Lesson 5
John 3:1–22; 4:1–42

John 3

Verses 1–2: Why does Nicodemus come by night? That fact is important enough to John to mention. What is John telling us with it?

Why does he call Jesus “Rabbi”?

What does it mean to say that a teacher has “come from God”? How does Nicodemus claim to know that Jesus has come from God? How reliable is the evidence of God that he gives?

Verse 3: How is what Jesus says a response to what Nicodemus has said?

Another translation, more literal and perhaps better: “Unless a person is begotten from above, he cannot see [or “know”] the kingdom [or “reign”] of God.” The Greek word translated from above in the King James Version is ambiguous. It can mean “above,” “from the beginning,” “for a long time,” and “again” or “anew.” Is that ambiguity instructive? How would you decide which meaning to choose?

Why is seeing so often used as the metaphor for knowing? Why not, instead, hearing?

How or when do we see or know the reign of God?
Nicodemus has seen Christ’s miracles (verse 2), but he has *not* seen the kingdom of God (verse 3). What does that fact teach us?

**Verse 4:** The Jews baptized—as is plain from the success of John the Baptist’s mission. And we know from other documents that they used the metaphor of rebirth for those who were converted. Why, then, does Nicodemus say such a dumb thing?

Did Nicodemus believe that his first, physical birth had conveyed spiritual advantages on him? Might that assumption help us understand his question? Compare what Jesus says to the multitude in Luke 3:8.

**Verse 5:** What does it mean to be born of the Spirit?

To think about that question, consider Alma 5:21. How and when do we know that we cannot be saved unless our garments are washed white? Is that knowledge experiential? Conceptual? If it is conceptual or partly conceptual, what conceptual knowledge must we have?

Why is sin portrayed as something that gets our clothing filthy? Is there a sin or set of sins in particular that would do that? Does that contribute to the irony that our garments must be washed in blood in order to become white again?

What does it mean to redeem someone from something or someone? Given that meaning, what does the phrase “redeem people from their sins” mean?

Look also at Alma 5:33–35. How can the Savior say that we can eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely if he has a condition on coming to him, namely repentance?
Consider also the verse we will be looking at later, John 3:16. How is its teaching relevant to being born of the Spirit?

Is the covenant of King Benjamin’s people (Mosiah 5:5) relevant to understanding this birth by the Spirit?

What does Alma 5:12–14 teach about that covenant?

For now, at least, finish by reading Mosiah 27:24–26 and thinking about how that sheds light on the exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus.

Verse 6: What is Jesus’s point here?

Verses 7–8: What is the genealogy of one born of the Spirit?

In Greek (the language of the New Testament) the word translated spirit can also mean “breath” or “wind.” In fact, that is its first meaning. So the Greek word translated wind in this verse is the same as the word translated Spirit. Rewrite the verse using wind for each and rewrite it using Spirit for each. Does either way of rewriting the verse add meaning?

Is there a connection between the gift of the Spirit and the breath of God, given to Adam in Genesis 2:7 (Moses 3:7)?

What does it mean to say that the Spirit/wind/breath goes where it desires or wills? What is Jesus teaching Nicodemus in these verses? How does that teaching compare to what Nicodemus, as a Pharisee, believed? How does that teaching apply to us?

Verses 9–10: Another translation of the word for master is teacher. If you make that substitution, what is Jesus saying to Nicodemus?
**Verses 11–12:** Jesus is scolding Nicodemus. Can you put his criticism into plain, contemporary language?

When has Jesus told Nicodemus or others of earthly things that they did not believe? Was it in this exchange? What kinds of things, “heavenly things,” is he withholding?

**Verse 13:** What the Lord says here is odd. Is he talking about his future ascent, after his resurrection? Or about something else? If something else, what?

How is what he teaches in these verses relevant to the discussion with Nicodemus as a whole?

**Verses 14–15:** The obvious cross-reference for this verse is 2 Nephi 25:20. How many parallels can you find between Moses lifting up the brass serpent and Jesus being crucified?

**Verses 16–17:** It is difficult to imagine that there are many people who have not heard John 3:16. Evangelists of many denominations quote it frequently when they proselytize. Sometimes, though, when something is very familiar, it is also easily overlooked. Consider this alternative translation of John 3:16, and because verse 17 is an essential part of Jesus’s teaching, I have also included it:

> For God so loved the world that he gave the only Son, so that all who trust in him might not be destroyed but might have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be delivered through him.

Verse 16 begins with *for* because it is explaining something. What is it explaining?
The Greek word *pisteuō* has the basic meaning “to trust,” but it can also mean “to believe” and “to have faith in.” Does it help make sense of faith in Christ to think about it as trust? What difference(s) can thinking of it that way make?

What is verse 17 explaining?

The word translated *condemn* also means “judge,” and most often it means to pass a negative judgment. Its basic meaning is “separation.” What belief is Jesus countering when he says that the Father did not send the Son into the world to condemn it?

From what does Jesus save us or deliver us?

**Verse 18:** How does the meaning of the verse change if we replace “believeth on” with “trusts in”? Why are those who believe on/trust in the Messiah not condemned?

The second half of verse 18 says that if we don’t believe, then we have already been judged for not believing. Can you explain what judgment that might be? In what sense does a person’s unbelief make him or her already judged? Does it help to remember that the basic meaning of the word translated *judged* is “separated”? From what are those who do not believe already separated? What separates (judges) them?

**Verse 19:** According to this verse, to be condemned is to be someone who loves dark more than light. Notice that Jesus doesn’t say, “They are condemned because they love darkness more than light.” He says that loving darkness is itself condemnation. What do you make of that?

How does what Jesus says here relate to what he says in verse 17?
How does the fact that men’s deeds were evil explain that they hate the light? How do evil deeds separate one from light? How would one’s evil deeds cause one to hate the light?

**Verse 20:** How does this verse explain the condemnation or separation of those who hate light?

The word translated *reproved* is *elenchō*. It means “to bring to light or expose,” “to bring a person to the point at which he or she recognizes something,” “to reprove or correct,” and “to punish.” Which of those meanings fits the context best? One way to decide that is by putting each into the verse and seeing which gives the best explanation for the hatred of light.

**Verses 21–22:** We never use the expression “do the truth.” What can it mean?

Why do those who do the truth want their deeds made manifest?

What does it mean that one’s deeds are “wrought in God”? Is the answer to this question also an answer to the immediately previous question?

**John 4**

I offer less detailed questions about this chapter.

**Verse 10:** What is the living water that Jesus offers the Samaritan woman? In the Old Testament, it represents God, as in Jeremiah 17:13. In ancient Israel it sometimes symbolized the Law. Mosiah seems to use it to represent the Holy Ghost when he speaks of the Spirit being poured out on the people (Mosiah 4:20).
Is the gift that Jesus refers to the same as the living water, or is it something else? What is it that she should know if she is to ask for living water?

**Verses 19–21:** The Samaritan woman asks Jesus the question that burned between the Samaritans and the Jews. Based on the fact that in Deuteronomy 12:1–14 the Lord tells Israel to worship at the place he will show them immediately after he has said that they should place a blessing on Mt. Gerizim (Deuteronomy 11:29), the Samaritans believed that the proper place for the temple was on Mt. Gerizim. While the leaders of Judah were in captivity, those who remained behind (which is who the Samaritans descended from) built a temple on Mt. Gerizim that was later destroyed under the Hasmonean (Jewish) rule. Present-day Samaritans (of which there are less than 1,000) claim that their worship is that of preexilic Israel and that Judaism changed the religion after the exile in Babylon.

Why doesn’t Jesus answer the woman’s question?

What does his answer in verse 21 mean?

**Verses 22–24:** What does he mean when he says that she doesn’t know what she worships? Did the Jews know whom they worshipped?

What does he mean when he tells her that salvation is of the Jews? The Samaritans claim descent from Ephraim and Manasseh. Aren’t they, too, set apart to bring salvation to the world?

What does it mean to say “God is a Spirit”? The Greek could be translated as it is or as “God is Spirit.” Either would be
correct. Scriptures also say “God is light” (1 John 1:5) and “God is love” (1 John 4:8). How should we understand those kinds of descriptions of God?

**Verses 32–38:** How is this incident related to the story as a whole? Why has John included it here as part of the story of the Samaritan woman? What has the parable that Jesus tells his disciples to do with his encounter with the woman?