

*Nuggets and Gems from the Bible*

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***Living Stream Ministry***  
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# **THE SON OF MAN LIFTED UP**

In chapter three of the Gospel of John, the Lord Jesus spoke to Nicodemus concerning being born of the Spirit and entering into the kingdom of God. Following this, in verses 9-21 He revealed man's real condition and his need of redemption.

## **POISONED BY THE “SERPENT” WITH A SERPENTINE NATURE**

In verse 9 Nicodemus was puzzled and asked, “How can these things be?” The Lord Jesus said in return, “You are the teacher of Israel, and you don’t know these things?” Then the Lord spoke to him regarding a prefigure or type of redemption found in the Old Testament.

## **POISONED TO DIE LIKE THE ISRAELITES IN THE WILDERNESS**

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (v. 14). When Jesus said this, Nicodemus was clear. When the children of Israel spoke against the Lord and against Moses, “The Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the

people; and much people of Israel died” ([Num. 21:6](#)). The people then came to Moses and asked him to pray that the Lord would take the serpents away. Moses prayed for them, and God showed Moses the way of salvation, telling him to make a serpent of brass and to put it upon a pole ([Num. 21:8-9](#)). When the people who had been poisoned by the fiery serpents looked upon the serpent of brass, they lived ([Num. 21:9](#)).

In [John 3:14](#), the Lord Jesus applied that picture to Himself, saying that He, the Son of Man, would be lifted up as the brass serpent was lifted up by Moses. Please notice that the Lord here refers to Himself as the Son of Man, not as the Son of God. The Lord was telling Nicodemus, “Nicodemus, you appear to be a gentleman, but you must realize that you are actually a serpent. Regardless of how gentle you are, you have a serpentine nature within you. You have been poisoned. You were poisoned in Adam. When Adam was poisoned by the serpent, you were there. You were born of that poisoned nature, and so your nature is also serpentine.” Nicodemus never realized this before. Likewise, very few people today realize that they are serpents. Do you like to have this said of you? If an unbeliever were to be told that he is not only a sinner, but also a serpent, he

would be highly offended. No, Nicodemus had never thought that he had a serpentine nature. However, the Lord Jesus, the best preacher, indicated a great deal by one brief sentence, telling Nicodemus that he was a serpent.

In John 1:29, John the Baptist said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” In 3:14, the Lord Jesus likens Himself, not as the Lamb of God, but as a brass serpent. The Lamb of God deals with sin, but the brass serpent destroys the old serpent. Our trouble as fallen people is not only with sin, but also with the serpent. Although Christians have heard many messages on the Lamb of God, they have not heard very many on the brass serpent as the type of Christ.

## CHRIST LIFTED UP ON THE CROSS IN THE FORM OF A SERPENT

When the Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, He was in the form of a serpent. This is a hard saying and it needs some explanation. Romans 8:3 says, “God sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Recovery Version). This verse tell us that Christ was made in the *likeness* of the flesh of sin. Second Corinthians 5:21 says that Christ was made sin for us. What

a strong word this is! What does it mean? When Satan in the serpent tempted Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and to take his concept, Satan, as the old serpent, injected his nature into man. That serpentine nature was injected into man's body. Although the human body was created by God as something good, when Satan's serpentine nature was injected into it, it was transmuted into the flesh. The body is something good created by God, but the flesh is something bad, being the body transmuted by the poison of the serpent. The term "body" is good, but the term "flesh" is bad. But what about [John 1:14](#) which says that "the Word became flesh"? Is the flesh there good or bad? When Christ became flesh, did He become something good or bad? Be careful of your answer. [John 3:14](#) indicates and guarantees that when Christ became flesh, He did not actually become something bad, and [Romans 8:3](#) says that He was in "the likeness of the flesh of sin," which likeness is equal to the form of the brass serpent. It had the form of the serpent without the poison of the serpent. Christ was made in "the likeness of the flesh of sin," but He had no participation in the sin of the flesh ([2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Heb. 4:15](#)). Christ became the flesh of sin in form, not in

actuality. Look at the serpent made of brass. In form, appearance, and likeness, it looks like a real serpent; however, it has no poison in it. It has the serpentine appearance, but it does not have the serpentine nature. Likewise, Christ became the flesh of sin in appearance, in likeness. In appearance, He was exactly the same as a sinful man, but within Him there was no sinful nature. Although He was made sin, He knew no sin. He was only in the form, in the likeness, of the flesh of sin.

## **THE “OLD SERPENT,” THE DEVIL, SATAN BEING JUDGED THROUGH THIS**

When Christ was lifted up on the cross, Satan, the Devil, the old serpent, was dealt with ([John 12:31-33](#); [Heb. 2:14](#)). This means that the serpentine nature within fallen man has been dealt with by the death of Christ. We may use the illustration of a mouse trap. Mice are a nuisance and they are difficult to catch. However, you may catch them if you use a trap and some bait. When a mouse comes out of hiding seeking for something to eat, he will see the bait, walk into the trap in an attempt to seize the bait, and immediately be caught. In this way the mouse is caught and destroyed. In the universe there is a little

“mouse,” Satan. Humanity became a trap in which he was caught. Adam became both the trap and the bait. Satan seized the bait, thinking that he had gained the victory by injecting himself into man’s body, but he did not realize that in doing so he became trapped. He was trapped, located in man’s flesh. One day the Lord Jesus put on the likeness of this flesh of sin. Then He brought this flesh to the cross and crucified it. By crucifying the flesh, He destroyed the Devil who had injected himself into man. Now we can understand [Hebrews 2:14](#) which says, “He...shared in the same [blood and flesh]...that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the Devil.” Christ destroyed Satan in the flesh by His death. If we do not understand all of these verses, it will be difficult to have the proper meaning of [Hebrews 2:14](#). How did Christ destroy Satan on the cross? By taking on the likeness of the flesh of sin and by bringing this flesh to the cross. There, through His crucifixion, Satan was destroyed.

In the eyes of God, we all have become serpents. Like the ancient Israelites who became serpents and needed a brass serpent to be lifted up as their substitute, we also needed Christ to die on the cross as our substitute. On the cross

Christ was not only the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world ([John 1:29](#)), but He was also in the form of the serpent that He might deal with our serpentine nature and destroy the old serpent. When Christ was lifted up on the cross, the serpentine nature within fallen man was dealt with. When man receives the crucified and resurrected Christ that he may be regenerated with the divine life in Christ, his satanic nature must also be dealt with. This is why in [John 3:14](#), when the Lord Jesus revealed the matter of regeneration to Nicodemus, He specifically mentioned this point.

Nicodemus might have considered himself as a good and moral man. But the Lord's word in [3:14](#) implies that regardless of how good Nicodemus might have been outwardly, he had the serpentine nature of Satan inwardly. As a descendant of Adam, he was poisoned by the old serpent, and the serpent's nature was within him. He not only needed the Lord to be the Lamb of God to take away his sin; he also needed the Lord to be in the form of the serpent that his serpentine nature might be dealt with on the cross and that he might have eternal life. By telling this to Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus seemed to be saying, "Nicodemus, you are a serpent. I am

going to die for you as your substitute in the form of a serpent, not only to take away your sin, but also to deal with your serpentine nature and to destroy Satan.”

## **MAN BELIEVING IN THIS CHRIST AND HAVING LIFE ETERNAL**

Verse 15 shows the purpose of verse 14. “That every one who believes in Him may have eternal life.” The word “that” in verse 15 indicates that this verse is an issue, an outcome, of verse 14. Christ died on the cross in the form of a serpent as our substitute. In doing so, He dealt with our serpentine nature and destroyed the serpent in our flesh. The issue of this is that we may have eternal life by believing in Him. Just as the poisoned Israelites lived by looking unto the brass serpent on the pole, we may experience the same thing today if we repent, lift up our heart, and gaze upon the very Jesus crucified on the cross. When we do this, our sin is removed, our serpentine nature is dealt with, Satan is destroyed in us, and we have life eternal. This is what it means to be regenerated. When we are regenerated, we receive the divine life other than our human life which was corrupted by the serpent and dealt with by Christ on the cross.

## CONDEMNED IN ADAM THROUGH HIS SIN

All men are condemned in Adam through his sin. In [verse 18](#), the Lord revealed more to Nicodemus about his condition. He not only had the poisonous nature of the serpent, but was also under the judgment of God. This verse says, “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” According to this verse, Nicodemus, a good gentleman, had been judged already. When were you judged? You were judged on the same day that Adam was judged. In other words, you were condemned before you were born. You were condemned six thousand years ago. Since you are a part of Adam, you were condemned when he was. Regardless of whether you are bad or good, you are already under the wrath of God ([3:36](#)). Although Nicodemus was a high-class gentleman, he was still condemned. He was a good man, a religious man, and a moral man, yet he was already condemned. Therefore, he needed the Lord’s redemption—the Lord had to die for him.

The actual condition of such a good man is

not really good. His true condition is twofold: his nature has the poison of Satan within it and his position is under the condemnation of God. We are not gentlemen; we are serpents. As far as our nature is concerned, we have the poisonous element of Satan, the Devil, an element which makes us “the children of the Devil” ([1 John 3:10](#)). As far as our position is concerned, we are already under God’s condemnation. Thus, the condition of the best person is the same as that of the worst.

### **THE SON OF GOD COMING TO SAVE MAN FROM THIS CONDEMNATION**

The Son of God has come to save man from this condemnation. [Verse 17](#) says, “For God did not send the Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” Christ, the Son of God, was sent to save us from God’s condemnation, which was caused by the sin of Adam. We all were condemned in Adam. Now we all can be saved from this condemnation through Christ. In the natural birth we were condemned in Adam. In regeneration we are saved in Christ.

## **SAVED FROM THIS CONDEMNATION BY BELIEVING IN THE SON OF GOD**

What is the way for us to be regenerated? How can we receive regeneration? In [verses 15, 16, 18](#), and [36](#), the Lord said, “That every one who believes in Him may have eternal life”; “that every one who believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life”; “he who believes in Him is not judged”; “he who believes in the Son has eternal life.” These emphatic words spoken repeatedly by the Lord tell us clearly and definitely that the way for us to be saved and regenerated is simply to believe in the Lord. To believe is the only way for us to receive salvation and regeneration. It is absolutely a matter of faith. Regardless of how much we can work or how good our work may be, we cannot be saved and regenerated by our work. Our work does not count in this matter. Only faith counts. Salvation and regeneration must be by faith. It is by faith in the Lord, by believing in the Lord, that we receive the forgiveness, the release from God’s condemnation negatively. It is also by faith, by believing in the Lord, that we receive eternal life, the divine life of God, positively for our regeneration. The Lord has accomplished the redemptive work for us. By

His redemptive death on the cross, He has met all of God's righteous demands on us and has fulfilled all the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory for us. By His death on the cross in the form of the serpent, the Lord has even destroyed Satan, the Devil that usurps us and enslaves us, that we might be delivered from the evil one's slavery and power of death ([Heb. 2:14](#)). All negative things have been solved by His all-inclusive death on the cross. We do not need to do anything except believe in what the Lord has accomplished. He has dealt with and solved all of our problems. He has left no room for our doing or work. So, there is no need of our work, only of faith in His finished, completed, and all-inclusive redemptive work.

After passing through death, by and in resurrection, the Lord has released His life and has become a life-giving Spirit ([1 Cor. 15:45](#)). Now, in resurrection, He is the Spirit of life ([2 Cor. 3:17](#); [Rom. 8:2](#)), with all the virtue of His redemptive work, waiting for us to believe in Him. Once we believe in Him, we not only receive the forgiveness of sins and the deliverance from Satan's evil power of darkness, but we also receive the Spirit of life, that is, the Lord Himself, with the eternal life of God. In this way we are

saved and regenerated. It is by the way of believing in the Lord with His all-inclusive redemptive work that we receive God's life and are born of Him to be His sons.

To believe in the Lord means to receive Him ([John 1:12](#)). The Lord is receivable. He is now the life-giving Spirit, with His complete redemption, waiting for and expecting us to receive Him. Our spirit is the receiving organ. We can receive the Lord's Spirit into our spirit by believing in Him. Once we believe in Him, He, as the Spirit, enters into our spirit. Then we are regenerated by Him, the life-giving Spirit, and become one spirit with Him ([1 Cor. 6:17](#)). The phrase "believes in" in [verses 16, 18](#), and [36](#) literally translated should be "believes into Him." When we believe in the Lord, we believe into Him. By believing in Him, we get into Him to be one with Him, to partake of Him, and to participate in all that He has accomplished for us. By believing into Him, we are identified with Him in all that He is and in all that He has passed through, accomplished, attained, and obtained. As we become one with Him by believing into Him, we are saved and regenerated by Him as life. It is by believing into Him that we partake of Him as life and are regenerated in Him.

## THE SON OF GOD COMING AS LIGHT

The Son of God came as light that man might be enlightened for salvation ([3:19-21](#)). In order to save us, Christ, the Son of God, came firstly to be the light to enlighten man that man might be saved. But, sorry to say, most men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But anyone who comes to the light will be enlightened and, through this enlightenment, he shall be saved. Light comes first, then salvation follows.

In [chapter three of John](#) we can see that even a high-class moral gentleman was also on the line of death. Though he was seeking after God, he was seeking according to the line of the tree of knowledge ([Gen. 2:9](#)). Nicodemus was seeking for teaching, for knowledge, which belongs to the tree of knowledge. He did not know life and had no concept of the tree of life ([Gen. 2:9](#)). But the Lord turned him from knowledge to life, from the tree of knowledge to the tree of life, that he might be regenerated and have the divine life denoted by the tree of life in [Genesis 2](#). In the Lord's conversation with him, it is implied that

his seeking of knowledge was related to his serpentine nature. The serpentine nature of our natural being causes us not only to do evil things, but also to seek knowledge, even knowledge concerning God, in a way that is not in the way of life. This kind of knowledge-seeking is on the line of death and brings in death. We all have to be turned from this line of knowledge to the line of life that we may receive the divine life for our enjoyment.

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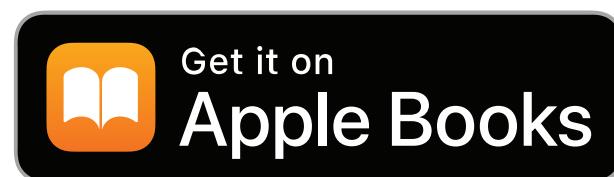
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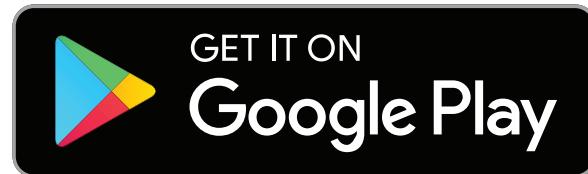
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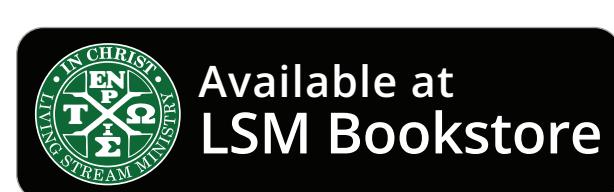


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