

A four-part series by Bob Mendelsohn
Jesus encountering Jewish people in his day....and ours
Lesson 1
John 3: Jesus Meets a Rabbi

Historical Background

Comment and Reading

Faith is a difficult issue in our lives today. How do we get it? What do we put our faith in? Is religion significant? Does God have anything to say to me today? Perhaps this lesson will help for it was a struggle that a rabbi in Israel had 2000 years ago. The student should read Numbers 21:1-9 (in the Torah) and answer the following questions. The bronze serpent might well have looked like the symbol for the Australian Medical Association.

1. What attitude and action of the Hebrews displeased God?
2. What was the penalty for their disobedience?
3. What happened when the bronze snake was lifted up on the pole?
4. What did God require of the people before he would save them?

Jesus' Conversation with a Leader

Comment

The main character in the next reading is the teacher of Israel or ruler of the Jews. He was one of 70 principal men who guided the Jewish community in all their affairs. In the tradition of the leaders, Moses appointed these men as judges. They formed the Sanhedrin which was the ruling council of Judaism. The 70 worked on the translation of the Bible (only the Old Testament) into Greek in Alexandria (Egypt) about 200 years before the Common Era. This Bible was called the Septuagint ("the work of the 70"). Nicodemus, "the teacher of Israel," held a pivotal position in the community. He would have been familiar with Jewish customs and biblical interpretation of major Jewish doctrines. Also note that the Hebrew word for *wind* or *breath* is the same as the word for *spirit*.

Reading

The student should read the Gospel of John chapter 3 and answer the following questions. [For background you might also read Ezekiel 36:16-38 (chapter 36, verses 16-38) and Jeremiah 31:31-40. These Old Testament passages talk about God's promise of a new covenant with his people.]

5. What does being born again allow you to do?
6. What did Nicodemus think it would take to be born again?
7. By what two elements do we need to be born?

8. What natural image does Jesus use to indicate that spiritual things are sometimes hard to understand or see or “capture”?

9. Jesus compared his coming to Moses’ bronze serpent. (He referred to himself as the Son of man.) How are they similar?

10. What must we believe in or have faith in to gain eternal life?

11. What motivated God to send his son to earth?

12. Who comes to the light?

Opinion Questions:

Faith can be defined as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Do you have the desire to have faith in God, whom you cannot see?

What did Nicodemus really want from Jesus?

Comment

How does a person come to the new birth? John 1:12 declares that we come to the new birth by the will of God and not by human volition. God orchestrates our instruction and understanding of spiritual matters. To be born again, we acknowledge our own sin, acknowledge that Y’shua is the promised messiah, and accept him as Lord and Savior—the ultimate sacrifice for our sin. In John 1:29, John the Baptizer calls Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Answers to the following questions can be found in John, chapter 3, which you have already read:

13. In John 3, who did John the Baptizer claim not to be?

14. Where did he say that Jesus was from?

15. What did John say about Jesus’ testimony?

Comment

Nicodemus saw things in the natural realm only. He misunderstood the kingdom of God. He thought that it was entirely natural, human and understandable. Jesus sought to expand his views. Faith is taking God at his word. What God said is true, and to demonstrate faith we only need to accept his truth. The children of Israel had to, in faith, look at the bronze serpent. That’s all. They didn’t need to explain it or be able to calculate anything about it, only to agree with what God said to do through his servant Moses. That is faith. What God said, I believe and I act upon.

The Hebrew word for faith is *emunah*, the root of which is *amen*. When someone says amen in a prayer, they are saying that they agree. When God speaks in the Bible and we agree, we demonstrate faith. Disagreement is “disfaith” or disobedience.

Obedience really starts with the amen. That's what Jesus was looking for from Nicodemus: faith. He was looking for agreement with what God said in Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31.

Opinion Question:

What has God said to you about Jesus? Do you agree?

Key Verse: John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Is there any reason you should not accept Y'shua now?