JOHN 3

You Must Be Born Again

a ruler at night, a serpent on a pole, and a friend who steps aside for the Bridegroom

> *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."*
> **JOHN 3:16**

A SMITH FOR CHRIST STUDY · FOUR VOICES: GUZIK · SPROUL · SPURGEON · HENRY

Where we are in John

1. John 2 ends at Passover in Jerusalem.

2. Nicodemus is no small figure.

3. The Old Testament roots are close to the surface, and Jesus expects “the teacher of Israel” to know them.

Born from Above

A ruler comes by night with a compliment and is told he must begin again

JOHN 3:3

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

DAVID GUZIK

A man might wash himself but never birth himself; water likely Ezekiel 36.

R.C. SPROUL

Not sure of the water; no unregenerate Christians; Lazarus cannot raise himself.

C.H. SPURGEON

The hinge of the gospel; not baptism, not reform — a radical new nature.

MATTHEW HENRY

Welcomed though he came by night; the Spirit works like water and wind.

ἄνωθεν

ANŌTHEN · "AGAIN / FROM ABOVE"

The adverb means "from above," and by extension "from the beginning," "anew."

As Moses Lifted Up the Serpent

The teacher of Israel is pointed to a pole in the wilderness

JOHN 3:10

Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?

DAVID GUZIK

Sin judged, not a sinner; saved by simply looking.

R.C. SPROUL

The substitute serpent; some looked and some did not.

C.H. SPURGEON

Christ hung on purpose to be looked at; preach Him plainly.

MATTHEW HENRY

Lifted on a pole that all Israel might see it.

ὑψόω
HYPSOŌ · "LIFT UP"

To raise high, and so to exalt.

The bronze serpent and the Son of Man

JOHN 3:14–15	NUMBERS 21:4–9	THE SON OF MAN
THE DANGER	**bitten by fiery serpents;** many died (Num 21:6)	**perishing in sin;** “shall not perish” (v16)
THE REMEDY	**a bronze serpent, made** at God’s command (21:8)	**the Son of Man,** given by God (v16)
LIFTED UP	**set on a standard** where all could see (21:9)	**lifted up on a cross** (v14; 12:32–33)
THE RESPONSE	**look at it** (21:8)	**believe in Him** (v15)
THE RESULT	**“he lived”** (21:9)	**“eternal life”** (v15)

Read across each row: Jesus takes Numbers 21 point by point — the danger, the remedy God provided, the lifting up, the look of faith, and life.

God So Loved the World

The gift of the only begotten Son — and the Light that men flee

JOHN 3:16

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

DAVID GUZIK

Love came first; moral compromise lies behind most unbelief.

R.C. SPROUL

Likely John's comment; one Son, no other way; we fear the light.

C.H. SPURGEON

Love is God's nature; whosoever includes every believer.

MATTHEW HENRY

So really, so richly; Christ hated because sin is loved.

μονογενής

MONOGENĒS · "ONLY BEGOTTEN, UNIQUE"

"Only-born," one of a kind.

Two responses to the Light



The Light comes to save, not to judge; the two columns show where a man stands, now and finally, by what he does with the Son.

He Must Increase

The friend of the Bridegroom loses his crowd and finds his joy full

JOHN 3:23

John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized—

DAVID GUZIK

Happy to lose his congregation to Jesus; the four musts.

R.C. SPROUL

Contentment is not natural; the bride isn't mine, she is His.

MATTHEW HENRY

The more others magnify us, the more we humble ourselves.

νυμφίος
NYMPHIOS · "BRIDEGROOM"

Sixteen New Testament uses; in John four — once at the Cana wedding (2:9) and three times in 3:29.

The four “musts” of John 3



One small Greek word, dei, carries the whole chapter: what the sinner must undergo, what the Savior must suffer, and what the servant must gladly become.

He Who Comes from Above

The Son speaks the words of God — life for the one who believes, wrath on the one who will not obey

JOHN 3:36

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

DAVID GUZIK

Different and greater; to reject the Son is to reject life.

R.C. SPROUL

God loves us in the Son; the Supper looks back and forward.

C.H. SPURGEON

Wrath never softened a heart; one door — trust Jesus now.

MATTHEW HENRY

The Spirit in Christ as in a fountain, a bottomless ocean.

ὀργή
ORGĒ · "WRATH"

Not a flash of temper (thymos) but settled, steady opposition — God's fixed judgment against sin.

What to carry from this chapter

1

The chapter begins after a warning.

John 2:23–25 says Jesus did not entrust Himself to people impressed by signs, “for He Himself knew what was in man.”

2

“Again” and “from above” are one word.

Anōthen (G509) means both.

3

You cannot birth yourself.

Guzik: “A man might wash himself; but he could never birth himself.”

4

The water is probably Ezekiel’s water.

Guzik gives Ezekiel 36 “the most weight (though it is a tough call)”; Sproul admits he is unsure and leans the same way; Henry reads it as the Spirit working like water.

More to carry

5

Saved by a look.

Israel did nothing but look at the serpent and live.

6

The cross is a divine “must.”

The same dei runs through 3:7, 3:14 and 3:30 — the sinner must be born again, the Son must be lifted up, He must increase.

7

Love came before we turned.

Guzik: “God did not wait for the world to turn to Him before He loved the world.”

8

Men run from the Light because it exposes.

Elenchō (3:20) is a cross-examiner’s word.

Talk it through

1. Nicodemus had religion, position and reputation, and still had to be born again. What have I trusted in that cannot give me new birth?

2. Where have I seen the “wind” of the Spirit at work in a man I know — not the wind itself, but what it moved?

3. The bitten Israelites only had to look. What am I still trying to do, instead of looking to Christ lifted up?

4. Is there a part of my life I keep out of the Light “for fear that [my] deeds will be exposed”? What would it take to bring it in?

5. Where am I competing for credit or attention in ministry, at home or at work? What would “I must decrease” look like this week?

CLOSING

John 3 begins with a respected man who knew a great deal and needed to be born from above, and it ends with the Son who came from above with the words of God. In between stands a pole in the wilderness. Look to Him lifted up, and live — and then, like John, let Him increase.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

Full Deep Dive, O·I·A study and reflection journal: see the John study page.