

**Lesson 3**  
**John 3:1 – 36**  
**A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH**

**Memory verse:** “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.” (John3:36 NIV)

“I find that you grow more and more famous in the learned world,” preacher George Whitefield wrote to Benjamin Franklin. “As you have made such progress in investigating the mysteries of electricity, I now humbly urge you to give diligent heed to the mystery of the new birth. It is a most important and interesting study and, when mastered, will richly repay you for your pains.”

The new birth is one of the key topics in John 3. In addition, in this chapter we see Jesus Christ in different roles as well. In this chapter, you will be confronted with the first reference to eternal life in this Gospel. It is illustrated by “the Son of Man must be lifted up.” The purpose of Jesus’ uplifting, as was the purpose of the uplifting of the bronze serpent in the wilderness, was the salvation (deliverance) of those who believed. By comparing Himself to that serpent, Jesus was teaching that whoever trusted in Him and His death would receive “eternal life.”

“Eternal life” refers to one’s “life” in the age to come, namely: in the kingdom age and forever after. It is “life” that one experiences, normally after resurrection, that fits him or her for the kingdom. However, John presented that life as something that people can experience in measure before the kingdom begins. The eternal life that people receive at new birth is the life of the eternal Word (1:4). It comes to them by believing in the person and saving work of Jesus.

John 3:16 is the best-known verse in the whole Bible expresses the gospel message more clearly and winsomely than any other. Almost every word in it is significant.

Jesus’ mission in the Incarnation (vv. 13, 17) and the Cross (vv. 14-15) resulted from God’s “love” for human beings. The construction of the Greek sentence underscores the intensity of God’s love. He gave His best: His unique and beloved Son. The Jews believed that God loved the children of Israel, but John affirmed that God loved all people regardless of race.

God does not take pleasure in pouring His wrath out on the lost, but He rejoices when people turn from their wicked ways to Him (Ezek. 18:23). The fact that God allows sinners to perish does not contradict His love. He has provided a way by which they need “not perish”—because He loves mankind. His ultimate purpose is the salvation of those who believe in His Son.

The consequences of belief are new birth (vv. 3, 5), eternal life (life with unlimited time; vv. 15-16), and salvation (v. 17). The alternative is perishing (v. 16, cf. 10:28), losing one’s life (12:25), and destruction (17:12). To “perish” (Gr. *apoletai*) does not mean to experience annihilation, but ruin, failure to realize God’s purpose, and exclusion from His fellowship. The only alternatives are life or perishing; there is no other final state.

Do you know the mystery of the new birth?

Scripture Reading: John 3:22-36

To learn in this lesson: 1) Jesus the Teacher 2) Jesus the Bridegroom 3) Jesus the Witness

**Discussion Questions:**

1) Jesus is seen as the Teacher in verses 1 to 21. Discuss the basics of salvation taught by Jesus to Nicodemus as illustrated by birth (vvs. 1-7), the wind (vvs. 8-13), serpent on the pole (vvs. 14-18) and light and darkness (vvs. 19-21).

2 Go through the passage of John 3:22-30, and explain why John the Baptist used the illustration of the bridegroom for Jesus.

3) The emphasis in John 3: 31-36 is on witness (“testimony”), one of the key subjects in John’s gospel. The Greek word translated “witness” or “testimony” is used forty-seven times. John bore witness to Jesus (John 1:7; 5:33), but Jesus was also a witness to the truth. Why should we heed His witness?