

v. 3:1-2 *There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, 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.*

The author concluded the last chapter that Jesus could read the hearts of men. (v. 2:24-25) He now presents the readers with an example by telling them the story of Jesus and Nicodemus.

- a) Nicodemus was a member of the party of Jews called the Pharisees. Being called a ruler, he was a member of the Sanhedrin and held a very prominent religious position.
- b) John says that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Even at this early stage in His ministry there existed a great tension between Jesus and the religious leadership. They already had at least one open confrontation at the temple.
- c) Nicodemus came having a great respect for Jesus calling Him a teacher from God. He had come to this conclusion based on the miracles that Jesus was openly performing among the people. (v. 2:23)
- d) Nicodemus was not alone in the opinion that he had of Jesus. Perhaps he came representing a group of leaders. More than likely the leadership was divided on the issue of Christ. Some probably felt that they as leaders were in competition with Jesus for the allegiance of the people.
- e) At this time the Jewish leaders could not deny His miracles (although they continually would, Mark 3:22), but at the same time couldn't accept His teachings because of their misunderstanding of the law and their misinterpretation of their scriptures. Nicodemus sought to reconcile these conflicts.

v. 3:3-6 *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 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. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

We are not told exactly what motivated Nicodemus to call on Jesus however, the response of Jesus provides a clue.

- a) Nicodemus probably came seeking the approval of Christ. He comes by night admitting that Christ is a teacher from God, but Jesus immediately challenges him with His response.

[In some ways this story of Nicodemus (the rich old ruler) is similar to the story of Christ and the rich young ruler. (Matt.19:16-21) They come to Jesus calling Him Rabbi and Master, but instead of receiving approval for their belief are issued a challenge.]

- b) Jesus tells Nicodemus that if he wants to see the kingdom of God he must be born again. The words "verily, verily" signify that what He was about to say was of great importance and was a certainty or a truth.
- c) The term "born again" was one that Nicodemus was very familiar with. This idea was not new. The Jews used the term in referring to gentiles who came to the Jewish faith. The Jew was

afforded the privileges of God by birth, so the gentile convert was thought of as being "born again."

- d) *Jesus, however, said that all men must be born again, including Nicodemus. In the mind of Nicodemus there was nothing better that he could enter into. He was a Jew by birth and a leader of the Jews. He was one of God's chosen people.*
- e) *Nicodemus conveys this idea to Jesus by referring to the natural birth. In other words, "The only way a Jew could be born again would be to crawl back into his mother's womb." For a Jew to be reborn as would a gentile was incomprehensible and so, the absurd reply by Nicodemus to get his point across. His question, which is really an answer to Jesus' statement on the need to be born again, conveys a sense of pride.*
- f) *Jesus strongly affirms what He said, again using the words "verily, verily." He tells Nicodemus directly that neither he nor any other man could enter the kingdom of heaven without being born again.*
- g) *Jesus expands this idea of being born again showing that He is not referring to the process by which gentiles became converts. The phrase "born of water and of the Spirit" has many interpretations, several of which are acceptable.*
 - *Water in the bible is a symbol of purification. The phrase can simply mean purified by the Spirit. Purified and reborn spiritually. (Ezek. 36:25-27)*
 - *Water could refer to the ministry of John that stressed repentance. The phrase could mean repent and be regenerated by the Spirit.*
 - *Water could refer to the physical birth and the Spirit to the spiritual birth. The phrase would mean a man must be born physically and then born spiritually.*
 - *A popular but unacceptable interpretation is that water refers to baptism. This would make water baptism necessary for salvation and would contradict the fact that salvation is of faith alone.*
- h) *Jesus also points out to Nicodemus that the physical birth that he deems so important as a Jew is not very important at all. Even the gentile converts that went through the ceremony were still of the flesh. Flesh is flesh and can never rise to a higher plane. Even if a man could be physically reborn he would be born once again into the same corrupt nature. On the other hand, to be born in or by the Spirit is to be like the Spirit, pure and holy. Spiritual regeneration must be initiated by the Spirit. (v. 6; Phil 3:3-8)*

v. 3:7-9 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 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. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

Jesus begins to introduce Nicodemus to the truth of spiritual regeneration. Jesus had just told him that the spiritual rebirth had nothing to do with the flesh. Nicodemus who is trusting in a law-works system is amazed.

- a) *Jesus confirms to Nicodemus through an example that spiritual rebirth is a sovereign act of God.*

- (v. 1:13) *The wind goes where it will. It cannot be seen, so no one knows where it comes from or where it goes. By the time you are aware of its presence, usually by the sound of it hitting an object, it is gone.*
- b) *By comparing the Spirit to the wind Jesus shows that it is not controlled by man, but works sovereignly. The wind to man is incomprehensible and mysterious. He cannot see it, but can see evidence that it was there. Man never knows when, where, or exactly how it will show up.*
 - c) *Nicodemus begins to get at least a basic understanding of what Jesus is revealing to him for he asks how these things are possible. These are his last recorded words as a teacher of Israel now becomes a pupil of the Messiah.*
 - d) *He seems to understand what Jesus is saying but is not sure if he is ready to accept it. As a Jew the problem was the law. This is probably what his question relates to. "How can these things be true in light of the law? How can the law be reconciled to a rebirth that is purely spiritual?"*

v. 3:10-12 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you [of] heavenly things?

Jesus challenges Nicodemus as to his ignorance of these doctrines especially in relation to the position that he holds as a teacher of Israel.

- a) *The scriptures speak of the doctrine of regeneration. (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 11:19-20, 36:25-27; Psalm 32:1-2; Joel 2:32) It should have been clear that God had always been more concerned with the inward man and not the outward appearance. David and Isaiah both understood this and instructed the people. (Psalm 51:15-17; Isaiah 1:11-18) Even Moses! (Deut. 30:6)*
- b) *Jesus strongly affirms to Nicodemus that what he is telling him is truth. Jesus uses the plural "we" probably in referring to himself and the prophets. Through divine knowledge and inspiration they knew these things to be true.*
- c) *Even though the testimony of the prophets, and now Christ, was confirmed with signs and wonders, the truth of God was rejected in favor of a law-works system that could never make a man righteous.*
- d) *The "earthly things" is probably the doctrine of regeneration of which Christ seems to hold Nicodemus accountable. The "heavenly things" probably refers to the means by which this regeneration will come about. By the atoning death of the Son of God, the resurrection and salvation by grace through faith. There will be oneness with the gentiles and worship of God in spirit and in truth.*
- e) *If he does not accept the basic truth of regeneration and spiritual birth how can he go on to accept these things that will now soon come to pass? Jesus will now go on in His discourse to Nicodemus and open to him the truth of His mission while answering the question, "How can these things be?"*

v. 3:13 *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, [even] the Son of man which is in heaven.*

Jesus had just rebuked Nicodemus for being a teacher of Israel and not having a true understanding of the very things that he taught. (v. 10-12) Nevertheless, Christ will now instruct Nicodemus in heavenly matters and first establishes His authority to do so.

- a) *He tells Nicodemus that He has first-hand knowledge as one whose proper habitation is in heaven. He did not go up to heaven to be instructed, but as one in heaven, came down to reveal the truth to man. In other words, He can tell Nicodemus of heavenly things because He is from the heavens.*
- b) *Jesus affirms His deity, first in the negative, stating that no man ever ascended into heaven and then came down. He then affirms it in a positive manner when He states, that which was always in heaven came down.*
- c) *In the same verse Jesus also affirms His human nature calling himself the Son of man. He clearly tells Nicodemus that He has authority as God in the flesh. (Phil. 2:5-7)*

v. 3:14-15 *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

Having told Nicodemus who He was, He now tells Nicodemus why He came. He begins by reminding Nicodemus of an Old Testament event that would help him to understand.

- a) *The incident referred to is recorded in Numbers 21:4-9. Most of the history of Israel as well as the writings of the prophets point to Jesus Christ in some way, shape or form. Even those who wrote it, inspired by the spirit of Christ, did not fully understand. (1 Peter 1:10-12) This incident is one of the events in the history of Israel in which we are shown exactly how it pointed to Jesus Christ.*
- b) *The truth is still presented to Nicodemus in a somewhat veiled form. Remember that Nicodemus was looking for a political Messiah and that Christ had not yet died and rose. Nevertheless, He provides Nicodemus with enough insight to be able to come to some important conclusions.*
- c) *Nicodemus knows that the bite of the serpent was fatal and the only cure was to put faith in the remedy provided by God, through His instructions to Moses, and to look upon the brass serpent.*
- d) *Jesus told Nicodemus that the Son of man is like the brass serpent, that He would be lifted up, and that those that believe Him to be the remedy would obtain salvation.*
- e) *Nicodemus could not deduce how the Son of man would be lifted up, but could come to understand that man's spiritual condition was terminal, and that the Son of man, coming down from heaven, was the only remedy. To have faith or to believe in Him would mean life, while any other course of action meant certain spiritual death.*
- f) *Jesus had earlier told Nicodemus that a man must experience a spiritual rebirth and now tells him that the means of this rebirth is belief in Him as the only remedy to man's terminal condition. He was the remedy provided by God, coming down from heaven.*

- g) *Later, Jesus would be literally lifted up on the cross and the remedy would be His atoning death for sin, proved to be accepted as such by His resurrection. (v. 8:28, 12:32)*

Author's note:

I tried to make comparisons using only the knowledge that Nicodemus possessed at the time. Now that we have full revelation the comparisons between the brass serpent and Christ are endless. However we are not at liberty to let our ingenuity as well as our imaginations run wild with these comparisons. We are limited to the specific comparisons made in these verses or comparisons that are clearly implied. I believe we are limited to the following:

- *In both cases death is the punishment for sin. Physical death in the case of the serpents and spiritual death in the bigger picture that it shadows.*
- *In both cases the remedy is provided by God. Man is in a hopeless position and God by His grace intervenes.*
- *In both cases faith or belief in the remedy is required, for the cure is supernatural; it goes against human logic.*
- *Jesus is lifted upon the cross which is shadowed in the Old Testament by the lifting up of the hanging serpent.*

v. 3:16-18 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Jesus continues His discourse to Nicodemus expanding on the fact that He is from the heavens, that He was sent by God, and that He is the means of salvation.

- a) *Jesus tells Nicodemus, as One who knows (v. 3:11), that the motive of salvation is love. It is a love that man cannot understand, and that we have nothing to compare to as to gain some perspective of it. (1 John 4:9-10, 19; Rom. 5:8-10)*
- b) *It is made clear to Nicodemus that the Jew stands with the gentile in condemnation and that the gentile stands with the Jew in the hope of salvation. Christ uses the term "world" to refer to all of mankind.*
- c) *It is made clear that sending His Son was an act of love and benevolence, not an act of judgment or condemnation. All of mankind already stands condemned before God. If the Son did not come into the world, if God had not made provision, all would have perished from the beginning.*
- d) *By believing, trusting, and relying on the Son as the One empowered by God and sent to secure salvation, a man can escape his inevitable fate. (v. 5:24; Rom. 8:1)*
- e) *Those who do not come to the way of deliverance provided by God remain condemned. (v. 14:6)*

Author's note:

The Jews believed that the Messiah would usher in a Jewish state. All of the nations that had oppressed Israel would be dealt with severely. The idea that the Messiah would not come to dole out

judgment, and that the gentiles as well as the Jew would be offered salvation was new to Nicodemus. These prophecies of the Messiah or "the day of the Lord" had always been misinterpreted by the Jews, and this "Jewish exclusivism" was an idea dealt with in the scriptures. (Amos 5:18-20)

v. 3:19-21 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

Jesus proceeds to explain to Nicodemus the grounds of the judgment or condemnation that is upon man. He basically shows him why all men are in need of a Savior, including the Jew.

- a) *Light can generally be defined as the knowledge of God. Jesus says that the knowledge of God is in the world. God instructs man through creation, conscience, reason, and revelation. In addition, He that is the Light had now physically come into the world.*
- b) *Darkness can be defined as sin and error. It is anything that is not truth. In his fallen state man prefers error over the truth and sin to holiness. The reason man gravitates to error and false doctrine is that his works or deeds are evil. His actions can be reconciled, condoned or even justified in systems and philosophies conceived in darkness.*
- c) *Darkness hides blemishes and imperfections. It makes things appear better than they actually are. The Pharisees appeared as holy God fearing men within the confines of their system that was based upon erroneous doctrine. Jesus pointed this out to them quite candidly. (Matt. 23:23-31)*
- d) *It is man's tendency to make his doctrine fit his deeds instead of conforming his deeds to the truth. Man gravitates to what he wants to hear. (2 Tim 4:3-4)*

[What happened within Judaism would happen within the professing church. In biblical times the classic example was what Judaism had turned into. Today a prime example is Catholicism. Doctrines of sacraments, indulgences, sacramentals, categories or degrees of sin, as well as saintly favors all cater to sin and evil motivations. The catch-all is the doctrine of purgatory, the doctrine of a second chance.]

- e) *Everyone whose deeds are evil shy away from the truth. They actually can come to hate it. The reason being, that it makes every blemish and imperfection show. Men hate the idea that there is truth for within truth there is no room for argument or compromise. The truth dictates to them the course that they must follow.*
- f) *The truth pricks the conscience and shows them that their ideas, theories, systems and philosophies are wrong. They see that they are misguided and that their deeds are worthless. Pride sets in and they refuse to believe that they must change and start over. They have become comfortable in darkness and so hate the light for it challenges their comfort.*
- g) *He that obeys or acts according to the truth loves the light. His desire is for the light to illuminate his deeds so that he knows that they are according to the will of God. He searches the scriptures ever willing to conform his deeds to the truth. He desires to live according to the will of God. He constantly seeks perfection through the light. (Barnes pp. 279)*

v. 3:22-24 *After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison.*

Sometime after the Passover, Jesus and His disciples went into the district called Judea. As far as we can tell it was still only the six disciples who accompanied Him in this early part of His ministry.

- a) Jesus and the disciples stayed in this region, near the Jordan River, baptizing. They stayed here for a considerable period of time, probably about six months.
- b) The baptism was probably on the order of John's baptism, that is, one of repentance. Possibly Jesus also preached of the need for regeneration as He had to Nicodemus. Details of this baptism are not given.
- c) Jesus and the Baptist during this time conducted parallel ministries. John was baptizing further north and on the other side of the Jordan River.
- d) We find out later that Jesus himself did not baptize but simply supervised His disciples. (v. 4:2) This shows that Jesus was greater than John as John himself had testified. (v. 1:29-30)
- e) John is the only one of the gospel writers that recorded this early part of Christ's ministry. The other three gospels begin recording the ministry of Christ after John the Baptist is imprisoned. Everything that we have studied so far in this gospel account took place between the following verses in the other gospels; Matt. 4:11-12, Mark 1:13-14, Luke 4:13-14.
- f) It is interesting to note that other than one week during Passover, Christ kept a relatively low profile until the ministry of John the Baptist was completed or fulfilled.

v. 3:25-26 *Then there arose a question between [some] of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all [men] come to him.*

For the last time the author records an incident concerning John the Baptist and provides what was probably the final testimony of John. He wants to be certain that his readers understand the relationship between Jesus and John. John recognized and many times testified that Christ was superior.

- a) A dispute arose between John's disciples (those baptized by him) and the Jews concerning this rite of baptism. What the exact nature of the dispute was we do not know.
- b) From what we are told it had something to do with the fact that the disciples of Jesus were now baptizing. Evidently in the course of the dispute John's disciples were informed of the popularity of Jesus.
- c) The language implies a sense of panic among these disciples of John. They basically go to John and remind him that Jesus was one of his followers, that he was the one that bore witness of Jesus and gave Him His start. Based on the testimony of these Jews everyone was flocking to Jesus at the expense of John. They evidently felt that Jesus was trying to usurp the ministry of John and that He had no right to baptize.

v. 3:27-30 *John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I [must] decrease.*

The disciples of John had come to love him and his message. They were slow to accept the fact that John's mission was nearly over and would soon come to an end.

- a) *John reminds them that from the beginning he had told them that he was not the Messiah. He tells them that they knew that he never claimed to be anything other than a messenger. (v. 1:26-27)*
- b) *John testifies as to the sovereignty of God. His message, as well as any success that he may have had, came from God. Likewise, the hand of God was now on the ministry of Jesus. They should not be jealous, but rejoice. John was ordained to go before the Christ and the fact that all men now went to Jesus was proof that his ministry was fulfilled.*

Author's note:

Any true ministry is given by God and orchestrated by Him in accordance with His will and purpose. This was true of John the Baptist and even Jesus himself. (Heb. 5:4-6) God's plan for a ministry may not have anything to do with success as measured by man. According to man's judgment most of the prophets were totally unsuccessful however, they were never meant to bring about true reform in the plan of God. They merely prophesied of the reform that would come in Christ. This was their God-ordained mission. Paul understood this truth when the Corinthians tried to put ministers in competition with one another. (1 Cor. 3:5-9, 4:6-7)

- c) *To further get his point across, John likens himself to the best man at a wedding and Jesus to the groom. The people represent the bride and so rightfully belong to Jesus. Just as the best man at a wedding is happy for the groom as he receives his bride, so John, at the report of Christ's popularity with the people, rejoices.*
- d) *John understands that just as the job of the herald is done when the king arrives, and just as the job of the best friend of the groom is done after the wedding, so John must decrease and give way to Jesus. He knows that this must happen and steps away rejoicing.*

v. 3:31-32 *He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony.*

John continues to testify of Jesus Christ to his disciples. They must understand the relationship that exists between Jesus and John. They too must follow the Messiah.

- a) *John once again confirms the deity of Jesus Christ. He simply states that Jesus is above all. He is from heaven and superior to man in every way. He is superior to the prophets (Heb. 1:1-2), superior to the angels (Heb.1-6-8), and sovereign Lord of the universe. (Col. 1:15-17) Such a One must and will increase and all authority must step aside.*
- b) *John, as well as all of the prophets before him, were of the earth. They were of a corrupt human nature. They spoke only as they were divinely inspired and even their inspirations were shadows and figures. John himself was a human messenger subject to fear and doubt. (Matt. 11:2-3)*

- c) *Jesus was the source of all divine inspiration. He now had come down to speak directly to man. He came to reveal to man truth and heavenly things. John stresses the point that Jesus was in heaven, that He heard and saw what no man could have ever experienced. (v. 1:18) Jesus presented the same idea to Nicodemus. (v. 11-13)*
- d) *John had repeatedly testified as to the deity of Christ. Christ himself was ministering and proclaiming truth to the masses as He began to open up the shadows of the scriptures. Very few however received His testimony. Some followed because of the miracles. (v. 2:23) Others probably for a variety of other reasons, but few truly received His words. The disciples that John was now addressing didn't receive Him even on the Baptist's repeated testimony!*

Author's note:

The author of this gospel was a disciple of the Baptist that did receive Jesus. We can see the influence of the Baptist's testimony as we compare his writings with the narrative of the Baptist that he recorded. (v. 1:5, 10-12)

Even near the end of Christ's ministry the situation still had not changed as this time the author of this gospel himself would testify. (v. 12:37-38) All was done in accordance with what was written by Isaiah approximately 750 years or so earlier (Isaiah 53:1, 6:9-10)

v. 3:33-36 *He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure [unto him]. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

Up to this time the Holy Spirit was given to the prophets and patriarchs in a limited fashion and for a particular purpose. As John had already pointed out they were men of earth limited by their human nature.

- a) *This was not true of Jesus who was from the heavens and possessed the fullness of divine knowledge. As a man the Holy Spirit was in Him without measure or without limits. He had full knowledge of the law, prophets and their fulfillment according to the divine purpose and plan. He was the Word of God made flesh. (v. 1:1, 14)*
- b) *God is truth and Jesus Christ is the manifestation of the truth of God. God's truth is not dependent on man's belief, but as absolute truth stands alone. (Rom. 3:3-4)*
- c) *So those that receive the testimony of the Son, affirm to themselves the truth of God. They put their "seal of approval" on God's truth and so are made a part of that truth by belief.*

[In his first letter John states the same doctrine in a negative fashion. (1 John 5:10-12) One can reject the testimony of a man without calling him a liar. Men are prone to error and deception. One might be sincerely mistaken, but not a liar. God, however, is not subject to error. What He testifies is true, so to reject His testimony is to personally question Him. So believing in the testimony of the Son is salvation, while those who reject it are condemned already]

- d) *The Baptist's final recorded discourse to his followers points to the deity of Christ and so proclaims Him as the source of truth.*

- e) *In the past teachers could be accepted or rejected, but such is not the case with Christ. He is infinitely above any teacher that ever existed. He was the inspiration of any truth they all had ever uttered.*

- f) *Acceptance of His testimony puts ones seal of approval on all the promises of God concerning Christ and all of the promises that He made in Christ. Acceptance or rejection of His testimony is life or death, respectively.*

v. 4:1-4 *When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria.*

Jesus, who had been ministering and baptizing in the Judean region for sometime, now leaves to go back to Galilee. The Galilean region is where He was from and where He had performed His first miracle at Cana.

- a) *He leaves as a result of the Pharisees finding out about His popularity with the people. At this time He had gained more disciples than John.*
- b) *Although not recorded in this gospel, Jesus also found out at this time that John had been imprisoned. (Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 4:14)*

[The Pharisees had finally gotten rid of John the Baptist, but now had an even bigger problem with Jesus. The Judean region was right in the Pharisees "backyard" and it was not now the time for a major confrontation in the plan of God. As seen from the above verses this is where the other gospel writers begin to record the ministry of Christ]

- c) *On His way to Galilee Jesus passed through Samaria. This was the customary route taken for it was the shortest, but at least two other routes existed that bypassed the region. The phrase "He had to go through Samaria" could very well mean that He had work that He had to accomplish there.*

v. 4: 5-12 *Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with [his] journey, sat thus on the well: [and] it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?*

Upon arriving in a city of Samaria, Jesus sat by a well to rest as His disciples proceeded into the city to get food.

- a) *The place where He sat had historical significance. The well had been dug by Jacob and the land itself was given to Joseph by Jacob his father. (Gen. 48.21-22) This is also the area where the bones of Joseph were buried. (Joshua 24:32)*
- b) *It is possible that John stayed behind with Jesus, for once again a precise time of day is given, and the narrative is written as if he had observed the event.*
- c) *As Jesus sits at the well a woman from the region comes and draws water. Jesus initiates the conversation by asking the woman for a drink, taking her by surprise.*

[Samaria was once the capital of the northern kingdom and after a long siege was taken by Assyria (2 Kings 17:3-6) Most of the Jews were taken to various places within the Assyrian empire. Groups from various pagan cultures were brought in to inhabit the land. These intermarried with the remnant of the Jews that were left behind. The religion of this region became an adulterated Judaism. The Jews therefore would have little to do with the people of this region.]

- d) *Probably recognizing Jesus as a Jew by His dress and/or His accent, the woman probably saw her chance to get even with an arrogant Jew. Jesus wanted water and had no means with which to get it. The woman thinks the only reason Jesus talks with her is because He needs something and so her response.*
- e) *Jesus tells her that she has no idea who had just asked her for a drink and states that He is a gift from God. Jesus, knowing her heart seems to play the role that she expects, that of an arrogant Jew.*
- f) *Jesus immediately adds that if she would have asked Him for water He would not have hesitated to give her living water. This softens the first part of His statement and puts doubt into the woman's mind as to her original assessment of Him.*

[Living water was a common term that the woman would have been very familiar with. It was the water that bubbled out of the ground as opposed to the water that sat stagnant. In this case it would have been water from the very bottom of the well as opposed to the water on top.]

- g) *The woman continues the conversation asking Christ two questions based on what He said. First, Jesus had nothing to draw water with, so how could He get any water, let alone the water from the bottom of this deep well? The other question is basically, Who do you think you are? She knew that Jesus was a Jew so surely He couldn't claim to be greater than one of the patriarchs who had dug this very well.*
- h) *At this point she probably doesn't know exactly what to make of Jesus or what He is after, but she appears to have called His bluff as to His status and His ability to provide water.*

v. 4:13-15 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.

The response of Jesus is along the lines of His response to Nicodemus when He separated physical things from spiritual. (v. 3:6) The idea here is that the living water that I provide is spiritual in nature, while the water Jacob supplied is for merely physical purposes. It is implied that He is therefore greater than Jacob.

- a) *Jesus is once again talking of spiritual rebirth and regeneration. The living water is the Holy Spirit. God gives or provides this "water", while man drinks it in. Those who partake of the gospel are eternally satisfied. The Holy Spirit is self-sustaining, permanent and inexhaustible. To partake is to have everlasting life. (Rev. 7:16-17, 21:6, 22:1, 17)*

[The contrast between physical and spiritual is clear to us, but to the woman the response of Jesus was hidden and shrouded in mystery. In dealing with Nicodemus, Jesus held him accountable for the knowledge of spiritual regeneration, but in dealing with this woman Jesus will hold her accountable for her lifestyle.]

- b) The woman has no idea as to the double meaning of living water and no idea of spiritual regeneration. She still has no reason to believe that Jesus is capable of providing any water at all. So unless there was something in His manner that humbled her and brought her to some type of faith, verse 15 should be taken as a sarcastic comment.

v. 4:16-22 Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.

Jesus begins to reveal himself to the woman by revealing the woman to herself. Knowing her heart, He instructs her to go to get her husband, with the intent of appealing to her conscience. Jesus now desires to reveal himself to her while at the same time preparing her heart to receive Him.

- a) The woman who had been talkative and sharp tongued can now only get at four words, "I have no husband." Jesus declares that she is speaking truthfully and proceeds to very specifically expose her life of immorality.
- b) She now realizes that the man that she is dealing with is extraordinary. Perceiving Him to be a prophet, she immediately steers the subject to religion. She obviously is ashamed as she stands before Jesus and wants to change the topic. Perhaps this is a question that has truthfully bothered her and to which she sought an answer. Maybe it is the classic justification of her actions, citing the confusion that exists within religion as the reason she lives how she wants. Perhaps she is repentant before Him and wants to know where and how to worship. Her true motive is probably a combination of all of the above as she is caught off-guard by the knowledge and insight of Jesus.
- c) The question asked deals with the proper place to worship. The Samaritans accepted only the first five books of Moses. The patriarchs worshipped in Shechem which is what region of Samaria was called. (Gen. 12:6, 33:18-20) The Samaritans built their own temple on Mount Gerizim in Shechem. This was a major point of controversy between the Samaritans and Jews.
- d) Being recognized by her as a prophet, Jesus tells her that things will soon change. He tells her to believe Him or trust what He is going to say. Worship will no longer be confined to a designated place. Neither Jerusalem nor Mount Gerizim will hold any special significance as to worship. (Mal. 1:11)
- e) After showing that it will soon be a moot point, Jesus instructs her that the Jews have the true religion. The Samaritans had rejected the prophets and mixed pagan practices with the truth that they did have. They had no insight or understanding of the God they worshipped. The Jews had the temple and the worship authorized by God. They had the insight of the prophets. The Messiah was to come out of the God-ordained Jewish system.

v. 4:23-26 *But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God [is] a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship [him] in spirit and in truth. The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am [he].*

Jesus immediately adds that all this is in the process of passing away. The events that will bring about the change are already in progress. Jesus states that true or genuine worshippers will worship God in the way that He desires, that is, in spirit and in truth.

- a) *Worshipping God in spirit means from the heart. One should worship God out of love with pure motives and intentions. This is in contrast to the worship that the Jews rendered. It was carnal and consisted of outward displays. Their hearts were far from Him.*
- b) *Worshipping God in truth is worshipping in harmony with the revealed truth of God. It is worshipping God with a clear and definite knowledge of sound doctrine. Truth must govern the spirit and emotions of man for worship to be acceptable. This is in contrast to the Samaritans who worshipped according to their own beliefs and ideas.*

“Such worship, therefore, will not only be spiritual instead of physical, inward instead of outward, but it will also be directed to the true God as set forth in the scriptures and displayed in the work of redemption.”
Hendricksen

- c) *Jesus emphasizes that this is what the Father seeks, what He desires. This is the culmination of His plan of redemption, what everything up to this point has led to. (Rom. 12:1-2)*
- d) *Jesus summarizes what He has said. The first truth is that God is a spirit and as such can be worshipped anywhere. The second truth is that He must be worshipped sincerely and according to knowledge.*
- e) *The woman, not fully comprehending, expresses to Jesus the belief in an individual sent by God who will explain all these things. One who will tell them directly what they need to know.*
- f) *Jesus, in turn, reveals himself to her as that individual. As the Messiah. He usually veiled this fact, calling himself the Son of Man, but in this region of Samaria directly proclaims himself as the Messiah.*

v. 4:27 *And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?*

Immediately following the declaration of Jesus to the woman that He was the Messiah, the disciples returned. They had been in the nearby city buying food. (v. 8)

- a) *The disciples wondered why He would be talking to this woman and what He could possibly be talking about. They called Jesus Rabbi, and a Rabbi would never think of talking to a woman in public. The fact that this woman was a Samaritan made His behavior even more of a curiosity to them.*
- b) *Even though the disciples wondered, they did not question Him. The idea seems to be that they knew His character to be true, and so, sat back and marveled as to how He viewed things and*

approached situations. He was redefining Judaism as they knew and understood it.

v. 4:28-30 *The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.*

The arrival of the disciples, coupled with her excitement as to what had just been revealed to her, ended her conversation with Jesus. Leaving her waterpot, she went into the city to share her excitement with others.

- a) The author tells us that she left her waterpot, she did not forget it. The significance seems to be that upon meeting Jesus everything else became unimportant. Water is a basic human need and drawing it a very important task, however, it became secondary to her spiritual need. She had already experienced something that Jesus would now explain to His disciples.
- b) Having five husbands, the woman seemed to know exactly how to manipulate the men of the town. She relates her personal experience telling them that the stranger told her of her entire life. He was a man of extraordinary knowledge and insight.
- c) Even though she knew Jesus to be the Messiah, she merely hints at the possibility, even posing the question in the negative. The men, struck with curiosity, all want to make the call. They want to confirm to the woman that this is the Messiah or this isn't the Messiah. The woman plays dumb, trusting in the ego of the men, to produce the response she desires. They all proceed to the well.

v. 4:31-34 *In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him [ought] to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

Meanwhile back at the well, the disciples, who had just returned, begin to eat. After a while they probably notice that Jesus is not eating, become self-conscious, and start coaxing Him to eat something.

- a) The disciples did not know what had transpired between Jesus and the woman and had no idea that she would soon return with a crowd. At this point the disciples seem to only be interested in food.

[The point made in verse 27b above may not be true. It is equally possible that they wondered what was going on, but never asked, because they were hungry and pre-occupied with eating. The whole point of this section seems to be Jesus getting the disciples' mind off of the physical and onto the spiritual. If they would have inquired about His conversation with the woman perhaps He would have prepared them for the crowd that would soon gather. Nevertheless, He goes about it in His own way.]

- b) Desiring them to start thinking spiritual, Jesus responds that He has food that they don't know about. The disciples, oblivious to what He is referring to, being totally caught-up in the physical, think that someone brought Him food while they were gone. This became a "hot topic" among them for it was amazing to think that a Samaritan would have brought Him food and even more amazing that He would have shared it with the individual.

- c) Jesus clearly explains the spiritual meaning of His response telling them that His food is to do the work of the Father. This, to Him, is much more important than any physical need. Situations like the one that had taken place by the well is what He came for and what sustained Him.
- d) Revealing himself to the Samaritan woman had made Him forget about His weariness and hunger just as it had made the Samaritan woman forget about her thirst and chores. (Matt. 4:4; Job 23:12)
- e) This “food” of which Jesus had partook is the food that the disciples knew nothing about, for they were away during the episode with the woman and did not inquire as to what had transpired.

v. 4:35-38 *Say not ye, There are yet four months, and [then] cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.*

To aid the understanding of the disciples, Jesus compares the harvesting of souls to the harvesting of grain. He uses a physical act with which they were familiar to explain a spiritual truth that they were slow to understand.

- a) The harvest at this time was still about four months away, however, the harvesting of souls would not be as defined or predictable. At this time the crowd of Samaritans approaching from the town came into view. Jesus directs their attention to the approaching crowd and instructs them that this also is a harvest. Their job was now to reap for the time was right.
- b) Things now become a little clearer to the disciples. They now know that Jesus must have revealed himself to the woman, that His teaching was not only for the Jew but for all men, and also began to get an idea as to their “job description.”
- c) “Gathering fruit” is synonymous with saving souls. The one who reaps brings souls to eternal life. “Wages” is synonymous with reward. This could refer to a heavenly reward, but more likely refers to the fact that reaping is the more pleasant as well as the more glamorous task.
- d) When the reaping is complete, that is, a soul led to eternal life, both the one that sowed the seed and the one who was appointed to harvest rejoice together. They both perform their task to the same end. They have a common interest and goal.
- e) Jesus refers to a saying that basically points out the fact that many times someone benefits from the work of others. This is illustrated many times in the Old Testament. (Deut. 6:10-11) Jesus says that in this particular incident the saying is true.
- f) Jesus had just instructed them to partake in the joy of the harvest. They were to reap a crop in which they performed no labor at all. A group of Samaritans were coming to receive the truth and the disciples were to take part. Jesus had done the sowing at the well.
- g) As reapers or harvesters the disciples could look to those who came before them laboring in the fields of humanity. They entered into the labor of the patriarchs, the prophets, and especially Jesus Christ.

Authors note:

In the small picture every believer is at the same time both sower and reaper. In some instances we sow the seed of the gospel while at other times we reap the fruit of the labor of others. Some time the harvest comes quickly and at other times not at all. Many times we are never even aware that our seed produced fruit. In the big picture, any fruit that is reaped by a believer can be attributed to the prophets, apostles, and especially Jesus Christ. He did the work and we are to gather in the harvest.

v. 4:39-42 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard [him] ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

The gathering crowd probably ended the discussion between Jesus and the disciples just as the coming of the disciples had earlier ended the conversation between Jesus and the woman. The crowd had gathered based on the testimony of the woman and the question she posed, namely, "is not this the Christ?"

- a) *The discourse of Jesus to the crowd is not recorded, however, they are obviously taken with Jesus for they ask Him to stay with them. Earlier we saw the impact that meeting and talking to Jesus for the first time had on the disciples.*
- b) *Jesus and the disciples stay in this Samaritan city for two days and many believe on Him because of His word. This is in contrast with the Jews, who were educated in the true religion, and yet made their belief contingent not on His word, but upon signs.*
- c) *These Samaritans came to believe on Him as the Anointed One and the Savior of the world. They rightly recognized Him as the Savior of the Jews as well as the Samaritans. Just as He had preached the gospel to Nicodemus, He, in a way not recorded, explained the same basic truths of salvation to the Samaritans.*
- d) *Those that followed the woman made the call as she knew they would. They tell her they believe not because of her testimony. She came to them expressing doubt (is not this the Christ?), but they now confirm to her based on their own assessment that Jesus is the Messiah. (This is indeed the Christ)*

[The disciples witnessed the working of the Holy Spirit just as Jesus had explained it to Nicodemus. (v. 3:8) Another journey in the Samaritan region would not be as fruitful. (Luke 9:51-56) Acts chapter 8 deals with the later evangelism of the Samaritan people. (Acts 8:5, 14) Consistent with the author's design of this gospel, he presents an entire town of Samaritan people, who after contact with Jesus, conclude that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.]

v. 4:43-45 Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee. For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country. Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galilaeans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast.

This chapter began with Jesus leaving Judea because the Pharisees had become aware of His popularity with the people. On His way to Galilee He passed through Samaria where He encountered

the woman at the well and spent two days in the Samaritan city. The narrative now resumes with His arrival into Galilee. (v.4:1-3, 43)

[The Roman province of Palestine was made up of three regions; Judea, Samaria and Galilee. Jerusalem was in Judea and in this region the Jewish leaders were dominant. The history of Samaria was already covered earlier, while Galilee was the area in which Jesus grew up. It contained the cities of Nazareth and Cana.]

- a) *Jesus went to Galilee because He recognized that in His own neighborhood, so to speak, it would be more difficult to gain notoriety, and so a major confrontation with the Jewish leadership would be less likely.*
- b) *Upon His arrival the people welcomed Him because of the miracles. They too had been in Jerusalem during the Passover feast and witnessed the things that He did. (v. 2:23)*

[Jesus, for the most part, ministered in this region for the next sixteen months. A considerable portion of the other three gospels deal with this part of His ministry. John, on the other hand, chooses to record only a few events that took place during this time. (Matt. 4:12-15:20; Mark 1:14-7:23; Luke 4:14-9:17)]

v. 4:46-54 So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told [him], saying, Thy son liveth. Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that [it was] at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. This [is] again the second miracle [that] Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee.

In the city of Cana, where Jesus performed His first miracle, a man came to Him seeking the healing of his son. The man was a nobleman or an officer of the court of Herrod Antipas, who ruled the area.

- a) *The account is straightforward. Jesus does not accompany the man to Capernaum, which was about a days journey, but simply tells the man his son will live. The man heads back and is met by his servants who tell him that the boy is well. The man finds out that the boy recovered the same hour Jesus pronounced that he would live. As a result the man and his household come to believe.*
- b) *The difficulty is with the words of Jesus to the man. These words were probably meant not only for the man but for anyone else that may have been present. "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."*
- c) *The man believed that Jesus had the power to heal his son. He knew of the works of Jesus in Jerusalem as well as in all Judea. When he heard Jesus was nearby he did not hesitate to come to*

Jesus with his request. He believed the word of Jesus by not insisting that He come in person, but started home by himself. So what didn't the man believe and what did he come to believe through the miracle?

- d) Jesus probably refers to His teachings and the fact that He was from the heavens and sent by God. That He was the Messiah, the Lamb of God, as John had testified. The purpose of the miracles was to substantiate His teaching. The Samaritans had accepted His teaching without the benefit of a miracle. They simply believed His word. (v. 41-42)*
- e) The faith of the Galileans was fragile. The man believed in Jesus as a miracle worker. His faith depended on signs and wonders. He didn't accept the teachings of Jesus until he experienced a miracle firsthand.*
- f) The faith of many Jews throughout the gospels was as strong as the last miracle that they observed. Their appetite for signs and wonders was insatiable. Even as He hung on the cross they still wanted more. (Mark 15:29-32) "Give us a miracle and we will believe."*
- g) This seems to be the difference between honoring Him (v. 44) and receiving Him (v. 45). The Samaritans honored Him, while the Galileans merely received Him.*