

JETHRO: But what did he do?

NICODEMUS: He looked around at us all as if he could read our thoughts – some were really angry and stubborn! Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand!” He stretched it out, and it became well again!

JETHRO: But that sort of thing doesn’t happen. It can’t have happened.

NICODEMUS: Jethro, I don’t know how it happened, but I did check up afterwards – rather carefully, in fact. It did happen. In Capernaum, no one, not even the enemies of Jesus, can try to deny that!

EZRA: Who is this Jesus, then? What kind of person is he? He seems basically a good man. Says some fine things. But disagrees with our teachers in some things. Who is he really?

JETHRO: I’m suspicious. Just watch out for him. He’ll be making more rash claims before he’s finished!

NICODEMUS: My strong impression is that he is a teacher sent by God. Look – no one could perform the miracles he is doing unless God is with him!

EZRA: Be careful, Nicodemus. Don’t talk like this to any other Sanhedrin members.

NICODEMUS: For the moment, you may be right. I would like to see him by myself, ask him my own questions. Who is he really? I’m not at all sure!

And Nicodemus did go by himself at night to talk with Jesus. What did he think about him then?

Reader: **John 3.1-17.**

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Who is this Jesus?

Bible Reading: John 3.1-17

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This dialogue pictures a conversation between Ezra, Nicodemus and Jethro, three members of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Ezra and Jethro seem preoccupied with questions of authorisation of a teacher, Nicodemus with finding out the truth about Jesus. The prophets didn't have authorisation, yet they were bearers of the truth. What would the Messiah do when he came? Seek authorisation of the Sanhedrin? But, at this stage, Nicodemus has no thought of identifying Jesus with the Messiah. Nicodemus has heard Jesus teach and seen a miracle performed (a possibility from John 3.2), and now he wants the truth about this "teacher sent by God."

Who is this Jesus?

It was in a quiet spot near the temple in Jerusalem that they met. There were three of them, all members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council.

EZRA: You're saying, Nicodemus, that this carpenter from Nazareth, this Jesus, is no ordinary carpenter.

NICODEMUS: Look, Ezra, I wasn't really commenting on his carpentry, though I have heard it said that he made the best-fitting yokes in the north. But he's left that now – he's a teacher!

JETHRO: And some teacher, I hear! That's what has us worried. That's what's got the whole Sanhedrin worried! I mean, the man has no authority from us to go around teaching. What authority has he got?

EZRA: Jethro's right. Even if he says some good, helpful things, lives an unselfish life... I mean, where might it end? Where would we all be if anyone could just get up and start teaching?

NICODEMUS: I can see what you're worried about, Ezra, but... isn't that how it always was with the prophets? If they'd had to wait for official approval, we wouldn't have the Scriptures today! The **officials** didn't have much time for what the prophets said!

JETHRO: Careful, Nicodemus! Lower your voice! You know that the priests are still a bit touchy about that!

NICODEMUS: Sorry! ... It's a long time since there's been a prophet, and things have been so dark... the Persians, the Greeks, now the Romans!

EZRA: Ah, but there is comfort in the Scriptures!

NICODEMUS: But is there hope?

JETHRO: Hope, you ask? We've had a chance to think about that. There's a thread through the Scriptures – God has promised someone – a Messiah will come!

NICODEMUS: But will we recognise him when he comes?

EZRA: I think we will. He will come here – to the Sanhedrin – and say, "The time is fulfilled and here I am". We'll ask him a few questions and then he'll... he'll...

JETHRO: Yes, I wonder what he'll do?

NICODEMUS: To change the subject... Now, about this Jesus, when I heard that people were saying what a marvellous teacher he was...

EZRA: "He doesn't teach like the scribes" – something like that?

NICODEMUS: A carpenter from Nazareth, not a likely sort of teacher! So I thought I ought to hear the man myself. That's only fair! I happened to be in Capernaum.

JETHRO: That's the deep north!

NICODEMUS: There had been a stir in the city. A paralysed man had been brought to Jesus by four friends. They had been so anxious to get their friend to Jesus that they broke a hole through the roof and lowered his bed through on ropes. That man was healed! He got up and walked!

EZRA: I hear this Jesus said the man's sins were forgiven. You must agree, Nicodemus, that's blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!

JETHRO: If what you say is true, Ezra, this Jesus in dangerous! He ought to be stopped!

NICODEMUS: That man was healed! I talked to him myself, talked to his parents, talked to some long-time residents. He really was paralysed. He really was healed – in an instant – completely healed!

EZRA: That's no guarantee of what sort of person Jesus is. He obviously has some power, but... what power? I don't like it at all!

NICODEMUS: I had that question too! So I went along to the synagogue on the Sabbath to find the answer. Jesus was there. There was this fellow there with a paralysed hand. Everyone was watching – what will Jesus do? At first I thought he might be a plant, brought along specially to test Jesus. But no, he was a regular – everyone knew him.

JETHRO: But it was the Sabbath. Even Jesus wouldn't have done any work on our holy day of rest, surely!

EZRA: Quite right, Jethro. No work on the Sabbath!

NICODEMUS: I wondered too. And Jesus called the man up to the front, then looked us all in the eye and said, "What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To help or to harm? To save a man's life or to destroy it?"

EZRA: I see what you mean... That's a clever answer. No... I mean a remarkable answer!