

John 3:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

Analysis

Nicodemus asks, 'How can these things be?'—expressing bewilderment at Jesus' teaching. The question is genuine, not hostile. A leading teacher in Israel cannot comprehend basic spiritual realities. This exposes the gap between religious expertise and spiritual understanding. Knowledge of Scripture doesn't automatically produce comprehension of its spiritual meaning. Nicodemus needs what he's being taught—spiritual illumination.

Historical Context

Nicodemus likely knew Ezekiel 36:25-27 promising the Spirit's cleansing and indwelling. Yet he couldn't connect this to Jesus' teaching about new birth. Religious education without spiritual regeneration leaves one unable to grasp spiritual truth. Jesus' response (verse 10) emphasizes this irony—Israel's teacher doesn't understand Israel's hope.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Why doesn't religious education automatically produce spiritual understanding?
2. What Old Testament passages should have prepared Nicodemus for Jesus' teaching on new birth?

Interlinear Text

ἀπεκρίθη Νικόδημος καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Πῶς δύναται
answered Nicodemus and said unto him How can
G611 G3530 G2532 G2036 G846 G4459 G1410

ταῦτα γενέσθαι
these things be
G5023 G1096

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 42:16 (Parallel theme): And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.

John 6:52 (Parallel theme): The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

John 6:60 (Parallel theme): Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?

Luke 1:34 (Parallel theme): Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?