

LESSON 9

Nicodemus

JOHN 3:1-21



BIBLE TRUTH

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

LESSON SNAPSHOT

1. OPENING REVIEW 5 MIN

Use last week’s lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

2. BIBLE STORY 10 MIN

Read John 3:1–21 from the Scriptures or read story 87, “Nicodemus,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

3. OBJECT LESSON 1 15 MIN

How Can a Man Be Born Again?

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ baby pacifier

4. TEACHING/DISCUSSION

Select one of the object lessons to use to cover the teaching points.

5. OBJECT LESSON 2 15 MIN

Compare the Stories?

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ Bibles
- ✓ pens and paper

6. SWORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

7. ACTIVITY TIME 10 MIN

Lifted Up

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ paper
- ✓ crayons, markers, or colored pencils

8. CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

9. BONUS OBJECT LESSON 25 MIN

Modern-Day Nicodemus Skit

TOTAL 90 MIN

PREPARING TO TEACH

TEACHING POINTS

Unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God—Nicodemus, a Pharisee, came to Jesus at night under cover of darkness to learn more about him. Nicodemus began by saying that he believed Jesus had been sent by God. Jesus replied to Nicodemus with a riddle-like statement: “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The Jews believed one had to obey the Law to enter the kingdom of heaven. But by teaching that one had to be “born again” or “born from above,” Jesus was saying that one cannot get to heaven by doing good works. Nicodemus replied with incredulity touching on sarcasm, “How can a man be born when he is old?” Jesus repeated his statement and assured Nicodemus that it was by God’s work—by the Holy Spirit’s work—and not one’s own work that a person enters the kingdom of heaven. Nicodemus likely left that night a bit confused, but in the end there is evidence that he believed. While here in this passage Nicodemus came at night so that the other Pharisees would not see him, after Jesus’ death on the cross he came boldly with Joseph of Arimathea to claim Jesus’ body (John 19:39). It seems that the Spirit fell upon Nicodemus and he was “born again.”

Apart from Christ, man stands condemned—John 3:18 tells us that we all stand before God as condemned sinners. Sometimes people will say, “I can’t believe a loving God would send men to hell.” They wrongly think that people are inherently good. In reality, we are all sinners, rebels against God. Our status as sinners condemns us and our breaking of the Law confirms that we live as God’s enemies and are condemned already.

Wickedness hates the light—John tells us that “light has come into the world” (John 3:19), and that people hate the light because their evil deeds are exposed by the light. Not only are we sinners who stand condemned, we are incapable of seeing the light of God unless we are born again. In our sin we hate the light. Like someone who has been trapped in a dark cave can’t stand the brightness of his rescuer’s flashlight, neither can sin stand the light of God’s truth. We reject God, until by his Spirit he transforms us. Later in John 8:12 we read that Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

A LITTLE BIT MORE

Born Again

Rather than focus on the words “born again,” think of the meaning, “born of God.” As sinners we are all dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). Just as a dead person can do nothing for himself, so we who are dead in our sins cannot express belief in God; we are dead. But once God causes our spirits to come alive, or be born again, our hearts can respond in faith to the gospel. When we are born of God, God places his Spirit in our hearts (Galatians 4:6)—he comes to live within us (Ephesians 2:22). That is something we can sense by faith. God tells us that the Spirit’s presence in our hearts is a guarantee we are going to go to heaven to be with him forever (see 2 Corinthians 1:21–22).

Where Is the Gospel? _____

How does today’s Bible story fit into God’s greater plan of redemption?

The third chapter of John introduces the idea of the new birth: being born again. Like our first birth, this new birth is not something we can do for ourselves; it is something that God does. When the Holy Spirit makes us alive or born again, we are given a new heart, and our eyes are opened to believe the truth of the gospel, that Jesus Christ was “lifted up” (John 3:14) on the cross so that all who look upon him for their salvation will be saved.

Moses lifting up the bronze serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:8–9) was a picture of how God planned to save his people from their sin. Bitten by the snakes, the Israelites could do nothing to save themselves. But, because of the grace and mercy of God, if they looked to the serpent on the pole, God healed them. Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel yet he failed to see that our salvation is by the mercy and grace of God, not by our own works. Perhaps it was when he saw Jesus “lifted up” on the cross that he finally understood and believed.

THE LESSON

OPENING REVIEW **5 MIN**

Use last week’s lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

BIBLE STORY 10 MIN

Read John 3:1–21 from the Scriptures or read story 87, “Nicodemus,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

OBJECT LESSON 1 15 MIN

How Can a Man Be Born Again?

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ baby pacifier

Arrange for a helper to come to class at a prearranged time with the pacifier and prepared to participate in the skit as shown.

Start teaching the lesson and when you have read up to John 3:6 have the helper enter sucking on the pacifier.

HELPER: (removing the pacifier) I’m so sorry to be late. I’ve been really busy preparing for today’s lesson.

TEACHER: (noticing the pacifier) Umm...what’s with the pacifier?

HELPER: (holding up the pacifier) This? I’ve been doing my best to be “born again.”

TEACHER: Being born again does not mean you’re really supposed to be born a second time as a baby. Being born again is about the Spirit of God giving you new life. Everyone is dead in their sins and they need God to make them come alive or be “born again.”

HELPER: How can I do that? That sounds like something God has to do for me. It’s easier just sucking on this pacifier.

TEACHER: You’re absolutely right. We can do nothing to save ourselves; God must save us. We are all in the darkness of sin and unless God changes our hearts we hate the light. Look at what it says in John 3:20–21: “For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” Now throw the pacifier away and pay attention to the rest of the lesson so you can learn all about how God planned to save us from our sins by sending Jesus to die on the cross and that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Then finish teaching the lesson.

TEACHING/DISCUSSION

Select one of the object lessons to use to cover the teaching points.

OBJECT LESSON 2 15 MIN

Compare the Stories?

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ Bibles
- ✓ pens and paper

Divide the class into groups of three, making sure each group has at least two Bibles. Have them look up Numbers 21:6–9 in one Bible (the story of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness) and John 3:1–18 in the second Bible. Have each group write down things that are similar in the stories and things that are different. Once everyone is finished, ask a representative from each team to report one similarity. See if the children can pick up the larger application that God is a saving God who saved Israel from their snakebites and us from our sins. Talk about the similarities and differences in the stories.

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITY TIME 10 MIN

Lifted Up

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ paper
- ✓ crayons, markers, or colored pencils

Have the children draw a picture illustrating one of the following verses—John 3:19, 20, or 21. Ask a few of the children to explain their drawings to the class.

CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

Pick several children to pray prayers based on the day’s Scripture passages.

BONUS OBJECT LESSON 25 MIN

Modern-Day Nicodemus Skit

Divide the class into groups of four to six. Tell them that their job is to create a modern-day Nicodemus skit. In this scenario a Christian meets up with a group of friends. Since it is well known that the Christian goes to church, the friends ask him how a person can go to heaven. The Christian responds, “You have to be born again.” The rest of the skit can either be serious or humorous, but not disrespectful.

In the end, discuss what it means to be “born again.” Talk about how you might answer someone who asks you, Are you one of those born-again Christians?