## REWARD FOR SERVING THE LORD

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**Abstract**: the article examines in detail and proves the obligatory nature of God's blessing to those who work for the glory of God. The evidence is provided by examples of the activities of three characters from the Holy Scripture of the New King James Version (NKJV): the Pharisee Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin Joseph of Arimathea, and a respected teacher of the law, the Pharisee Gamaliel. This study was conducted by the biblical method—"proof by the Scriptures."

Keywords: holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (The NKJV Bible), Church's history.

#### **Abbreviations**

f — the remainder of that verse of Holy Scripture (Bible).

ff — the remaining verses of the specific context of the Bible.

#### Quotes

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version* of the Bible (*NKJV*).

#### Introduction

The work of three important characters of the Holy Scriptures of the New King James Version (NKJV) is studied in detail: the Pharisee Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin Joseph of Arimathea and a respected preacher of the law, the Pharisee Gamaliel. In the example of the activity of the teacher of Israel—the Pharisee Nicodemus—the transformation of his thought for the future service of Jesus Christ is shown. The example of Joseph of Arimathea member of the Sanhedrin shows his choice and determination to serve the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of His earthly journey. The example of the actions of the respected teacher of the law, the Pharisee Gamaliel, also shows the change in his mind and the later salvation of his soul. It is proved that in every case, it was the will of God. This proof is based on compelling biblical verses, "showing from the Scriptures..." (Acts 18, 28f) [6].

This study differs from article [2] as it examines another manuscript—the Holy Scripture of the *New King James Version* (*Nelson's NKJV Study Bible, Second Edition*; briefly—*NKJV*). Also, the article and bibliography have been edited for the English-speaking audience only.

# 1. NICODEMUS

Let us consider the activities of the first person, the *Pharisee Nicodemus*. *Nicodemus* (*Hebrew* της τος καταρούς τος

1) For the first time, the name of the *Pharisee Nicodemus* is mentioned in his night conversation with Jesus Christ:

«There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." 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?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? ... For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ...» (John 3, 1-10ff, 16ff-21).

2) What should **Nicodemus**, the teacher of Israel, *know and teach?* This question Jesus asked him in their night conversation, about the Holy Spirit. That was prophesied by the prophet Ezekiel:

«Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.» (Ezek. 36, 25-28).

3) And already a man with a "new heart (*carnivore*)"—needs the New Testament, about which the *prophet Jeremiah* predicted:

«"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."» (Jer. 31, 31-34).

4) The Apostle Paul in his epistle—"The Epistle to the Hebrews"—wrote about this New Testament that it was "necessary" (**Heb. 7, 12**), because there was a change in the priesthood. God with oath has appointed a new **Eternal High Priest—Jesus Christ**:

«for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The Lord has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek". ...» (Heb. 7, 21ff).

5) Why did **Nicodemus** come to Christ at *night and secretly*? Because everyone in Jerusalem, except the apostles, was afraid to acknowledge Jesus for Christ. Everyone was afraid to be excommunicated from the synagogue (but in Israel it is a status, otherwise the person will be an outcast):

«His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue.» (John 9, 22).

6) *Nicodemus*, a man of knowledge of the law, having spoken with Jesus Christ during the night (*secretly*), received the knowledge of the truth. And later he had already clearly defended Jesus Christ to the great priests and Pharisees of the Sanhedrin:

«Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee." And everyone went to his own house.» (John 7, 50-53).

7) When the earthly way of Jesus Christ is completed, *Nicodemus* no longer hides, attending the burial of Jesus Christ:

«And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds.» (John 19, 39).

We see how the teaching of Jesus Christ changed the mind of one of Israel's teachers, the Pharisee Nicodemus.

#### 2JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

Joseph of Arimathea (*Hebrew* יוסף הרמתי)—the Jewish elder in whose tomb Jesus Christ was buried—is mentioned by all four evangelists in the story of the burial of Jesus.

Let us describe all these scripture passages of the evangelists in detail.

1) Evangelist Matthew describes the burial of Jesus Christ:

«Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed.» (Matt. 27, 57-60).

2) Evangelist Mark also describes the same case of the burial of Jesus Christ by Joseph of Arimathea:

«Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb» (Mark 15, 43-46).

3) Evangelist **Luke** describes these same events:

«Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before» (Luke 23, 50-53).

**4)** The Evangelist **John** also describes these events of the burial of Jesus Christ by Joseph of Arimathea together with Nicodemus:

«After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.» (John 19, 38-42).

5) In Christianity, it is believed that the messianic prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled by burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea:

«And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.» (Is. 53, 9).

We understand that a simple person could not enter the procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate, in any way. Therefore, God provided for this purpose one of the elders of the Sanhedrin—Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph, a noble, rich, empowered man, having his personal tomb close to the city, believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, we see that Joseph of Arimathea, just like Nicodemus, no longer *secretly*, but *openly* served the Lord Jesus Christ for His glory.

#### 3. GAMALIEL

The Jewish Encyclopedia gives us a description of the life of Gamaliel:

«Gamaliel (Heb. רבן גמליאל הזקן)—Son of Simon and grandson of Hillel: according to a tannaitic tradition (Shab.15a), he was their successor as nasi and first president of the Great Sanhedrin of Jerusalem. Although the reliability of this tradition, especially as regards the title of "nasi," has been justly disputed, it is nevertheless a fact beyond all doubt that in the second third of the first century Gamaliel (of whose father, Simon, nothing beyond his name is known) occupied a leading position in the highest court, the great council of Jerusalem, and that, as a member of that court, he received the cognomen "Ha-Zaķen."» [8, 558-559].

1) In the book «Acts of the Apostles» we read that the Pharisees and scribes plotted to kill the Apostles:

«And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." When they heard this, they were furious and plotted to kill them.» (Acts 5, 27-33).

2) Gamaliel, an honest and kind teacher of the law, seeing that the Pharisees and scribes wanted to kill the Apostles, decided to save them:

«Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God."» (Acts 5, 34-39).

3) The Apostle Paul reminded the Jews that he was brought up at the "feet of Gamaliel," a respected teacher of the Law of Moses (1st century):

«"I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and as zealous toward God has you all are today» (Acts 22, 3).

So, we see that even such important and responsible people as **Gamaliel** in Israel also wanted to do a good deed for the Apostles—to save them and thereby serve Jesus Christ for His glory.

#### 4. REWARD FOR SERVING GOD

The apostle Paul writes that the work of believers is not in vain before the Lord:

«Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.» (1 Cor. 15, 58).

Evangelist Mark writes about the reward for labor in the Name of Jesus Christ:

«For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.» (Mk. 9, 41).

So, we see that any work for the glory of God is worthy of a reward. But how did the Lord bless the main characters—Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and Gamaliel? Church history provides an answer to this question.

# 1) Joseph of Arimathea

The Library of the University of Rochester (*Rochester, New York, USA*) contains the manuscript "*The History of This Holy Disciple of Joseph of Arimathea*" published by Bow Church Yard in London (1770?). (*Robbins Library Digital Projects, Project Camelot*):

«THE person we are going to speak of, named Joseph, was a just, holy, pious, and devout man, born at Arimathea, otherwise called Rameth, and afterwards Ramula. It was a city formerly allotted for the Levites, and situated near Sophim on mount Ephraim, near the confines of the tribes of Benjamin and Dan; and is also noted for being the birth place of Samuel the prophet, who here lived and died, and was buried.

Here Joseph was born, and from hence was called Joseph of Arimathea...

He was born about eight years before the nativity of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...

However, when Jesus Christ began to take upon him the great work of the ministry of the Gospel, and by his holy life, pure doctrine, and supernatural miracles, had procured many Jews to embrace what he taught them, among the rest of his followers this Joseph of Arimathea became a great admirer of our Saviour's preaching...

But when Jesus was betrayed by Judas, who sold the precious blood of our lord and master, for the value of thirty pence, after the condemnation was passed upon him by Pontius Pilate, the Roman president of Syria, and he was crucified on the cross, for the sins of the whole world.--As soon as he was dead, this Joseph of Arimathea, who was a rich man, went, as the evangelist St. Matthew tells us, chap. xvii, 58, 60, to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered; and when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in the rock, and he rolled a great Stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed.

After the death of our Saviour, Joseph of Arimathea led a solitary life, about six months, in commemoration of our Saviour's crucifixion for his salvation, as well as the whole race of mankind...

Being now returned home, and having given a full account to the twelve apostles, of what special service he had done for the vindication of the Christian liberty at Rome, he was appointed and ordained to go and preach the Gospel in England; and according as the mission commanded him, he took shipping at Joppa, and sailing with a great deal of difficulty, and meeting many dangerous storms, through the Mediterranean sea, he at length landed at Barrow-bay in Somersetshire, and then proceeding onwards of his journey eleven miles that day; came to Glastenbury in the same county; where, fixing his pilgrim's staff in the ground, it was no sooner set in the earth, but just like Aaron's rod (which blossomed flowers when there was a contest betwixt him and other learned Jews for the priesthood) it was presently turned into a blossoming thorn, which supernatural miracle made the numerous spectators, who came to see this wonder, be very attentive to hear his preaching the Gospel, which was concerning Christ crucified for the redemption of mankind.

He arrived at Glastenbury about three years after the death of our blessed Redeemer, being then in the forty-fourth year of his age, doing there such wonderful miracles, that he presently brought to the conversion of Christ above one thousand souls. Besides, as Eusebius, Sozomenes, and Ruffinus, three most faithful ecclesiastical writers, relate, he baptized at the city of Wells, which is within four miles of Glastenbury, eighteen thousand persons one day; so devout, zealous, and holy, was the life of Joseph of Arimathea, that although he found the inhabitants of this island very barbarous and superstitious, yet, by wholesome admonitions, in learnedly as well as strenuously exhorting them to change their erroneous opinions, representing before their eyes, the heinousness of their damnable folly and blindness, he piously persuaded them not to hazard the salvation of their souls, and their posterity, by embracing downright idolatry, in worshipping the sun, moon, and stars, as well as living creatures, both on the earth, as well as in the sea.

Thus Joseph of Arimathea, by his godly life and good behaviour, having obtained the good-will of one Ethelbertus, a king then reigning in the western parts of England, and many other nobles, whom he converted to the Christian faith, he founded a most famous abbey at Glastonbury; which was the first Christian church in the world, and by the large endowments settled upon it afterwards by the Christian princes, it became one of the richest monasteries in Christendom.

In the antient town of Glastenbury the holy Joseph of Arimathea continued till the day of his death, being forty-two years, so that he was eighty-six at his death; and so venerable was his person then held, that six kings of those parts honoured his corpse by carrying him on royal shoulders to the grave; which was made in the chancel of Glastonbury-abbey, and had a most stately tomb erected over him, with the following inscription:

HERE LIES THE BODY OF THAT MOST NOBLE DISCIPLE, RECORDED IN SCRIPTURE BY THE NAME OF JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA, AND NOTED BY THE FOUR EVANGELISTS, ST. MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, AND JOHN, FOR HIS BEGGING THE BODY OF OUR BLESSED SAVIOUR WHEN CRUCIFIED TO REDEEM LOST MEN FROM ETERNAL DESTRUCTION, AND BURYING IT IN A TOMB OF HIS OWN MAKING. HE DIED A.D. 45, AGED 86.

But what is more remarkable is the White-Thorn, otherwise called the Holy-Thorn, which to this very time is noted thro' all Europe, for its budding on Christmas-day in the morning, blossoms at noon, and fades at night; and the reason is as abovesaid; for that it was the staff of Joseph of Arimathea, which he fixing in the grouad, it instantly took root where this famous thorn grows, and thereby proclaimed that spot a resting place for its master. And though the time of superstitious popery is in this kingdom abolished, yet do thousands of people, of

different opinions, go annually to see this curiosity, which appearing supernatural, and contrary to the course of nature, makes us cry out with Psalmist, O Lord! how marvellous are thy ways!» [1].

#### 2) Nicodemus

The *Orthodox Church in America* (*OCA*) in the section «Lives of the Saints,» in the article "The Uncovering of the Relics of the Righteous Saint Nikódēmos" writes about Nicodemus (Nikódēmos – romanization of the Greek Νικόδημος) as follows:

«Saint Nikódēmos was a prominent Pharisee who believed in Christ. The Savior explained to him how man is regenerated through Baptism, but he did not understand how a man could be born again. When the Lord reproved him for his ignorance, he accepted it with humility (John 3:1-21).

Nikódēmos came back to Christ from time to time, defended Him to the Pharisees (John 7:50-52), and brought spices to anoint His body (John 19:39). After being cast out of the synagogue for his belief in Christ, Saint Nikódēmos went to live with Saint Gamaliel at his country house, remaining there until his death» [4].

### 3) Gamaliel

In the Catholic Encyclopedia, the following is written about Gamaliel:

«According to Photius, he was baptized by St. Peter and St. John, together with his son and with Nicodemus. His body, miraculously discovered in the fifth century, is said to be preserved at Pisa, in Italy» [3, 375].

**Patriarch Photios I of Constantinople** (Greek Φώτιος, Phōtios; c. 810/820-893) in his work The Bibliotheca (Greek Βιβλιοθήκη), in his review of Eustratius (codex 171), provides interesting information about Stephen, Nicodemus and Gamaliel:

«I have discovered, on the other hand, that in this book the master who taught the law to Paul, Gamaliel, was converted and baptised. And that Nicodemus, the friend who came by night, also became a friend of the great day and died a martyr 3; he was a cousin of Gamaliel, according to the book. Both were baptised by John and Peter and the son of Gamaliel, named Abib, also. As for the blessed Nicodemus, when the Jews learned that he had been baptised, he was beaten up, which he endured valiantly, but died soon after.» [7].

**Taylor Reed Marshall**, Ph.D. in philosophy and theology (born 1978) is an American Catholic YouTube commentator, former Episcopalian priest and former academic, now known for his advocacy of traditionalist Catholicism, referring to St. Augustine, writes about Stephen, Nicodemus and Gamaliel:

«In 415, the priest Lucian had a vision of Gamaliel, who told him the following:

"I am," said he, "Gamaliel, who instructed Paul the apostle in the law; and on the east side of the monument lieth Stephen who was stoned by the Jews without the north gate. His body was left there exposed one day and one night; but was not touched by birds or beasts. I exhorted the faithful to carry it off in the night-time, which when they had done, I caused it to be carried secretly to my house in the country, where I celebrated his funeral rites forty days, and then caused his body to be laid in my own tomb to the eastward.

Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night, lieth there in another coffin. He was excommunicated by the Jews for following Christ, and banished out of Jerusalem. Whereupon I received him into my house in the country, and there maintained him to the end of his life; after his death I buried him honourably near Stephen.

I likewise buried there my son Abibas, who died before me at the age of twenty years. His body is in the third coffin which stands higher up, where I myself was also interred after my death." » [5].

An *important conclusion* follows from all this:

God wants every person to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and receive the full reward from the Lord—salvation and eternal life.

# 5. CONCLUSION

Summing up this study, the following important conclusions can be drawn.

It was noted above that the one who gives the disciple a cup of water in the Name of the Lord will not lose his reward (*Section 4*). Therefore, the one who saves the life of a person who believes in Jesus Christ will receive a reward from the Lord all the more.

All the main characters served the Apostles and through them the Lord. Therefore, all three characters: Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and Gamaliel—received a full reward from the Lord—salvation and eternal life.

It is important to note the obligation of **God's blessing** (i.e. full reward) for labor in the Name of the Lord—this is *salvation and eternal life*.

- 1) *Nicodemus* accepted the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, served Him and received *salvation and eternal life*. This is God's blessing.
- 2) *Joseph of Arimathea*, a disciple of Jesus Christ, served the Lord and buried Him in his new tomb. Preached the word of God in England. Received *salvation and eternal life from God*.
- 3) *Gamaliel* believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, saved the lives of the Apostles, was baptized by the Apostles Peter and John. He also received a full reward from the Lord—*salvation and eternal life*.
- So, the obligation of God's blessing for work in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ is proven by the Scriptures.

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