

Worksheet #4: John 3:1–36

Summary: In some ways, the chapter division between chapters two and three is unfortunately placed, because 2:23–25 provides helpful context for the events of chapter three. This brief transition moves us away from the scene of the temple clearing and provides the setting for the events of chapter three.

The first episode in chapter three is Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus (3:1–21). We see the non-committal mindset that 2:23–25 anticipates in Jesus' responses to Nicodemus' queries. Careful examination of the language of 3:16–21 suggests that these words were not spoken by Jesus on this occasion, but rather are John's interpretation of Jesus' enigmatic teachings in 3:1–15.

The second pericope in chapter three involves John the Baptist again (3:22–36). This passage serves as an “interlude”¹ between the stories of Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman (4:1–45), and may be intended as a contrast with the response of Nicodemus. As in the Nicodemus encounter, we probably see narrator commentary again in 3:31–36. This one, however, seems to serve as a “recapitulating epilogue”² that summarizes themes from throughout the chapter.

Abbreviated Outline³ (current passage in bold):

- I. INTRODUCTION: THE WORD MADE FLESH (1:1-18)
- II. THE BOOK OF SIGNS: THE SIGNS OF THE MESSIAH (1:19-12:50)
 - A. *The Forerunner and the Coming of the Messiah* (1:19-51)
 - 1. The Testimony of John the Baptist (1:19-34)
 - 2. The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry (1:35-51)
 - B. ***The Cana Cycle: Jesus' Inaugural Signs and Representative Conversations* (2:1-4:54)**
 - 1. Sign 1: Changing Water into Wine at the Wedding in Cana (2:1-12)
 - 2. Sign 2: One of Jesus' Jerusalem Signs: The Clearing of the Temple (2:13-22)
 - 3. **Representative Conversations: Nicodemus the Jewish Ruler, the Samaritan Woman (2:23-4:42)**
 - 4. Sign 3: The Second Sign in Cana: The Healing of the Royal Official's Son (4:43-54)
 - C. *The Festival Cycle: Additional Signs amidst Mounting Unbelief* (5-10)
 - 1. Sign 4 at an Unnamed Feast in Jerusalem: The Healing of the Lame Man (5:1-47)
 - 2. Sign 5: Galilean Passover: Feeding the Multitude and Bread of Life Discourse (6:1-71)
 - 3. Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:1-8:59)
 - 4. Sign 6: The Healing of the Blind Man and the Good Shepherd Discourse (9-10)
 - D. *Final Passover: Climactic Sign, the Raising of Lazarus, and Other Events* (11-12)
 - 1. Sign 7: The Raising of Lazarus (11)
 - 2. Final Events of Jesus' Public Ministry (12)
- III. THE BOOK OF EXALTATION: PREPARING THE NEW MESSIANIC COMMUNITY AND THE PASSION OF JESUS (13-20)
 - A. *The Cleansing and Instruction of the New Covenant Community, including Jesus' Final Prayer* (13-17)
 - B. *The Passion Narrative* (18-19)
 - C. *Jesus' Resurrection and Appearances, Commissioning of Disciples* (20:1-29)
 - D. *Concluding Purpose Statement* (20:30-31)
- IV. EPILOGUE: THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF PETER AND THE BELOVED DISCIPLE (21)

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2004), 133.

² Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 149.

³ Adapted from Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Academic, 2009), 307–308.

Interpretation: *Read through the passage, and then review and make notes under the questions below.*

1. What do we anticipate about the conversation with Nicodemus from John's choice of details about him and the situation in 3:1–2a?

2. Where does Nicodemus seem to be headed with his question in 3:2? How does Jesus' answer in 3:3 build upon Nicodemus' statement?

3. Look at 3:14–15 and identify Jesus' main point. How does 3:16–21 expand and interpret that main point?

4. What is the point of conflict in the story about John the Baptist (3:25–26)? Why is that significant?

5. What is the main point embedded in John's response to his disciples (3:27–30)?

6. How does the interpretational section (3:31–36) expand our understanding about the John the Baptist story? About the Nicodemus passage?

Application: *Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today.*

7. What does this passage tell us about Jesus? How does it help us to understand “his place in the sweep of redemptive history”?⁴

8. What does this passage mean for your walk with the Lord?

9. How does this passage challenge the way you think about situations in daily life? What should you do about that?

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 102.