

VOICES FROM HEAVEN AND HELL

by

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CHAPTER SIX

"I Was Born A Second Time"

by Nicodemus

"My name is Nicodemus. It is my desire to give you my amazing experience with JESUS who is the Messiah. Of part of my experience I am thoroughly ashamed. But I trust that you will forgive me even as the living GOD has forgiven. I confess that I was a coward and a weakling. I was more afraid of the opinion of men than of GOD. But now all has changed. I was born a second time. Let me tell you of my experience.

"I am a Jew. I was a Pharisee. This is the strictest party of our nation. As a Pharisee I was very zealous of keeping the law of Moses and the traditions which we received from the elders. My father was a man of considerable wealth and was very anxious that I would become a teacher of the law. From early youth I attended the best schools in Jerusalem and sat at the feet of the famous rabbis of the day. The teachings of Moses, of Isaiah, of Daniel and the other prophets became my delight. The thousands of traditions which arose during the past centuries, too, were learned by heart. It was a proud day when I was accepted as a teacher of the law.

"As a Pharisee I was very zealous of the honour of my nation. The Romans who ruled Palestine were hated by all faithful Jews. We all longed for the day when a Deliverer would come who would release us from our bondage to the Gentiles whom we considered to be worse than dogs. We all looked for the coming of the Messiah who had been promised of GOD. We believed that He would set up a kingdom which would rule all the kingdoms of this world.

"Often Joseph of Arimathea, a close friend of mine, and I would speak of that day when we as Jews would rule the world even as the Romans were ruling. We spoke of the prophecies which indicated that the Messiah would change the hearts of the Gentiles so that they would leave their abominable practice of worshipping idols. The Jewish nation would be glorified in that day.

"I must confess that there was much within my nation which disturbed me. Many had no regard for the law. The significance of the sacrifices of the Temple was not known to many. Worship was a matter of form. The life of some of my friends was shocking. Even my associates in the

Sanhedrin were wicked, cruel, and greedy. I had been honoured in being chosen to be ruler in the highest court of our nation, the Sanhedrin. I came to the court with high ideals of justice but these ideals were not shared by all.

"It was no wonder that some of us were greatly disturbed by the preaching of a man who was called John the Baptist. To us he seemed wild and uncouth. He had not attended the schools of the Rabbis. But the multitude flocked to hear him preach. Some of us went to hear him from Jerusalem. I can still remember his message which seared into my conscience. When he saw us he cried out: **'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.'**

"This message enraged us. Surely he did not have to call us vipers. And why would not our descent from Abraham entitle us to the blessings of GOD? As long as we kept the law faithfully GOD would be pleased with us. And as the children of Abraham we would have the chief positions in the kingdom which the Messiah would set up. We were offended by the preaching of this John the Baptist. But he was such a powerful preacher and had such influence with the people that we could not help wondering if he might be the Messiah. When we asked him he denied this and said that he was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. He claimed that the Messiah would come soon. However, as many had declared this previously we did not take him seriously.

"Not long after this I began to hear rumors about a man by the name of JESUS. He was a worker of miracles. At first in common with my friends I doubted the miracles were genuine. But I checked them. I personally interviewed a leper who had been cleansed; a man who had received sight; and a man who had been afflicted with palsy. There was no doubt in my mind that they were genuine miracles. Now these miracles could be performed only by the power of GOD. This JESUS must be a prophet.

"I talked this matter over with some of my associates of the Sanhedrin. They were still feeling bitter about what John the Baptist had said and they classified this JESUS with him. They felt that his miraculous power came from Beelzebub, the prince of devils. It was their opinion that the multitude should be warned about him. Only the very ignorant would follow him.

"However, I was not satisfied with their opinion for I felt that no man could do such miracles except through the power of Almighty GOD. Of course, I did not want to antagonize my friends by telling them what I felt. They would consider me ignorant and I would lose their respect. I valued their opinion. But I could not deny the fact that this JESUS was a prophet of GOD. It disturbed me. I dared not listen to Him when He taught in Jerusalem. Some might think that I was His follower.

"One night I could not sleep and the thought struck me that I could see this JESUS without any one knowing anything about it. I found where He was lodging and He was awake. I asked if I could see Him in private. He consented. I said to Him, **'Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.'** To this He gave a strange reply: **'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born**

again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God!

"What did He mean? That I, a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, would have to be born a second time? Did He mean that as a son of Abraham I was not entitled to be a citizen of the Kingdom of GOD? Had I not kept the law and traditions zealously? Surely He could not mean that I was not fit to enter into the Kingdom! But could He mean a physical rebirth? In my puzzlement I asked Him; **'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?'**

"To this JESUS answered: **'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'** I knew by this that JESUS meant a spiritual rebirth. But why would it be necessary for me a Jew and a zealous keeper of the law to experience a spiritual rebirth? What was wrong with me? I was not conscious of any wrongdoing. If I had been a Sadducee or a Publican I could understand the necessity of repentance and spiritual rebirth. But from my youth I had been faithful to the law and the traditions. I had been honoured as a teacher of the law and a member of the Sanhedrin. Yet now this JESUS was telling me that it was necessary for me to experience repentance and a spiritual rebirth.

"The astonishment which I felt must have been written on my countenance for JESUS said: **'Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.'** This statement added to my bewilderment. For it seemed that this rebirth depended upon the Spirit of GOD. Did this JESUS not realize who I was? Did He not know my zeal for the law? Did not the fact that I was a Jew automatically make me fit for the Kingdom? So in my bewilderment I cried out: **'How can these things be?'**

"To this JESUS replied: **'Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to Heaven, but he that came down from Heaven, even the Son of man which is in Heaven.'**

"I knew by this reply that JESUS considered Himself to be the Messiah. It was Daniel who termed the Messiah: **'The Son of man.'** Was this JESUS the Son of man? Was He the Messiah? Was He the one who would set up the everlasting Kingdom? Was He the one who would deliver us from bondage to the Romans? Surely that could not be. He did not seem like a warrior. I could not picture this meek and mild man leading an army in bloody conflict. A prophet, yes; but not a king. Surely He could not be the Messiah.

"While these thoughts were disturbing my mind this JESUS made another startling statement which confused me more than ever. He said: **'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.'**

"The Son of man be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness? The Messiah

nailed to a post? The thought shocked me. Many times had I taught this scene from the Book of Moses to others as a warning not to break the law. When our people were in the wilderness they murmured against GOD. The living GOD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many died. Then those who remained alive confessed their sins and pleaded with Moses to intercede for them. The Lord instructed Moses to make a serpent of brass. Anyone who looked upon this serpent of brass suspended on the pole lived. By a look at the suspended serpent the poison would leave his system.

"And now this JESUS said that the Son of man must be suspended even as the serpent of brass and that whosoever believed in Him would not perish, but have eternal life. This was so contrary to all my beliefs concerning the Messiah that my mind was in a turmoil. Must the Messiah be suspended in the manner that criminals were crucified? How then could He be our King and lead us against the Romans? How could He establish the Kingdom? And must we as Israelites look upon this suspended Son of man? This JESUS must consider that we are just as great sinners as our forefathers in the wilderness. O yes, it was true of many like the Sadducees and Publicans. But surely that was not true of the Pharisees. Did this JESUS consider that I too was a sinner and had to look upon a suspended Messiah as my forefathers looked upon the serpent of brass? Is that the only way I could enter into the Kingdom of GOD?

"I left the presence of JESUS. No one had seen me. If my colleagues knew of my interview they did not indicate it to me. I congratulated myself that my interview was kept a secret. For several years I saw nothing of JESUS but I continued to hear about His miracles and teachings. My colleagues hated Him more and more, for some of the people believed that this JESUS was the Messiah. At one time they sent the guard to arrest Him. The guard was so impressed with His teachings that they did not dare to arrest Him. For this they were sternly rebuked. But I spoke up and said: **'Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth?'** They turned at me and said, **'Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look; for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.'** Cowardly I remained silent although I could have told them that Jonah and Nahum came forth from Galilee. I feared, however, to offend them and I thought it would be best to remain silent.

"They were determined to kill JESUS. I learned a few months later that they had contacted one of His disciples whom they bribed to betray Him. Then it happened. It seems that they seized JESUS in the Garden of Gethsemane. They hastily called the Sanhedrin together at midnight. This was illegal. They did not call me for they suspected that I was sympathetic towards JESUS. In the morning Joseph of Arimathea told me what had happened. I was indignant when I heard that my colleagues had influenced Pilate to crucify JESUS. Joseph and I hastened to Golgotha the place where they crucified criminals.

"And there I beheld the terrible sight of JESUS crucified upon a cross. Tears filled my eyes for I was convinced that JESUS was a teacher sent from GOD. A teacher? Suddenly I remembered the words of JESUS: **'And as Moses lifted up the serpent into the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.'** JESUS was lifted up. JESUS is the Son of Man. JESUS is the Messiah. It was my Saviour and my GOD who hung on the cross. I believed. I believed.

"JESUS died on the cross. Joseph obtained permission to bury the body in the tomb. I brought

about a hundred weight of myrrh and aloes and we anointed the body of the Lord. But the tomb could not contain my Lord. He arose on the third day and ascended into Heaven. Oh that you would behold the crucified Lord! He was lifted up even as Moses lifted the brazen serpent. Won't you behold Him! Look upon the crucified One with eyes of faith and you will not perish but possess life everlasting. May GOD cause you to be born a second time, **'for except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.'** "

~ end of chapter 6 ~
