

## 28.18 Nicodemus (John 3:1–21)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows  
[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that usually should not be read. It also indicates answers to questions.

### Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.
- CEF’s flannel graph, “Another Birthday?” or Accent’s Kindergarten Sunday School curriculum, K2B, Teacher’s Manual, p. 41.

**Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach:** Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *rabbi*: a teacher of great things. “It comes from a word, which signifies great and large; and was used by [the Jewish doctors] to suggest the . . . great plenty of knowledge they would be thought to have had” (John Gill in Online Bible).
- *verily*: (KJV) surely; certainly; most assuredly; truly
- *kingdom of God*: the people over whom God rules—first the Jews, now Christian Jews and Gentiles. Christ Himself is also called the kingdom of God—the King, the Person who rules.
- *born again or regenerated*: one who is “dead in sins” made alive by the Spirit of God; renewed in the spirit of his mind; has Christ formed in his heart; becomes a partaker of the divine nature; and in all respects a new creature; and another in heart, in principle, in practice, and conversation; or unless he be “born from above,” as the word is rendered in #Joh 3:31; that is, by a supernatural power, having the heavenly image stamped on him; and being called with an heavenly calling, even with the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (John Gill in Online Bible).
- *world*: in this chapter and many others, *Jews* and *Gentiles* but not every single person in the earth; the world order
- *condemned*: pronounced guilty without hope of mercy and, therefore, surely bound to perish in hell

### Scripture Passage: (NKJV)

John 3:1 There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”

3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4 Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

6 “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 “Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again.’

8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit “.”

9 Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”

10 Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?

11 “Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

12 “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly

things?

13 “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

14 “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

15 “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

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.

17 “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

18 “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

21 “But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

### **Introduction/Review:**

Way back on our time line, when Israel was on the way to the Promised Land after being in Egypt [point to the place on your time line], during the forty years when the older generation would die out, the people complained against God because they needed food and water. They hated the manna God had provided because they were so tired of it. God sent poisonous snakes to bite and kill many Israelites. Then the people were sorry and came to Moses, asking him to pray that the Lord would take away the snakes. God told Moses to make a snake out of bronze and to put it on a high pole so that those who looked at the bronze snake might be healed of their snake bite (Numbers 21:4–9). You will hear a mention of that story in today’s Life-of-Christ story.

Jesus was in Jerusalem for the first Passover of His public life. He had cleansed the Temple of business that was defiling God’s House. John 2:23–25 states that at this time, “many believed in his name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.” “✓These last three verses of chapter 2 belong really to chapter 3, for there we understand that men can believe in Christ in a certain kind of way, and yet it [that faith] is good for nothing” (JND CW 25.233 in Online Bible).

### **Story:**

#### ***Nicodemus meets Jesus.***

One man who was at least curious about Jesus was the ruler of the Jews. His name was Nicodemus. We can only guess why he came to visit Jesus at night. ✓Probably it was because he didn’t want to be seen by his comrades, but see Christ he must.

“Rabbi,” he began, ✓complimenting the Lord Jesus as a teacher of great things. He continued, “We know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” ✓Apparently, Nicodemus had seen Jesus’ miracles and wanted to learn more about this Man.

#### ***“You must be born again.”***

I am startled by Jesus’ answer that gets right to the heart of the issue. He said bluntly, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again—*anew with a completely new beginning* (JND CW 25.235 in Online Bible)—he cannot see the kingdom of God.” What does this statement mean? [Someone needs to be changed by God—born again—in order to be in God’s kingdom.]

Now, Nicodemus, being a Jew—of God’s favored family according to birth—seemed confused, for he

considered himself righteous. Furthermore, ✓when the Messiah would come, thought Nicodemus, all descendants of Abraham would share in the kingdom. What was this new birth? Who needed it? ✓He thought only of the physical aspects—being a Jew—even though ✓the Jews used the expression *to be born again* “to denote a change from *Gentilism* to *Judaism*. . . . The word with them meant a change from the state of a heathen to that of a Jew. But they never used it as applicable to a Jew, because they supposed that by his birth every Jew was entitled to all the privileges of the people of God” (Barnes in Online Bible).

Surely, ✓Nicodemus thought, Jesus has some kind of weird doctrine. So he asked, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

### ***Born of water***

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Many teach that *water* in this verse is baptism; thus, they say one cannot be born again unless he or she is baptized. This interpretation goes against other Scriptures that tell us, for example, “Not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the *washing* of regeneration, and renewing of the *Holy Ghost*” (Titus 3:5). Other interpretations for the word *water* exist, ✓but it can refer to the Bible, the Word of God—“the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26), which is essential to one’s coming to salvation.

### ***Born of Spirit***

“The wind\* blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ✓Certainly, a spiritual scene, not a physical, is before us. Jesus stated that one must be born “*of the Spirit*.” He continued, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Only the Spirit can make a person be born again. Jesus admonished, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”

We believe that “salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). God does it all from wooing us to saving us, even giving us the faith to believe. The word *wind* in John 3:8 comes from the Greek word, *pneuma*, that can be translated not only *wind* but also *spirit*. The word *spirit* makes perfect sense at the beginning of this verse: “The Spirit goes where it wishes, and you can see what it does but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes.” [See “Notes to the Teacher” below.]

On the other hand, the *wind* is also an illustration of the variety of ways in which the Spirit works, saving some through quiet work and others through a tempest (Barnes).

Nothing Jesus said fit Nicodemus’s mindset. Since he thought he was right with God, being a descendant of Abraham, and since he was still concerned about physical things, he asked, “How can these things be?”

### ***Rebuke of Nicodemus***

Jesus answered with a deserved rebuke: “Are you *the* teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”

Okay. So how should Nicodemus have known these things? All he had was the Old Testament, right? “Had he never read the promise to Israel by [Isaiah]? —“I will pour water upon him that is thirsty. . . . I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3). Had he forgotten the words of [Ezekiel]? —“. . . I will give you a new heart, and will put a new spirit within you. . . . And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and keep Mine ordinances, and ye shall do them. And . . . ye shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Eze 36:25–28; WK E 51ff in Online Bible). Jesus’ rebuke was well aimed; Nicodemus, a man who knew the Old Testament, should have understood these things.

### ***Godlike statements***

Jesus went on to say things that only God Himself could say; His statements would show He was God.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.”

Who is the *We* and *Our* in this sentence? ✓Instead of saying *I* over and over, Jesus might have used the word *we* as editorially. Rather, ✓it sounds to me as if Jesus is talking about the other Persons of the Trinity—the Father, Spirit, and Himself. Jesus knew what He was talking about from first-hand knowledge; Nicodemus was not believing what God Himself was saying even though Jesus was an eye witness to the truth of His words.

Jesus continued His part of the conversation: “If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” Nicodemus wasn’t getting it on the simple level that he already should have known. How would he learn more of God?

Then Jesus made a statement that was very revealing about Himself: “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”

Who was the only One who came down from heaven? [The Son of Man.] Who is the Son of Man? [Jesus.] How could He say He was *in* heaven? ✓Probably because He was so in tune with His Father in heaven. [Teacher, see “Notes to the Teacher” at the end of this lesson.]

### ***The plan of salvation***

At this point Jesus gave the clear plan of salvation: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 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.” He said in essence, “This is how it is: Just like that bronze snake in Moses’ day, I will be put on a pole (or cross) so that the ones who believe on Me will have eternal life. God loved the world, not just Jews but also Gentiles,\*\* in this way that He gave Me to be their Sacrifice so that the ones believing will not go to perdition but will have everlasting life.”

There it was—a matter-of-fact statement, no urging, just explanation of the Spirit’s work of regeneration.

Jesus continued: “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Some people think that the term *the world* means everyone who ever lived. Others say that Jesus saved everyone who ever lived (universal redemption). But notice that the ones who don’t believe are already condemned, not saved. No one starts out saved from his sin; he starts out condemned for his sin. Jesus must save him.

### ***Loving darkness***

The true condition of all people can be seen in Jesus’ next words: “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”

On their own, people love evil deeds; they love to do evil deeds in darkness. It takes the supernatural work of regeneration to change—to come to the light. “He who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” Who does the work? [God.] Jesus said He was the Light of the world (John 8:12). Those who do “the truth” (notice it’s not just “do good works”) are those who have come to Jesus to be saved.

Do you love the light? Have you trusted Christ to save you? If not, may the Holy Spirit bring you to Jesus, the only One who can save from sin.

### ***Was Nicodemus saved?***

What happened to Nicodemus? The Bible doesn’t directly state that he was saved by God, but it does

mention his name in positive connections with Jesus. In John 7:50–52 we read that he challenged the Pharisees’ judgment of Jesus. In John 19:39 he prepared a hundred pounds of spices for Jesus’ dead body. I hope we believers will see Nicodemus when we go to be with Jesus in heaven.

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\*In this sentence we have the word *pneuma* translated by the *two* words “wind” and “spirit.” There can be no justification in rendering *pneuma* “wind,” when in the last clause of the same sentence, and three times in the immediate context, it is rendered “spirit.” There can be no doubt that it means the same in both clauses of this verse, and if we render it “wind” in the first clause, we must say “born of the wind” in the last clause (TFG 128–129 in Online Bible).

\*\*[O]ur Lord addresses this Jew; and it is as if he had said, you Rabbins say, that when the Messiah comes, only the Israelites, the peculiar favourites of God, shall share in the blessings that come by, and with him; and that the Gentiles shall reap no advantage by him, being hated of God, and rejected of him: but I tell you, God has so loved the Gentiles, as well as the Jews (Gill in Online Bible).

### Lessons from this lesson:

- Jesus is God: “Came down from heaven . . . Son of man . . . who is in heaven” (John 3:13). Predicted the manner in which He would die—“lifted up” (John 3:14). Claimed that all who believe on Him have everlasting life (John 3:15–18).
- John Gill shows evidence that Nicodemus was extremely wealthy but lost his wealth after identifying himself with Christ after Christ’s death. Gaining the world but not the Saviour is to lose all
- “Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

### Activities:

- Play dough: snakes, cross
- Sing “Look and Live” found at [https://hymnary.org/text/ive\\_a\\_message\\_from\\_the\\_lord\\_hallelujah](https://hymnary.org/text/ive_a_message_from_the_lord_hallelujah).
- Show the acrostic of “GOSPEL” found below.
- Sing “Happy Birthday” with the following words:  
Happy birthday to you, Only one will not do.  
*Born again* means salvation. How many have you?
- Sing refrain to “Verily, Verily” (see and hear this online at <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/1014>).
- Sing “Ye Must Be Born Again” found in many hymnals.
- Sing “Just Like Nicodemus” (CEF’s *Salvation Songs*, Vol. 2, #92).
- Print and prepare take-home booklets for this story. The online source for ordering or downloading for \$12.99 is <https://www.carsondellosa.com/products/0499--New-Testament-Take-Home-Bible-Stories-Resource-Book-0499#/?book%20media%20type=f389e45b92884d48844baaf09d49e3c5>.
- Game: A student (the “Holy Spirit”) hides an item while students close eyes. Seekers find the item. (The Holy Spirit works even though we can’t see Him. However, He does not have a body like ours.)
- Game: blow a cotton ball. (We can’t see the wind, but we see what it does. The Holy Spirit can’t be seen, but we can see when a life is changed.)
- Game: New-life charades. Students draw one of the following and act out. Others guess what the new life action is. (1. Pray before lunch at school; 2. Read Bible in the morning before school; 3. Tell a friend about Jesus; 4. Resist temptation to steal; 5. Go to church to learn about Jesus and the Bible.

- Game: Read the following items. If one is the true way of salvation, students say, “Verily, verily” or “Truly.” If not the true way of salvation, students shake their heads “no.”

Be as good as you can be. [No.]

Be sorry for your sin and trust in Jesus. [“Verily.”]

Give five pieces of candy to a neighbor. [No.]

Go to church. [No.]

Believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins. [“Verily.”]

Walk 100 miles to a special church. [No.]

Be kind and share. [No.]

Trust Jesus to be your Saviour. [“Verily.”]

Become a preacher or Christian worker. [No.]

Have Christian parents. [No.]

Realize you can’t save yourself and trust Jesus died for you. [“Verily.”]

- List places and activities in which people like the dark. (bars, haunted houses, dance clubs, robbing, *etc.*)
- Review or work on Catechism regarding regeneration:
  1. How could the Son of God suffer? [Christ, the Son of God, became man that He might obey and suffer in our nature.]
  2. What is meant by the atonement? [Christ’s satisfying divine justice by His sufferings and death in the place of sinners.]
  3. What did God the Father undertake in the covenant of grace? [To justify and sanctify those for whom Christ should die.]
  4. What is justification? [It is God’s forgiving sinners and treating them as if they had never sinned.]
  5. What is sanctification? [It is God’s making sinner holy in heart and conduct.]
  6. For whom did Christ obey and suffer? [For those whom the Father had given Him.]
  7. What kind of life did Christ live on earth? [A life of perfect obedience to the law of God.]
  8. What kind of death did Christ die? [The painful and shameful death of the cross.]
  9. Who will be saved? [Only those who repent of sin and believe in Christ.]
  10. What is it to repent? [To be sorry for sin and to hate and forsake it because it is displeasing to God.]
  11. What is it to believe in Christ? [To trust in Christ alone for salvation.]
  12. Can you repent and believe in Christ by your own power? [No. I can do nothing good without God’s Holy Spirit.]
- Tell a story about a butterfly’s or dragonfly’s metamorphosis; *e.g.*, Ethel Barrett’s “Gregory the Grub.” (Ethel Barrett’s stories are available at [https://homeschoolhowtos.com/store/list/category/ethel\\_barrett](https://homeschoolhowtos.com/store/list/category/ethel_barrett). “Gregory . . .” in pdf form is a free download at the above site, but the dramatization, plus others, on “Audio CD #1” will be well worth the cost of \$5.99.)
- Review questions: (Game: Affix stars to a black paper sky for each correct answer.)
  1. In John 3:1 a word indicates that Nicodemus was a religious man. Fill in the blank. “There was a man of the \_\_\_\_\_ named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. [Pharisees.]
  2. What time of day did Nicodemus come to Jesus? [Night.]
  3. When Nicodemus started his conversation with compliments, Jesus immediately got to the point. What did He say? Fill in the blanks. “Unless a person is \_\_\_\_\_, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” [Born again.]
  4. What did Nicodemus think being born again meant? [Being born of a mother again.]
  5. Rather than being born again of a mother, Jesus said a person must be born of whom? [The Spirit.]
  6. Who is the only One that ascended to heaven, came down from heaven, and is in heaven? [The Son of man—Jesus.]
  7. What Old Testament illustration did Jesus give to show how He would die? [The serpent lifted on a pole.]

8. Fill in the blanks for John 3:16. “For this is how God loved the \_\_\_\_\_: He gave his one and only \_\_\_\_\_, so that everyone who \_\_\_\_\_ in him will not \_\_\_\_\_ but have eternal \_\_\_\_\_.”  
[World; Son; believes; perish; life.]
9. Fill in the blanks for John 3:17. “He who does not believe is \_\_\_\_\_ already, because he has not \_\_\_\_\_ in the name of the only begotten \_\_\_\_\_.” [Condemned; believed; Son of God.]
10. Why do most people love darkness rather than light? [Because their deeds are evil.]

### Handwork:

- Color “Gospel” one color in the acrostic of John 3:16 found below and the other lines with different colors.
- Make a pinwheel with a pencil for the stick. (See template and instructions below.)

### Memory Verse[s]:

- John 3:16--For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that every-one who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (NLT).
- John 1:1–14:
  - 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
  - 2 He was in the beginning with God.
  - 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.
  - 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
  - 5 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.
  - 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John.
  - 7 This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.
  - 8 He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light.
  - 9 That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.
  - 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.
  - 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.
  - 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
    - 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
    - 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

rabbi

verily

kingdom of God

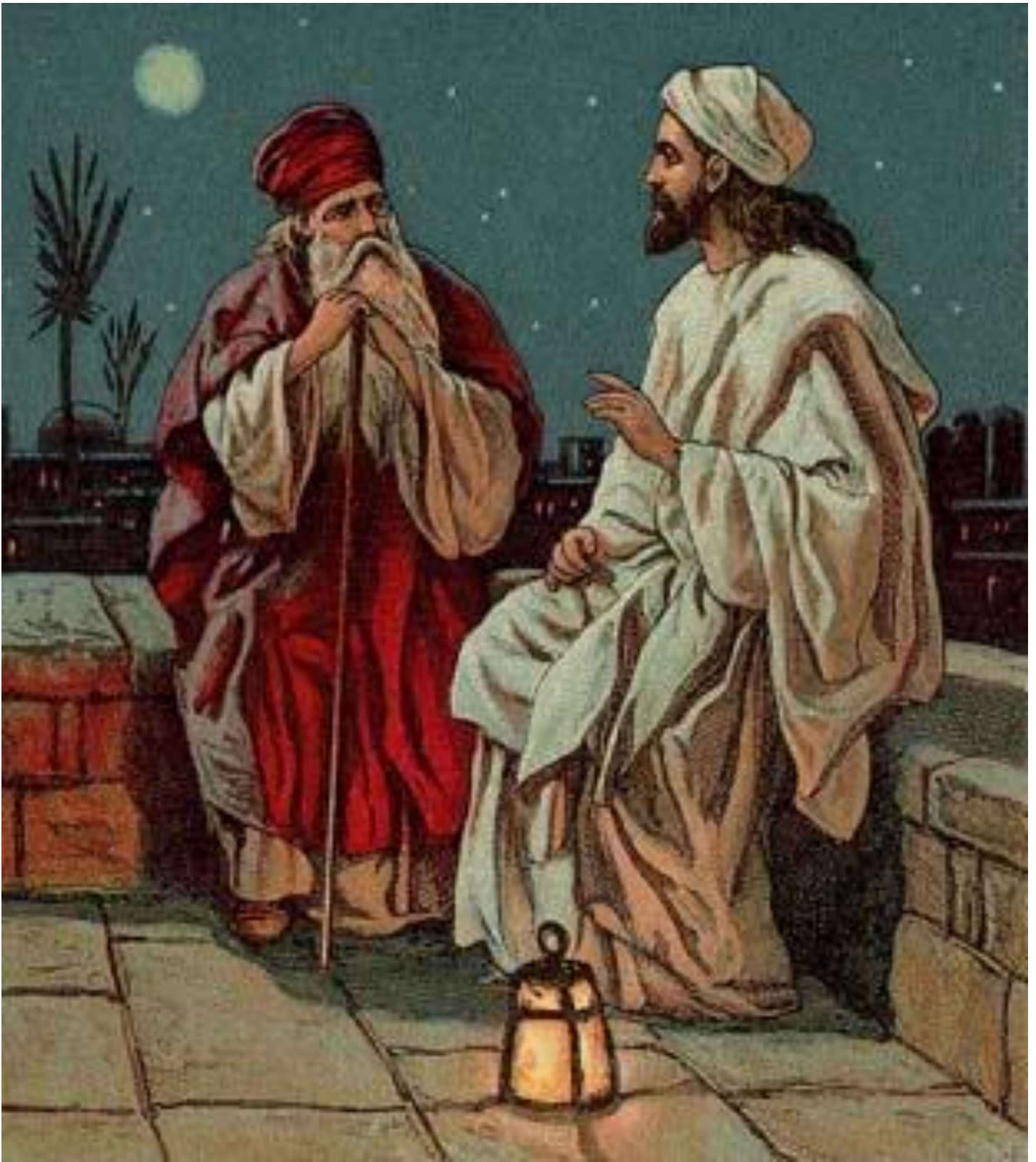
born again or regenerated

world

condemned







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*“Just as Moses  
lifted up the  
Serpent in the  
wilderness...*

*..even so must the Son of  
Man be lifted up, that  
whoever believes in him  
should not perish but have  
everlasting life”.*

*John 3:14-15*



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For this is how

**G**od loved the world: He gave His

**O**ne and only

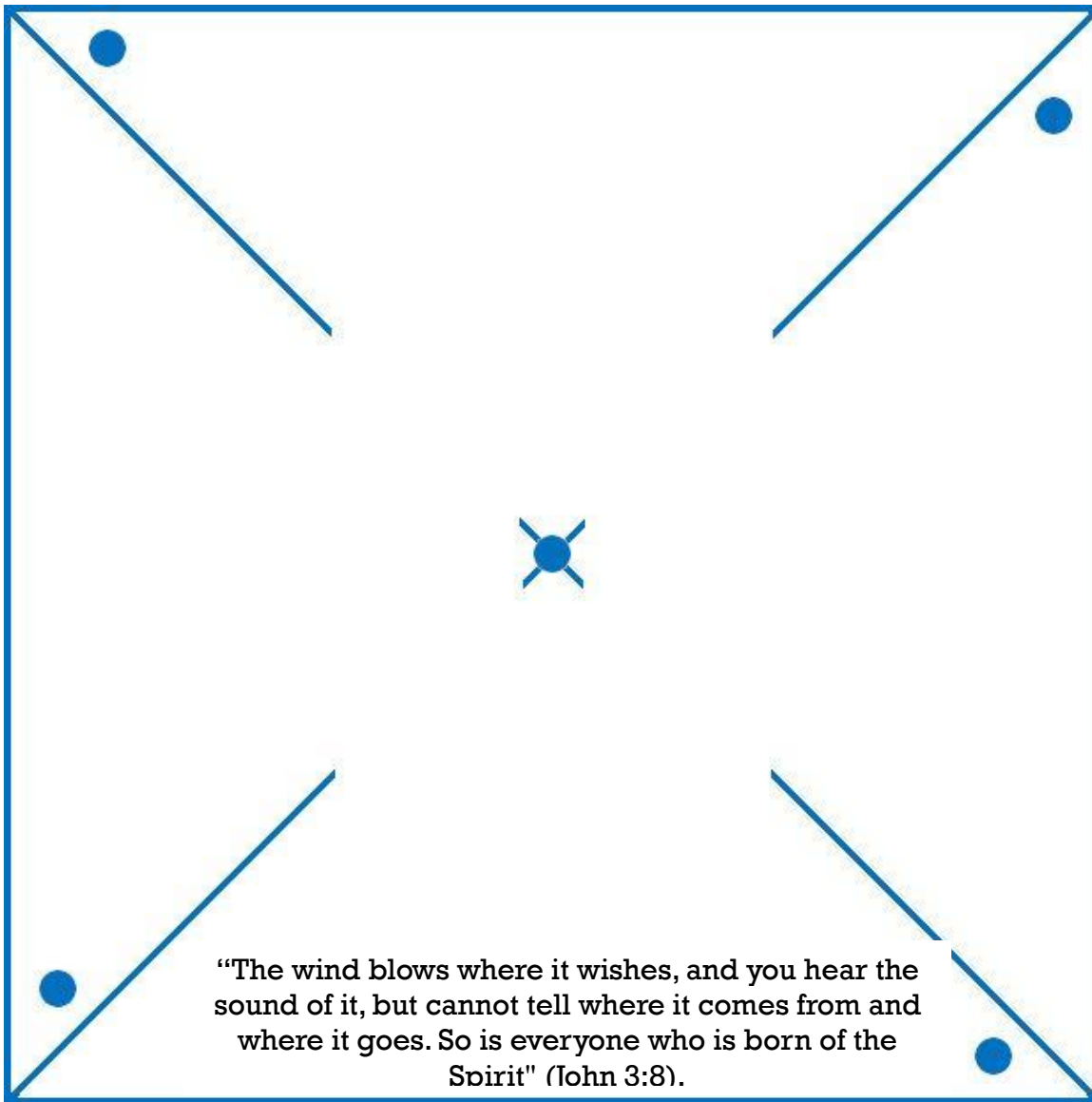
**S**on, so that everyone who believes in Him  
will not

**P**erish but have

**E**ternal

**L**ife.

—John 3:16 (NLT)



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Materials for each student: paper printed with this template; push pin or straight pin; unsharpened lead pencil with an unused eraser

Have students color the pinwheel. Cut out on outside lines and snip from the corners toward the center. Stick the pin through each corner dot, one after the other, then through the center dot. Push the pin into the side of the eraser on the pencil far enough so that it will stay but not so far that it will not move freely.