STUDY BIBLE WORKBOOK

John 3

You Must Be Born Again

QUICK STUDY + DEEP DIVE

Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one enters God’s kingdom without new birth from the Spirit. He reveals the Father’s love in giving His Son and calls every person to believe in Him. John the Baptist shows the joy of making Christ greater than himself.

Scripture quotations: World English Bible (WEB)

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

Study at Your Own Pace

Quick Study: Begin with a focused 15–20 minute overview, key Bible words, Greek translation notes, the Gospel Connection, and a prayer.

Deep Dive: Study seven passages with complete WEB Scripture, S.O.A.P. observations, applications, prayers, Hard Questions, and writing space.

John 3 — Geographic Setting

From the Jerusalem context to the Judean countryside. The setting of Aenon near Salim is named in Scripture, but its exact site is uncertain and not pinned.



Historical political boundaries and some places are illustrative. No exact Judean journey route is drawn.

Regional location



COUNTRIES IN YEAR 2020

1 Jerusalem: Nicodemus likely speaks to Jesus in the Jerusalem context of 2:23–3:1; John 3 does not restate the city.

Judean countryside: Jesus and His disciples later go into the land of Judea (3:22). The exact site is not given.

Aenon near Salim: John baptizes near plentiful water (3:23). Exact site uncertain — not pinned.

Map reading: Colored regions represent approximate first-century control; relief shading shows landforms; blue marks water.

John 3 — You Must Be Born Again

MAIN VERSE

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16, WEB

BIG PICTURE

Jesus tells Nicodemus that entering God’s kingdom requires birth from above by the Spirit. He speaks of His coming death and announces God’s saving love for the world. The chapter then shifts to John the Baptist, who rejoices when people turn to Jesus. John 3 brings together God’s initiative, the call to believe, light versus darkness, and Christ’s supreme authority.

Nicodemus approaches Jesus (3:1–2)

A respected Pharisee and ruler comes by night. He recognizes the signs but still needs to understand who Jesus is.

The necessity of new birth (3:3–8)

Jesus teaches that entry into God’s kingdom requires new life from the Spirit, not merely human effort or ancestry.

Heavenly testimony and the lifted-up Son (3:9–15)

Jesus connects spiritual life to His heavenly origin and to the saving pattern of Numbers 21.

God’s love and the world’s response (3:16–21)

God gives His Son so believers may live. Unbelief and love of darkness leave people under judgment.

QUICK STUDY NOTES

The Chapter’s Major Movements

Ministries in Judea (3:22–26)

Jesus’ disciples and John the Baptist minister at the same time; John’s followers become concerned.

John’s joyful humility (3:27–30)

John gladly points attention to Jesus: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

The Father’s Son and eternal life (3:31–36)

Jesus’ testimony is from above. Believing in Him brings life; rejecting Him leaves judgment in place.

QUICK STUDY FLOW

Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night

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Jesus teaches the need to be born from above by the Spirit

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The Son of Man must be lifted up so believers may live

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God gives His Son in love; light exposes darkness

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Jesus’ and John’s ministries overlap in Judea

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John rejoices that Jesus must increase

↓

The chapter ends with life in the Son and a warning against rejection

QUICK STUDY NOTES

Important Bible Words

Word / Phrase	Simple Meaning	Why It Matters
Pharisee	Member of a Jewish religious movement attentive to the Law	Nicodemus brings learning and authority, yet still must hear Jesus' teaching about new birth.
Born anew / from above	New life whose source is God	Spiritual birth is more than improving behavior or inheriting religious privilege.
Kingdom of God	God's saving reign and rule	Jesus says one must be born anew to see and enter God's kingdom.
Water and Spirit	Language of renewal and spiritual life	Evangelicals differ on "water," but Jesus clearly emphasizes the Spirit's work.
Son of Man	Title Jesus uses for Himself	He comes from heaven and must be lifted up for the salvation of believers.
Eternal life	Life received through faith in the Son, beginning now and enduring forever	The promise runs through John 3:15–16 and 3:36.
Light and darkness	Truth revealed by Christ contrasted with sinful concealment	Jesus' coming exposes the human response to God.
Bridegroom	The central figure in John the Baptist's wedding illustration	John rejoices that Jesus, not John, receives the honor.

Translation Word Notes

Greek is a helpful study aid, not a requirement. The NKJV, NIV, and NLT entries quote only short comparison phrases; all full Scripture text remains WEB.

Verse	Greek / Say it	NKJV	NIV	NLT	What It Means
3:3	**anōthen** AH-noh-then	born again	born again	born again	WEB says "born anew"; the Greek also means "from above." Jesus stresses God's source of new life.
3:8	**pneuma** PNEW-mah	wind / Spirit	wind / Spirit	wind / Spirit	A single Greek word links the mysterious movement of wind with the Spirit's work.
3:16	**monogenēs** moh-noh-geh-NAYS	only begotten	one and only	one and only	The Son is uniquely related to the Father, not one son among many.
3:30	**auxanein / elattousthai** owk-SAH-nayn / eh-lah-TOOS-thye	increase / decrease	greater / less	greater / less	John rejoices as Christ becomes central and his own public prominence fades.
3:36	**apeitheō** ah-pay-THEH-oh	does not believe	rejects	doesn't obey	The Greek can convey refusal to believe or obey; rejecting the Son is not neutral.

Pronunciation is approximate; CAPITALS mark the stressed syllable.

QUICK STUDY NOTES

The Gospel Connection

John 3 does not present salvation as a reward for being moral or religious. Even Nicodemus needs life from above. Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of Man who must be lifted up, recalling God's provision for dying Israelites in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4–9). God loved the world and gave His only born Son so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life. The gospel is both gift and summons: Christ saves sinners, and we are called to believe in Him rather than remain in darkness. This is the same Savior whom John the Baptist gladly honors above himself.

Reflection: Am I resting in the life Christ gives or relying on my own spiritual credentials?

A Short Prayer from John 3

Father, thank You for loving the world and giving Your Son. Forgive me for trusting my own goodness, hiding from Your light, or seeking recognition that belongs to Jesus. Teach me to depend on the Holy Spirit for true renewal, to believe the promises of Christ, and to rejoice as He increases in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Pray this in your own words:

QUICK STUDY COMPLETE

One Truth to Carry With You

New birth comes from the Holy Spirit, eternal life comes through faith in God's Son, and joyful discipleship puts Jesus—not ourselves—at the center.

READY TO GO DEEPER — NEXT PAGE

Ready to Go Deeper?

The Deep Dive follows S.O.A.P.: Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer. Read the entire WEB passage, examine the author's meaning, respond with faith and obedience, and pray honestly. Scripture remains our final authority.

S — Scripture

Read the full passage slowly. Notice Jesus' words, the conversation, repeated phrases, and Old Testament references.

O — Observation

Ask what the passage teaches about new birth, the Spirit, the Son, faith, judgment, and our response.

A — Application

What should I believe, trust, confess, change, obey, or thank God for?

P — Prayer

Respond to God from the truth of the passage, using the example prayer as a starting point.

Before I begin, what do I want God to help me see or understand in John 3?

Words, questions, or ideas I want to watch for as I read:

JOHN 3:1–4

A Teacher Comes at Night

S — Scripture

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.
2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.”
3 Jesus answered him, “Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born anew, he can’t see God’s Kingdom.”
4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

John 3:1–4, WEB

O — Observation

What does this passage say? What does it teach about God, Jesus, people, faith, salvation, or obedience?

Nicodemus is a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling leadership. He approaches Jesus at night and recognizes that Jesus’ signs point to God’s presence. John does not explain all of Nicodemus’s motives for coming at night; secrecy, caution, and a desire for conversation are possible, but not stated as facts.

Jesus does not stop at the compliment. He tells this religious teacher that a person must be “born anew” to see God’s kingdom. The Greek word carries the sense of being born again or from above. Nicodemus hears the language as another physical birth and asks how such a thing could happen.

The contrast matters: religious knowledge, office, and even respect for Jesus’ miracles cannot produce the spiritual life Jesus describes. Jesus confronts a respected teacher with the same fundamental need shared by everyone.

My observations:

A — Application

Am I relying on my religious knowledge or good reputation, instead of trusting Jesus for the new life only He gives?

P — Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me approach You humbly, not merely admiring Your teaching but listening to what You say about my deepest need. Give me a teachable heart.

Pray this in your own words:

JOHN 3:5–8

Born of Water and the Spirit

S — Scripture

5 Jesus answered, “Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water and Spirit, he can’t enter into
God’s Kingdom.
6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
7 Don’t marvel that I said to you, ‘You must all be born anew.’
8 The wind blows where it wants to, and you hear its sound, but don’t know where it comes from and
where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

John 3:5–8, WEB

O — Observation

What does this passage say? What does it teach about God, Jesus, people, faith, salvation, or obedience?

Jesus explains that entry into God’s kingdom requires birth “of water and Spirit.” The exact relationship of water and Spirit has been interpreted differently by evangelical Christians. Many connect the wording with God’s promised cleansing and new heart in Ezekiel 36:25–27; others emphasize the contrast with natural birth or baptismal imagery. John does not explicitly define “water” in this conversation.

Jesus clearly contrasts flesh with Spirit: natural human life cannot produce spiritual birth. The Holy Spirit must give life. The command “You must all be born anew” includes Nicodemus and everyone else; no class or background exempts anyone.

The same Greek word can mean “wind” and “Spirit.” Jesus uses the movement of wind to show that the Spirit’s work is real and powerful even though people cannot control or fully trace it. He calls for faith, not a technique for manufacturing new birth.

My observations:

A — Application

Where do I substitute self-improvement for dependence on the Holy Spirit’s work in my heart?

P — Prayer

Father, thank You for the promise of cleansing and new life. Keep me from trusting my own effort to do what only Your Spirit can do. Renew my heart and lead me to Christ.

Pray this in your own words:

JOHN 3:9–15

The Son of Man Must Be Lifted Up

S — Scripture

9 Nicodemus answered him, “How can these things be?”
10 Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and don’t understand these things?
11 Most certainly I tell you, we speak that which we know and testify of that which we have seen, and you don’t receive our witness.
12 If I told you earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?
13 No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended out of heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven.
14 As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
15 that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:9–15, WEB

O — Observation

What does this passage say? What does it teach about God, Jesus, people, faith, salvation, or obedience?

Nicodemus still struggles to understand. Jesus asks how a teacher of Israel could miss the need for spiritual renewal, then speaks of the witness He brings from heaven. The Son of Man is uniquely qualified to reveal heavenly truth because He has come down from heaven.

Jesus turns to Numbers 21:4–9. In the wilderness, Israelites bitten by serpents were commanded to look at the bronze serpent God appointed, and those who looked lived. Jesus says the Son of Man must likewise be “lifted up.” John later connects Jesus’ being lifted up with His death (John 12:32–33).

The comparison is about God’s provision for those who cannot rescue themselves. Eternal life is received by believing in Jesus, not by earning it. His coming cross is not an accident outside the Father’s purpose; it belongs to the saving mission He has announced.

My observations:

A — Application

What keeps me from looking to the crucified and risen Christ as my only sufficient Savior?

P — Prayer

Jesus, thank You for coming from heaven and giving Yourself for sinners. Turn me away from self-rescue and teach me to look to You in trusting faith.

Pray this in your own words:

JOHN 3:16–21

God Loved the World

S — Scripture

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.
17 For God didn’t send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him.
18 He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn’t believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only born Son of God.
19 This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil.
20 For everyone who does evil hates the light and doesn’t come to the light, lest his works would be exposed.
21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God.”

John 3:16–21, WEB

O — Observation

What does this passage say? What does it teach about God, Jesus, people, faith, salvation, or obedience?

John 3:16 gives the motive and gift at the center of the gospel: God loved the world and gave His only born Son. “World” points to humanity in need of salvation, not to the goodness of human rebellion. The promise of eternal life is offered to whoever believes in the Son.

Verses 17–18 explain the urgency. The Son came on a saving mission, yet those who reject Him remain under judgment. John does not describe salvation as automatic for everyone; he calls readers to believe in Jesus. This chapter holds together God’s love, real accountability, and the necessity of faith.

The light-and-darkness contrast uncovers why people resist Christ: exposure of evil can be unwelcome. Coming into the light is not claiming sinlessness. It is a truthful response to God that stops hiding from His Word and acknowledges what He is doing.

My observations:

A — Application

How should God’s costly love change the way I respond to Jesus and bring my life into His light?

P — Prayer

Father, thank You that You loved the world and gave Your Son. Forgive my efforts to hide in darkness. Teach me to believe Your promise, confess sin honestly, and walk in Your light.

Pray this in your own words:

JOHN 3:22–26

The Judean Countryside and a Question

S — Scripture

22 After these things, Jesus came with his disciples into the land of Judea. He stayed there with them
and baptized.
23 John also was baptizing in Enon near Salim, because there was much water there. They came and
were baptized;
24 for John was not yet thrown into prison.
25 Therefore a dispute arose on the part of John’s disciples with some Jews about purification.
26 They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you
have testified, behold, he baptizes, and everyone is coming to him.”

John 3:22–26, WEB

O — Observation

What does this passage say? What does it teach about God, Jesus, people, faith, salvation, or obedience?

After His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus goes with His disciples into the Judean countryside. John also continues baptizing at “Enon near Salim” where water is plentiful. The precise modern location of that ancient site is debated; the Gospel itself does not give coordinates or a travel route.

A dispute about purification becomes an occasion for John’s disciples to express concern that people are going to Jesus. The text does not require us to assume John himself shares their jealousy; the next passage shows his response.

John includes the chronological note that John the Baptist had not yet been imprisoned. The overlapping ministries emphasize transition: John’s purpose was always to prepare people to recognize the Christ, not to build a competing movement.

My observations:

A — Application

When attention shifts toward another person’s fruitful ministry, do I respond with gratitude or competition?

P — Prayer

Father, guard me against jealousy and comparison in serving You. Help me welcome Your work wherever it brings people to Jesus Christ.

Pray this in your own words:

JOHN 3:27–30

He Must Increase

S — Scripture

27 John answered, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.
28 You yourselves testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before him.’
29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore my joy is made full.
30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

John 3:27–30, WEB

O — Observation

What does this passage say? What does it teach about God, Jesus, people, faith, salvation, or obedience?

John the Baptist answers his disciples by putting God’s gift and calling first: a person can receive only what heaven gives. He reminds them that he never claimed to be the Messiah. His mission is to prepare the way for Someone greater.

The wedding illustration makes the point warmly. The bridegroom receives the bride, while the bridegroom’s friend rejoices at his voice. John finds fulfillment not in keeping attention on himself but in hearing and honoring Jesus.

His statement “He must increase, but I must decrease” is not an invitation to despise ordinary responsibilities or deny God-given gifts. It expresses the proper direction of Christian witness: our influence is not the goal; Christ’s honor is.

My observations:

A — Application

Where am I seeking recognition that belongs to Christ, and what practical choice would help me point others toward Him?

P — Prayer

Lord Jesus, increase in the way I think, speak, and serve. Give me John’s joy when others see You more clearly, even when I receive less attention.

Pray this in your own words:

JOHN 3:31–36

The Father Has Given All Things to the Son

S — Scripture

31 “He who comes from above is above all. He who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.
32 What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies; and no one receives his witness.
33 He who has received his witness has set his seal to this, that God is true.
34 For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for God gives the Spirit without measure.
35 The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand.
36 One who believes in the Son has eternal life, but one who disobeys the Son won’t see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

John 3:31–36, WEB

O — Observation

What does this passage say? What does it teach about God, Jesus, people, faith, salvation, or obedience?

The chapter closes by contrasting heavenly testimony with earthly limitations. The One who comes from above is greater than all. Receiving the Son’s witness means affirming that God is true, because Jesus speaks the words of God and the Spirit is given without measure.

Verses 31–36 may continue John the Baptist’s testimony or may be the Gospel writer’s concluding explanation. John does not identify the change of speaker with an explicit label. The theological message is clear either way: the Father loves the Son and has placed all things in His hand.

Finally, belief and disobedience are set in serious contrast. Verse 36 joins receiving eternal life in the Son with the warning that God’s wrath remains on the one who rejects Him. This is not merely a call to admire Jesus; it is a call to trust and submit to God’s Son.

My observations:

A — Application

What would genuine trust in the Son look like in a decision I face this week?

P — Prayer

Father, You have given all things into the hands of Your beloved Son. Help me hear His testimony, trust His promises, and obey Him rather than resist Your truth.

Pray this in your own words:

Hard Questions

Is being “born again” simply deciding to become a better person?

No. Jesus distinguishes natural life from the Spirit’s work. Repentance and faith are necessary responses to the gospel, but they are not a self-improvement project that creates divine life by human power (John 3:3–8; Titus 3:5).

What does “born of water and Spirit” mean?

Evangelical interpreters differ. Some understand water as the cleansing promised in Ezekiel 36:25–27 alongside the Spirit’s renewing work. Others understand a reference to natural birth or to baptismal imagery. The immediate teaching is unmistakable: the Spirit gives the new life necessary to enter God’s kingdom. This passage should not be used to erase salvation by grace through faith.

Does “God so loved the world” mean everyone is automatically saved?

No. John 3:16 promises life to whoever believes. Verses 18 and 36 distinguish those who believe in the Son from those who remain under judgment. The offer is wide and sincere, but John does not teach that rejecting Christ has no consequence.

Who is speaking in John 3:16–21?

Some editions print Jesus’ speech through verse 21; others place a break after verse 15 and treat verses 16–21 as John’s inspired explanation. Ancient Greek manuscripts did not use our modern quotation-mark conventions. The workbook follows a common red-letter convention but does not claim the boundary can be established with certainty.

Does “lifted up” refer only to Jesus’ crucifixion?

John 3:14 evokes Moses lifting the bronze serpent (Numbers 21:4–9). In John, the phrase also anticipates Jesus’ death and exaltation (John 8:28; 12:32–33). The point is that God provides life through the Son who is given for sinners.

Where was Enon near Salim?

John 3:23 places it near a source of plentiful water, but the exact ancient location is uncertain. Several identifications have been proposed. Our chapter map shows the broad regions without pinning this disputed site or inventing Jesus’ travel route.

Do verses 31–36 come from John the Baptist or the Gospel writer?

The text gives no clear quotation boundary. They may continue John the Baptist’s testimony or summarize it in the narrator’s voice. Both readings emphasize that Jesus comes from above, bears the Father’s testimony, and gives eternal life.

How do belief and obedience relate in John 3:36?

The final contrast is not between earning salvation through perfect works and earning it by intellectual agreement. John portrays true faith as receiving and trusting the Son; persistent refusal to hear Him exposes unbelief. The Greek can be rendered “disobeys” or “disbelieves.”

HARD QUESTIONS NOTES

Reflection

What have I relied on for spiritual confidence instead of the new life Jesus says I need?

How does the cross show God’s love without minimizing the seriousness of sin and judgment?

Where am I tempted to hide from the light rather than confess the truth before God?

What would it look like this week for Christ to increase and my desire for recognition to decrease?

A Prayer for New Life and Faith

Heavenly Father, I praise You for Your love displayed in sending Your only born Son. I confess that I cannot give myself new birth or earn eternal life. Thank You that Jesus was lifted up for sinners and that You promise life to everyone who believes in Him. Bring hidden sins into Your light and lead me in genuine repentance. Guard my heart from religious pride and envy. Like John the Baptist, teach me to rejoice when Jesus is honored and to say with sincerity, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” Help me trust Your Son and obey His Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Pray this in your own words:

ONE TRUTH TO CARRY WITH YOU

New birth comes from the Holy Spirit, eternal life comes through faith in God’s Son, and joyful discipleship puts Jesus—not ourselves—at the center.

Final Notes