

In John's Gospel

As is the case with Lazarus, Nicodemus does not belong to the tradition of the Synoptic Gospels, and is mentioned only by John,^[3] who devotes more than half of Chapter 3 of his gospel and a few verses of Chapter 7 to Nicodemus, and lastly mentions him in Chapter 19.

The first time Nicodemus is mentioned, he is identified as a Pharisee who comes to see Jesus at night. According to the scripture, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. While in Jerusalem he chased the moneychangers from the temple and overturned their tables. His disciples remembered then the words of Psalm 69: "Zeal for your house will consume me." After these events "many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing" (John 2:23–25). When Nicodemus visits Jesus he makes reference to these events: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." (John 3:2).

Jesus replies: "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Then follows a conversation with Nicodemus about the meaning of being "born again" or "born from above" (Greek: ἀνωθεν): Nicodemus explores the notion of being literally born again from one's mother's womb, but most theologians recognize that Nicodemus knew Jesus was not speaking of literal rebirth. Theologian Charles Ellicott wrote that "after the method of Rabbinic dialogue, [Nicodemus] presses the impossible meaning of the words in order to exclude it, and to draw forth the true meaning. 'You cannot mean that a man is to enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born. What is it, then, that you do mean?'"^[4] In this instance, Nicodemus chooses the literal (rather than the figurative) meaning of *anōthen* and assumes that that meaning exhausts the significance of the word.

Jesus expresses surprise, perhaps ironically, that "a teacher of Israel" does not understand the concept of spiritual rebirth:

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.

— *John 3:10–11, KJV*

In Chapter 7, Nicodemus advises his colleagues among "the chief priests and the Pharisees", to hear and investigate before making a judgment concerning Jesus. Their mocking response argues that no prophet comes from Galilee. Nonetheless, it is probable that he wielded a certain influence in the Sanhedrin.^[3]

Finally, when Jesus is buried, Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes—about 100 Roman pounds (33 kilograms (73 lb))—despite embalming being generally against Jewish custom (with the exceptions of Jacob and Joseph).^[John 19:39] Nicodemus must have been a man of means; in his book *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, Pope Benedict XVI observes that, "The quantity of the balm is extraordinary and exceeds all normal proportions. This is a royal burial."^[5]