

John 3:10-18

“The Son of Man Who Descended From Heaven”

“Yeshua answered and said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 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.’”

In His preceding discussion with Nicodemus (John 3:1-9), Yeshua the Messiah informed him that he needed to be born again (John 3:3, 5-6). It has long been recognized in Biblical Studies that being “born again” or “born from above” was used in Second Temple Judaism to describe proselytes. The Talmud records, “R. Yosé says, ‘A proselyte at the moment of conversion is like a new-born baby’” (b.*Yevamot* 48b),⁵¹ describing the transformation which was believed to take place in the life of a proselyte to Judaism. All Yeshua does is take this terminology, and apply it to the level of transformation which is to take place to all men and women who desire to see and enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Yeshua is perplexed, asking Nicodemus what should be self-obvious: “You hold the office of teacher in Isra’el, and you don’t know this?” (John 3:10, CJB/CJSB).

The dialogue shifts to Yeshua speaking to a wider audience, and He seemingly uses the plural “we” to speak mainly on behalf of He and His Disciples, and the experiences they have thus far had in seeing various miracles take place—and certainly dynamic and challenging teachings being issued: “I assure you that we are talking about what we know and we are witnessing to what we have observed, yet you will not accept our evidence” (John 3:11, Phillips New Testament). The limitations, and perhaps even broad faithlessness, of Yeshua’s audience, is realized in how He informs them how they lack the ability to believe the Earthly or terrestrial things about which He speaks. *If they cannot believe the Earthly things He reports, then they will surely not believe the Heavenly things He could tell them:* “If you people don’t believe me when I tell you about the things of the world, how will you believe me when I tell you about the things of heaven?” (John 3:12, CJB/CJSB).

To further make His point, Yeshua asserts how He would be the only exclusive, reliable source of information brought from Heaven: “No one has gone up into heaven except the One who came down from heaven—the Son of Man” (John 3:13, TLV). This is not a statement on the post-mortem condition for Believers, as the intermediate state between death and resurrection is one of being “absent from the body” (2 Corinthians 5:8) and “with Messiah” (Philippians 1:23).⁵² It is not just enough for Yeshua to invoke the Danielic title “Son of Man,” of a figure granted supreme authority by the Ancient of Days, to whom all of Creation must revere and worship (Daniel 7:13-14). By saying “No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man” (John 3:13, ESV), Yeshua is dismissing any of the sentiments present in Second Temple Judaism whereby it was believed that different

⁵¹ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

⁵² Consult the author’s publication *To Be Absent From the Body.*

human figures were permitted to go into Heaven and bring back Divine secrets to Earth—**placing the central nexus of true Heavenly knowledge and revelation in Himself**. The NLT has the slight, and justified, paraphrase of John 3:13, “No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven.” A number of commentators on the Gospel of John rightly stress,

- D.A. Carson: “The Judaism of Jesus’ day circulated many stories of bygone saints who had ascended into heaven and received special insight into God’s ways and plans. Many of these stories focused on Moses...Jesus insists that no-one had ascended into heaven in such a way as to return and talk about heavenly things...But Jesus can speak of heavenly things, not because he ascended to heaven from a home on earth and then descended to tell others of his experiences, but because heaven was his home in the first place.”⁵³
- Colin G. Kruse: “Jesus identified himself as the heavenly figure of great sovereign authority, the Son of Man...who came down from heaven, and therefore was qualified to speak authoritatively of heavenly things. At the same time he rejected all Jewish speculations about other ‘revealers’ who were thought to have ascended to heaven (e.g., Abraham, Moses, Enoch and Isaiah) to return with revelations for those on earth (cf. Pr. 30:4).”⁵⁴
- Andreas J. Köstenberger: “Jesus here contrasts himself, the ‘Son of Man’ (cf. Dan. 7:13), with other human figures who allegedly entered heaven, such as Enoch (Gen. 5:24; cf. Heb. 11:5), Elijah (2 Kings 2:1-12; cf. 2 Chron. 21:12-15), Moses (Exod. 24:9-11; 34:29-30), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-3), or Ezekiel (Ezek. 1; 10). A whole cottage industry of Second Temple literature revolved around such figures and their heavenly exploits (e.g., 1 Enoch...)...[O]nly Jesus both descended from heaven and ascended back into heaven (cf. Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9...”⁵⁵

The further significance of Yeshua is highlighted, as the Lord decreed, “Just as Moshe lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14, CJB/CJSB). The scene of Numbers 21:9⁵⁶ and Moses lifting up the bronze serpent to the community of Ancient Israel, is invoked as a precursor to Yeshua’s later execution on the tree. That Yeshua could have said in John 3:14, “so must *I* be lifted up” or “so must *the Messiah* be lifted up” (John 3:14, NASU both modified), but did not, cannot be overlooked. Yeshua’s self-identification as the Daniel 7:13-14 Son of Man, who would be unjustly executed and lifted up on a Roman cross, can only be understood as highlighting the gravity of His humiliation. God Incarnate (John 1:14, 18) would be sacrificed for the sins of humanity, with the gift of eternal life and communion with God something possible for those who believe (John 3:15-18), **a gift purchased for those who receive it at the highest price**.

⁵³ Carson, *John*, pp 200-201.

⁵⁴ Kruse, *John*, 110.

⁵⁵ Köstenberger, 127; also Keener, *John*, pp 562-563; Michaels, pp 194-195.

⁵⁶ “And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived” (Numbers 21:9).