:1-2)

“Now there was a man ...” Transition or Contrast?

- Context: In chapter 2 there is the account of Jesus, during the Passover celebration, clearing the temple of that rabble that trafficked in merchandise.

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“A man of the Pharisees”

- Nicodemus was a Pharisee, *“the separated ones,”* the religiously *“straitest”* fragment of the Hebrew people (Matthew 15:2; Acts 26:5; cf. Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:5)
- Compare the Sadducees. Acts 23:8
- While there were some noble Pharisees (e.g., Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea), they generally are cast in a negative light by the New Testament writers (cf. Matthew 23).
- It is out of this background that Nicodemus steps forward – a pleasant surprise from a group generally hostile to the Savior.

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“Named Nicodemus”

- “Nicodemus” is a Greek name, signifying “conqueror of the people,” or “victor of the people.”
- Nothing known of his background, but his Greek name may indicate that he was a “Hellenist,” i.e., a Jew born outside of Palestine (cf. Acts 6:1).
- It is apparent that he was both powerful and wealthy. (John 19:39)

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“A ruler of the Jews”

- “Ruler” (*archon*) is a term generally used for a member of the Jewish council, called the “Sanhedrin.”
- He was a professional student, interpreter, and teacher of the Scriptures (cf. John 3:10; 7:50; 19:39).
- Nicodemus was a man of considerable power. (cf. John 7:50)

He *“came to Jesus by night.”* Why?

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He addressed Jesus as *“Rabbi.”*

- The title Rabbi means *“my great one”* or *“my master.”* At times the term is interpreted in the sense of a great *“teacher”* (John 1:38; 20:16).
- Nicodemus recognizes Jesus to be a greater teacher than he.
- NOTE: It is important to observe that later the Savior forbade His disciples to adopt grand titles of distinction within the context of religious instruction, e.g., “Rabbi,” “Master,” “Father,” compare such titles as “Reverend,” “Doctor,” etc. (Matthew 23:8-10).

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“WE Know” (see 7:50; 19:38-39).

- Others besides himself have acknowledged the amazing teaching and miracles of Jesus.
- Had the Jewish leaders discussed the amazing teaching of Christ in private (cf. 7:26)?
- Had Joseph of Arimathea, likewise a member of the Sanhedrin (Luke 23:50), and Nicodemus talked about Jesus?

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“*Thou art a teacher come from God*”

- “Teacher” is from *didaskalos*, found some 59 times in the New Testament.
- It is used of Jesus 41 times, and in 29 of these instances it occurs in the form of a direct address, rendered either “Master” or “Teacher,” depending upon the translation.

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“*Thou art a teacher come from God*”

The teaching of Jesus was unique.

- It was the truth (John 14:6).
- It was authoritative (Matthew 7:28-29; cf. Matthew 5:21ff).
- It was impartial. (Matthew 22:16; Mark 12:14; Luke 20:21; cf. John 18:19ff).
- It was spoken plainly so that even common folks could understand Him (Mark 12:37).
- It was compassionate (Luke 7:36-50).

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Nicodemus commended the “Teacher” as one who has “*come from God*.”

- Jesus was recognized as a valid prophet who has come to speak with divine authority (cf. John 1:6).
- Yet, Christ had, in the most literal sense, come from God (cf. John 6:48-51; cf. John 1:1; 8:58).

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“*for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him.*”

- Three terms are used to describe the supernatural works of Christ.
 - dunamis*, is a “mighty work” (“miracles” KJV), which emphasizes the fact that the Lord’s miracles were wrought by supernatural power.
 - teras* is a “wonder” which suggests the effect produced upon the observer.
 - semeion*, “sign,” reflects the concept of a directed focus, i.e., it is intended to point to a greater object beyond itself. All three of these terms are found in Acts 2:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; and Hebrews 2:4.
- Ultimately all the miracles of Christ, and those of the men supernaturally endowed by him, were to establish the case that he was the promised Christ (the Old Testament “Messiah”), the Son of God (cf. John 20:30-31).

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- Even those who remained enemies of the Lord could not deny the signs He and His apostles performed (see Matthew 27:42; John 11:47; Acts 4:14-16).

John 3:10, “*Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?*”

There are three portraits of Nicodemus in John’s Gospel.

1. John 3:1-2), he is an inquiring scholar.
 2. John 7:50), he is a fair-minded judge.
 3. John 19:39), he is a devoted disciple.
- Nicodemus represents the perfect illustration of the growth of faith that John’s narrative is designed to generate in each of us.