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# Teachers' Preparation Leaflet

LESSON 11.

SEPTEMBER 9th, 1894.

3rd QUARTER.

Jesus and Nicodemus. John 3: 1-16.

**GOLDEN TEXT:** "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3: 16.

**COMMIT TO MEMORY** VERSES 1-3. CHILDREN'S HYMNAL 26, 79, 144, 170.

**PROVE THAT**—We need new hearts. Ps. 51: 10.

**SHORTER CATECHISM**—Quest. 92. What is a sacrament? Quest 93. Which are the sacraments of the New Testament?

## DAILY PORTIONS.

(The Selections of the International Bible Reading Association.)

MONDAY.	TUESDAY.	WEDNESDAY.	THURSDAY.	FRIDAY.	SATURDAY.	SABBATH.
John 3: 1-16	Num. 21: 4-9	Rom. 8: 1-11	2 Cor. 5: 14-21	Ezek. 36: 22-27	John 6: 25-40	Rom. 8: 31-39

## NOTES AND EXPLANATIONS.

**INTRODUCTORY.** The connection of this narrative with the preceding chapter has been variously understood. Some regard it as an illustration of that penetrating insight into human nature just spoken of; others, of the kind of faith that Jesus accepts in contrast with that of the superficial believers from whom he held himself aloof. There is however, no such logical connection. The evangelist continues his account of the events connected with the first passover. The discourse is given at length because containing important doctrine and it occupies the same place in the gospel of John that the sermon on the mount does in that of Matthew. John may have been present and was able, with the help of the Spirit of inspiration (14: 16) to recall the words of our Lord concerning a doctrine which he had, at the time this book was written, preached for more than half a century. Nicodemus could not have been one of those who believed on Christ for the miracles alone and to whom he did not trust himself, for he takes him thoroughly into his confidence and utters to him in private some of the most important teachings that ever fell from his lips.

**LESSON PLAN.** I. The Timid Inquirer. vs. 1, 2. II. The New Birth. vs. 3-9. III. The Uplifted Saviour. vs. 10-16.

**I. THE TIMID INQUIRER.** 1. A man of the Pharisees—"A certain pharisee." This sect observed rigidly, not only all the requirements of the law, but the superadded traditions of the elders." They were orthodox, but unspiritual. They taught that a Jew was saved just by being a Jew, and that there was a place in Abraham's bosom for every circumcised descendent of his. Hence our Saviour's teaching is a surprise to Nicodemus.

**NICODEMUS**—We know nothing more about him than is told us here and in ch. 7: 50; 19:

36. A RULER—A lay member of the sanhedrim (ch. 7: 50). This court consisted of 70 members and the High Priest was president. It was the supreme tribunal of the nation and held in great veneration.

2. By night—He was one of those referred to in ch. 12: 42. He was in a general way convinced by the miracles of Jesus that he must be a divinely commissioned and divinely supported teacher, and he therefore sought, by a confidential interview, to determine more exactly his half-believing judgment,

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and especially to find out whether Jesus was the very Messiah. (Meyer). His visit at night may have arisen partly from a desire to have an uninterrupted private interview. He had not yet quite made up his mind and deemed it prudent to enquire further before compromising himself. He had courage enough to attend Christ's funeral, but not enough to bear his cross. **We know**—This may imply that there were others of his class who conceded this, or, perhaps, it is better to regard it as the indefinite plural, denoting the general opinion. **A teacher come from God**—The order of words in the original is "from God come a teacher" (see ch. 7: 16). He acknowledges him as "the coming One" (Matt. 11: 3), an expression used only with reference to the Messiah. (Alford). But instead of saying "come from God the Christ," he cautiously, but inconsistently, substitutes the term "teacher." Now, no Jew expected the "coming One" to be a *teacher*, he was to be a *king*. Nicodemus confesses Christ to be the Messiah and withdraws his confession in the same breath. **These miracles**—Miracles were a proof that the worker of them was sent from God. (Ex. 4). But only if the message he delivered was in harmony with what God had already revealed in his law. Deut. 13: 1; 18: 20. Compare ch. 9: 16, 33; Acts 2: 22. **God be with him**—Acts 10: 38. Surely Christ's miracles proved more than this if they proved anything. Either they certified his claims to the full, or they were wrought by Beelzebub. God could not be with one who claimed to be his Son, if he was not. Nicodemus here again shews his lack of courage. He timidly avoids saying what his acknowledgements imply.

II. THE NEW BIRTH. **3. Jesus answered**—Either Nicodemus made an awkward pause or Jesus interrupts the complimentary prologue with a startling answer to the question trembling on his lips, a question afterwards asked by the rich young man (Matt. 10: 17), the lawyer (Luke 10: 25), and some other pharisees (Luke 17: 20). Other instances in which Jesus answered the thoughts of men are John 1: 42, 47, 48; 4: 29; 6: 61, 64; 11: 4, 15; 13: 11; 21: 17. **Verily, verily**—"Amen, amen." Christ used these words in introducing a solemn and impressive truth uttered with all his authority as a divine teacher. **Except a man be born anew**—R. V. marg. "from above." This latter meaning is unsuitable here. Nicodemus evidently understood Christ to mean something that resembled a birth repeated a second time. The Greek word implies that the man's life must start over again from the beginning. **See**—"experience the blessings of." Compare the expression "see death" (Luke 2: 26; Heb. 11: 5; also Acts 2: 27; 1 Pet. 3: 10; Rev. 18: 7; 2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 6: 15; Eph. 2: 5, 10; Titus 3: 5; Jas. 1: 18; 1 Pet. 1: 23). **The kingdom of God**—John uses this expression on only one other occasion (ch. 18: 36). By this Nicodemus would understand

the kingdom of the Messiah.

**4. How can a man be born when he is old?**—Nicodemus must have been familiar with the "circumcision of the heart" (Deut. 30: 6; Jer. 4: 4), and the "new heart and new spirit" (Ex. 31: 19, 20; 36: 26, 27; Ps. 51: 12; 86: 4 &c.) spoken of in the O. T. Moreover, proselytes were spoken of as "babes just born." Nicodemus dimly understood what Jesus meant, and replied, in effect, "How can such a moral transformation take place in one whose habits and disposition have become fixed. It would be as impossible as for him to undergo the natural birth a second time." The answer of Jesus indicates the supernatural character of the new birth. The most common view is that Nicodemus did not understand Jesus at all and asked a singularly stupid question. Of this incapacity to grasp the spiritual meaning of strongly figurative language we have other instances in John 4: 14; and 6: 34, 52. But this hardly does justice to Nicodemus. That he came to Jesus at all argues some capacity for appreciating his teaching, and the style adopted by our Lord indicates that he believed that he was speaking to one who could grasp the truth enunciated. As a master of Israel, Nicodemus was not ignorant of these things, but they had never before been put to him in that light. "When he is old" does not mean merely "when he is grown up" but "when he is an aged man." Nicodemus puts a strong case in point to shew how incredible such a change must be. He may have felt that our Saviour's words touched his own case.

**5. Born of water and of the Spirit**—There can be no reference here to the Christian rite of baptism, although the truth stated is that which was afterwards embodied in this sacrament. Nicodemus was well acquainted with ceremonial cleansing ("baptisms" Heb. 9: 10) as representing the removal of moral defilement (Ps. 51: 2; Isa. 52: 15; Ezek. 36: 25, 26; Zech. 13: 1; 12: 10), and he could not have helped thinking of John's baptism. Baptism with water he understood, but to conjoin with this a baptism by the Holy Ghost as the efficient cause of being born again, was a new idea. Christ in effect says "Repentance must be accompanied by a spiritual renewal and this is the work of the Holy Spirit." Compare Acts 2: 38. There is no support here to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. The penitent thief, the apostles themselves (except Paul), and many saints and martyrs never received baptism, but they received the baptism of the Spirit which is the essential factor in the ordinance. **He cannot enter**—The omission of "water" in verses 6 and 8 implies that the Holy Spirit may produce regeneration without baptism, as he undoubtedly did under the Jewish dispensation and in the case of Cornelius; while on the other hand the example of Simon Magus (Acts 8: 23) proves that baptism may take place without being accompanied by spiritual regeneration.

The necessity of regeneration and faith to salvation is absolute, the necessity of baptism, or anything else, is merely relative (Mark 16: 16. (Schaff))

**B. Is flesh**—Human nature as at present constituted. The context shews whether the idea of sin is to be emphasized or not. By itself, the name at least implies sinful humanity, for there is no other kind by nature. Membership in the kingdom of God must rest upon a spiritual birth, for it is impossible for fallen humanity to step out of the fatal circle of recurring generations springing from a corrupted ancestry. To enter into a spiritual kingdom it is necessary to be born into it by regenerating spiritual influence. "There is a natural birth and there is a spiritual birth. The spiritual can never rise out of natural, as no stream can rise higher than its source." (Reith).

**Is spirit**—is kindred in character, in essential being, with the Spirit of God. Rom. 7: 6; 8: 2—10; 2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 6: 15; Eph. 4: 23; 1 Pet. 1: 23. This is Christ's answer to Nicodemus' incredulous question. "How can a man &c.?" He is born by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Evidently increased astonishment was depicted on his listener's face. Noticing his thoughts, our Saviour seeks to assist his comprehension by a familiar illustration.

**7. Marvel not**—For you see as wonderful things every day, changes which you cannot explain. **Ye**—He does not say "we." He was not "born of the flesh." In him from the first the Father was well pleased.

**8. The wind**—In Greek the same word stands for "wind" and "spirit". The R. V. marg. reads, "The Spirit breatheth," but the sense is not so good. **Where it listeth**—"list" and "lust" are from the same Saxon root. This illustrates the unrestrained action of the Spirit. You cannot bid the wind blow, or dictate its direction. We know the Spirit's work by its fruits (Gal. 5: 22), but his modes of action are diverse and the laws of his working unrevealed. **So is every one**—The points of resemblance summed up in "so" are (1) unrestrained freedom of action, (2) visible effects produced, and (3) ignorance of its origin and end is no reason for doubting the reality of the agent.

III. THE UPLIFTED SAVIOUR. **10. Art thou a teacher of Israel** (R. V.)—i. e. the wellknown, illustrious teacher. **Knowest not**—He ought to have known all these things from Jer. 31: 33; Ezk. 36: 26-28; Ps. 143: 10, 11 and such passages.

**11. We speak**—Some of his disciples may have been present. **Ye receive not our testimony**—Ye Jews, people and rulers.

**12. Earthly things**—"Things which take place on the earth." The new birth as manifested amongst men. "Facts which pertain to the domain of human consciousness and which man can verify by observation of himself." (Godet). **Heavenly things**—"The

heavenly side of the new birth and the salvation of man, in the eternal counsels of God regarding his only begotten Son." (Alford) These things have to be received by faith resting on the word of the Revealer. Christ proceeds to unfold these "heavenly things" and, in the next verse, asserts his competency to do it. "And no other than I can reveal to you heavenly things for I alone have come from heaven." (Meyer)

**13. No man hath ascended**—i. e. and returned to tell us any of the affairs of that world. **But he that came down**—at the incarnation (ch. 6: 33; 16: 28.) He speaks "in the prophetic language of accomplished redemption. He regards throughout the passage, the great facts of redemption as accomplished, and makes announcements which could not be literally acted upon till they had been so accomplished." (Alford.) He describes himself as the one who was to ascend back to the place whence he descended. **Son of man**—A title by which the Messiah was known. Dan. 7: 13. **Which is in heaven**—The meaning is similar to that of "which is in the bosom of the Father" (1: 18), indicating the kind of existence which Christ as the divine Son has ever had and continues to have." (Reith.) There is a profound mystery in the words. They clearly assert that He who spoke to Nicodemus was at the same time locally in heaven, in two places at one time. Compare John 8: 58. It is the mystery of the incarnation.

**14.** Having stated his right to speak of "heavenly things," Christ proceeds to declare God's method of salvation through his crucified Son. The reference is to Num. 21: 8ff. There are two points of comparison (1) being lifted up, and (2) giving life by simple faith. Fancy may find other resemblances between the brazen serpent and Christ, but the words do not suggest them. **Must**—Luke 24: 26. In pursuance of the unchangeable plan of God. In no other way can sinners be saved. Matt. 16: 21.

**15. That whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life** (R. V.)—Resting on him and his atoning death. "Faith in Christ is looking to him as given by God for our salvation from sin; it is the look expressive of helplessness, of need, of desire, of acceptance, of personal appropriation. A look brought sin into the world, a look takes it away." (Reith.) **Eternal life**—ch. 17: 3. "Life in the true sense is fellowship with God through faith in Jesus Christ and this, the possession of which is a matter of certainty now to the believer, lasts for ever." (Reith.)

**16. For**—the reason of the "must be lifted up." **So loved**—the measure of divine compassion is the sacrifice made to save men. Rom. 5: 8; 1 John 2: 2; 4: 8. **The world**—1 John 4: 9. The case of Abraham offering up Isaac is suggested. Heb. 11: 17; Rom. 8: 32.

# SUMMARY AND REVIEW.

By Rev. R. H. Abraham, M. A., D. Sc., Burlington, Ont.

SUBJECT: THE NEW BIRTH.

I. **The need of it.** Nicodemus, to whom the conversation of our Lord was directed, had characteristics which shew how much a man may have without the experience of a new birth. He was a religious man, of the strictest and most religious sect of the Jews. The Pharisees, of which he was a representative, were distinguished for their zeal in maintaining the ceremonies of the Jewish law. He was also a man of learning, being a Master in Israel; a man of influential position and of respectful manner. To this man of so many good qualities our Lord, no doubt addressing the whole class represented by Nicodemus, says "Ye must be born again." Thus declaring that nothing will do as a substitute for the new birth.

II. **The nature of it.** The new birth implies a change that is (a) *Radical*. Vs. 6-7. It cannot be regarded as simply an improvement but a complete and radical change of nature as Hodge says, "a change of inward immanent disposition or spiritual state which is back of all voluntary or conscious activity and which, in the things of God, determines that activity." It is the infusion of a new spiritual principle.

(b.) *Spiritual*. Vs. 4-7. "Of the Spirit." It is a divine work. Man inherits from his earthly parents his fleshly and physical nature; from the divine Spirit alone he can receive the divine life. Spiritual life in us can only come from God's spiritual life. Thus we learn that the Divine Spirit alone is the cause of the great and important change which takes place in the heart of man.

(c.) *Mysterious*. Vs. 8-9. It is not to be wondered at that there is much about the new birth that is to us mysterious, all nature is full of mysteries. If we cannot understand nature how can we understand Spirit. The new birth cannot be apprehended by the natural man, for only the spiritual can discern spiritual things. The Spirit's methods we cannot know, but the facts of the new life, which result from the aspirations of the Spirit are as plain and certain as the bending bough before the blast. The only real knowledge we can have of the new birth is that which comes through the channel of experience.

III. **Its condition.** Vs. 15-16. The only condition for the possession of this new, divine life is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We must look to Christ as our Saviour; surrender ourselves to Him as our Master if we are to possess Spiritual and Eternal life.

IV. **Its Evidence.** We know that the wind blows from the effect produced. So the changed life is an evident token of a changed heart.

When the Holy Ghost enters the soul and there abides as a principle of a new life, the result will be without doubt that the soul will be possessed of *light*, by which truth is more clearly comprehended; of *love* by which the soul is drawn out to God and Christ; of *power* by which the world is overcome—sin conquered—God's will obeyed and made the rule of life.

John tells us that he that is born of God, believeth (1 John 5-1) loveth (1 John 4-7) overcometh (1 John 5-4) doeth righteousness (1 John 2: 1-9.)

## Ten Minutes Normal Drill

Based on the text-book, "The Sabbath School Teacher's Handbook; or, The Principles and Practice of Teaching, with special reference to the Sabbath School," and prepared by Principal Kirkland of the Toronto Normal School.

### PRINCIPLES OF MEMORIZING.

Amongst the Principles of Teaching Dr. Morrison includes the principles of Association. This is a principle of memorizing, rather than a principle of teaching, and it is one of the important principles, for no piece of mental or spiritual experience is isolated. Every thought and action in our life is associated with some other thought or action.

#### Different kinds of Association.

- (1) *Contiguity of place*, by which the locality is associated with events that happened there. Ex.—Patmos with John; Jacob's Well with Jesus, &c. Give other examples.
- (2) *Association by Similarity*.—When two objects that resemble each other have been contemplated together, the one cannot be recalled without recalling the other. Give examples.
- (3) *Association by Contrast*.—By this is meant that one impression, object or event tends to call up image of its opposite or contrast. Ex.—The house on the rock suggests the house on the sand; Peter boasting suggests Peter denying.
- (4) *Cause and Effect*.—This is the most important principle of association. The cause suggests the effect, and the effect should lead us to look for the cause. See Judg. 3: 28. What is the Association here? Give other instances.