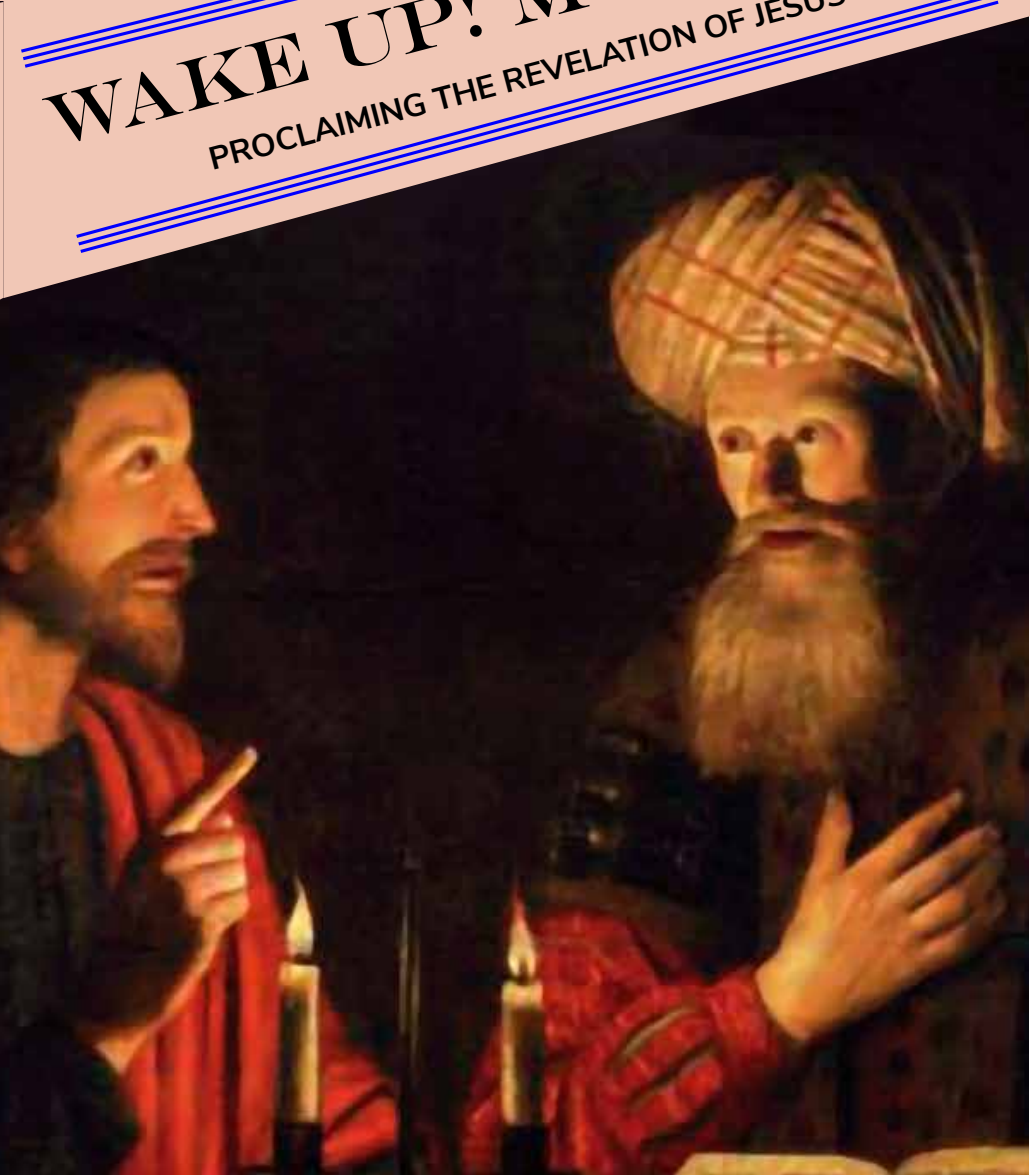


April 2023

WAKE UP! MONTHLY

PROCLAIMING THE REVELATION OF JESUS



Wake Up
America
Seminars

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Dear Wake Up Family:

This month we decided to share an article that we printed years ago about being born again. I hope you enjoy it! – Marty

Bible students misuse John 3:16 because they may not appreciate its historical context, so let's replay the secret conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus within the historical setting of that night. I revised the language and background to make the discussion with Jesus seem more contemporary. See John 3:1-21 for the actual text.

A wealthy, well-educated Pharisee named Nicodemus who was about the same age as Jesus and already a respected member of the Jewish ruling council, was the Director of Naturalization. The Jewish Department of Naturalization was the agency that provided the administrative services allowing Gentiles to become Jews. Since the Romans, Samaritans, and Jews hated each other, Nicodemus' office was more political than essential. Like many bureaucrats, it did not bother him that his job required little work.

By nature, he was a thoughtful man with a quiet disposition. Those who knew him well admired him. He was honest, but his indecisiveness and deliberation caused him problems. Because his department was not busy, he knew his position was politically insecure. So, he carefully played by the rules to avoid embarrassment and personal controversy.

Nicodemus had heard much about the miracles and teachings of the Man from Galilee. He became curious about Jesus after watching Him perform a miracle from a distance! Nicodemus saw dignity and compassion in Jesus, and that touched his doubting heart. Occasionally, he even wondered if Jesus could be the promised Messiah.

Nicodemus' friends would never consider talking to Jesus in a one-on-one conversation. However, Nicodemus wanted to ask Jesus a few questions.

Jesus was highly controversial, and Jewish leaders treated Him with contempt. So, Nicodemus wanted to avoid meeting Jesus in public. Nicodemus made an appointment through John to meet Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Concealed in his cloak, Nicodemus arrived just after the sun had set. He found Jesus and His disciples sitting around a small fire. When Jesus saw Nicodemus, Jesus moved to the deeper shadows to speak with Nicodemus.

Nicodemus had carefully prepared his opening remarks. Out of respect for the miracles he had seen Jesus perform, and not Messianic conviction, he addressed Jesus as Rabbi, a term of endearment for respected teachers in Israel's society. "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher from God. No one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus ignored his pleasantries. Knowing their visit would be short, Jesus cut to the purpose of the visit. "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Jesus' abruptness surprised Nicodemus, but he was even more surprised to hear Jesus utter words that were recorded on the first page of the by-laws of Israel. As Israel's Director of Naturalization, Nicodemus believed that no one could be part of God's kingdom unless he was born again. Nicodemus often repeated the exact phrase when speaking to various groups in Jerusalem about his essential but infrequent duties.

In those days, a Gentile could only become a Jew through a ritual called the *new birth*. First, Jewish teachers gave the Gentiles a long and tedious indoctrination. Next, the Gentile renounced his former citizenship and pledged allegiance to Israel and Israel's God at a public meeting. Finally, after

the ruling council's approval, the candidate was baptized by immersion into the nation of Israel. His past was believed to be washed away and never mentioned again. Eight days later, the males underwent the painful ritual of circumcision.

Then, a scribe entered the convert's Jewish name and date of rebirth (baptism) on the rolls of Israel; after that, the convert was considered a descendant of Abraham with all citizenship rights.

Jesus' simple, clear words caught Nicodemus by surprise. Immediately, Nicodemus perceived a sharp difference between the kingdom of Israel, which they called God's kingdom, and the true kingdom of God. In his discomfort, to gain some conversational ground and mentally regroup, he foolishly asked, "How can a man be born when he is old?" "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Nicodemus made this childish remark to deflect his embarrassment when Jesus exposed his foolish darkness of arrogance. Nicodemus stood spiritually naked in the darkness. Jesus could read his inner thoughts, and even worse, Jesus was telling Nicodemus, a specialist in naturalization, the process of changing citizenship! Seeing his discomfort, Jesus amplified his explanation of the conversion process: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter God's kingdom unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Given his career and official responsibility, Nicodemus found special meaning in Jesus' words. Nicodemus knew that a Gentile could become a Jew by merely following the rituals. Very few Gentiles wanted to become Jews and most wanted citizenship for marriage.

Jesus declared that a person had to renounce carnal life and be born of water and the Spirit to be naturalized as a citizen of God's kingdom. This process only happens through God's power. In other words, one must receive the gift of a new attitude from the Spirit of God!

Nicodemus asked, "How can this be?"

"You are a teacher in Israel, and you do not understand these things?" Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth; people speak from what they know and report what they have seen. Your nation does not accept my teachings. Therefore, their refusal demonstrates that they do not know God or His teachings or would receive Me joyfully. I have spoken to Israel about earthly things, and they do not believe; how could they believe Me if I spoke of Heavenly things? No one has ever lived in Heaven and then on earth except Me, the Son of Man who came from heaven."

Jesus told Nicodemus that He was a man, born of a woman. He made this point to remind Nicodemus that the Messiah would be born of a woman. (Isaiah 7) If this was the case, Nicodemus needed to consider the possibility that Jesus could be the Messiah.

Then, Jesus redirected the conversation from Nicodemus as a person to four profound statements about the Jewish nation.

- * Israel's leaders spoke negatively about Jesus because of their faulty knowledge of God.
- * Israel's leaders had a perverted perspective when they made abusive comments about Christ's miracles.
- * The ugly reaction of Israel's leaders toward Jesus confirmed they did not have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit
- * Jesus would have revealed much more about God if Israel had been open to hearing more.

Jesus continued, “Just as Moses lifted the snake in the desert and many were saved from death by looking to the snake, so the Son of Man must be lifted, so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. God so loved everyone born into the world that he gave His dearest companion, like Abraham gave up Isaac, that whoever trusts in Me as His lamb for sin shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Jesus’ words were contrary to everything Nicodemus had been taught. He believed God granted eternal life based on complete conformity to the law. He thought God transferred the guilt of violating the law through animal sacrifices. He believed sacrificial ceremonies *produced* forgiveness.

He believed that eternal life was limited to those in the Church of Israel, but Jesus presented the truth to Nicodemus in the simplest terms.

- * God saved many Israelites from death by *looking* at the bronze serpent that Moses put on a pole.
- * The devil, that ancient serpent, has bitten all people who live in the world, and the only way God can save them from eternal death is by looking to the one who will be lifted on a pole, Jesus.
- * God so loved the whole human race that He gave His most valued gift possible to provide the necessary atonement. For example, Abraham did not have to kill his son Isaac, but God would have to sacrifice His son, Jesus.
- * The sacrifice of animals does not make atonement for man. Instead, the sacrifice of animals was a model pointing to the time when God Himself would provide an atonement for man.

“Therefore,” Jesus said, “everyone who looks to Me for that atonement, and out of gratitude, obeys my commands, shall have life eternal.”

Nicodemus frowned when he heard the truth from Jesus. He recognized the doctrinal opposition between Jesus and

Israel's leaders. The gulf between them was wide enough for the universe to fit. He saw no room for compromise.

Jesus paused, then continued, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Nicodemus looked at the moonlit face of Jesus. He was trying to sort out the realities of the moment. Was this young man camping in the Garden with a scruffy bunch of uneducated Galileans, the Son of God? Did this man live in heaven and then come to earth? Nicodemus pondered the last words of Jesus thoughtfully, "but whoever does not believe in Me stands condemned already!"

The teachers of Israel claimed that God had not condemned those born of Abraham. They believed all others were condemned at birth to eternal death, so Nicodemus' office was necessary. As Director of Naturalization for Israel, he had the privilege of processing people from death into life—a point he often boasted about.

Nicodemus started to speak. He wanted to ask the Teacher, "How can you say that those born of Abraham are condemned already?"

Jesus interrupted, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

This statement made Nicodemus uncomfortable and angry. Jesus had slandered his religion and heritage. He wanted

to retort from the sting saying that Israel was a light to the gentiles (Isaiah 42:6), but cowardice ruled, and Jesus' penetrating, truthful simplicity choked his response.

Without pleasantries or giving a reason, Nicodemus said, "Teacher, I must be going." With that remark, Nicodemus stood up, pulled his cloak around him more securely, and left.

His feet carried him toward home while Jesus' words went through his mind like a broken record. "Men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

As Nicodemus reached the gate to his house, the tension had passed, and a new realization filled his heart. He saw the irony in his actions. He had visited Jesus, the light of the world, under darkness. He sensed he had been in God's presence. Jesus had directed the *Director of Naturalization* toward heaven. He began to see the larger view. He saw his need for citizenship in God's kingdom.

Nicodemus decided before greeting his wife that night to find a way to help Jesus. However, Nicodemus did not act on it until the day of Christ's crucifixion. He and Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. When his fellow Pharisees noticed this action, he received a public rebuke and demotion. This humiliation fueled his inability to stand firm in a decision.

According to legend, Nicodemus testified for Christ at Pilate's trial, the Jews expelled him from the Sanhedrin, and Peter and John baptized him. Perhaps he used his wealth to support the early Christian church. How or when he died is unknown.

Larry Wilson

Great Clocks from God

Over two decades ago, Larry wrote an in-depth study on principles of timing in the Bible. God uses many methods to measure time and these measurements help us interpret biblical timing. We have updated this study with new graphics and hope it makes Bible timing easier to understand. In this updated study, Larry explains these time measurements and dates:

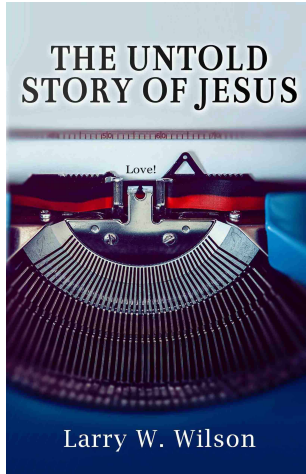
- The Day Clock
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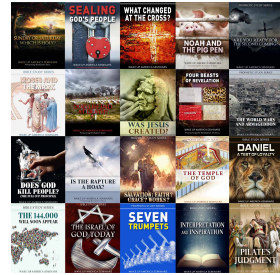
Quote of the Month

“Why is God landing in this enemy-occupied world in disguise and starting a sort of secret society to undermine the devil? Why is He not landing in force, invading it? Is it that He is not strong enough? Well, Christians think He is going to land in force; we do not know when. But we can guess why He is delaying. He wants to give us the chance of joining His side freely. I do not suppose you and I would have thought much of a Frenchman who waited till the Allies were marching into Germany and then announced he was on our side. God will invade. But I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere openly and directly in our world quite realise what it will be like when He does. When that happens, it is the end of the world. When the author walks on to the stage the play is over. God is going to invade, all right: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else -something it never entered your head to conceive- comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature. It will be too late then to choose your side. There is no use saying you choose to lie down when it has become impossible to stand up. That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realised it before or not. Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever. We must take it or leave it.”

— C.S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity*

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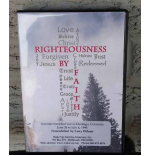


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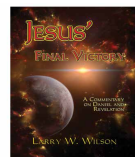


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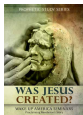
#6 – *Sunday or Saturday Which is Holy?* (30)



#7 – *Does Life End at Death* (30)



#8 – *The Temple of God* (22)



#9 – *Was Jesus Created* (60)



#10 – *Salvation: Faith? Grace? Works?* (40)



#11 – *Does God Kill People?* (30)



#12 – *Is the Rapture a Hoax?* (30)



#13 – *The World Wars and Armageddon* (25)



#15 – *Four Beasts of Revelation* (30)



#17 – *The Israel of God Today* (30)



#18 – *What Changed at the Cross?* (30)



#19 – *Interpretation and Inspiration* (30)



#20 – *Angry with God* (30)



#21 – *Seven Trumpets* (30)



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be saved?* (40)



#30 – *John the
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#40 – *When God
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#25 – *A Faith More
Precious than
Gold* (30)



#32 – *Noah and
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#41 – *What Must
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#26 – *Esther –
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#33 – *Moses
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#42 – *Is Sin
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#27 – *Gideon –
Reluctant
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#34 – *Predestina-
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#44 – *The Trinity–
One God or
Three* (20)



#35 – *Once Saved
– Always
Saved* (40)



#36 – *The Proper-
ties of Faith*
(35)



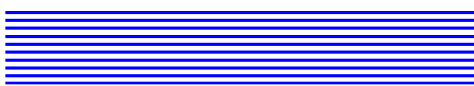
#37 – *The 144,000
Will Soon
Appear* (38)

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