



“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (John 3:7).

New Birth

Central Truth: Salvation brings spiritual life to the believer

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Have you noticed that some of Jesus' greatest sermons were delivered to one person or a small group of people? The message on the water of life was given to a down-and-out Samaritan woman. The message on the new birth was given to an up-and-out Jerusalem rabbi. That discussion of the new birth is the subject of this study.

William T. Sleeper summarized the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in these words: “A ruler once came to Jesus by night/To ask Him the way of salvation and light;/The Master made answer in words true and plain,/'Ye must be born again.’” That answer is as applicable to you and me today as it was to Nicodemus back then. So Mr. Sleeper wrote, “Oh, ye who would enter that glorious rest,/And sing with the ransomed the song of the blest,/The life everlasting if ye would obtain,/'Ye must be born again.’” Therefore, this study is not theoretical but practical. You must be born again!

I. DECLARATION OF THE NEW BIRTH (John 3:1, 2)

A. The new birth was announced by a teacher of the things of God. Jesus' message was that “*the kingdom of God is at hand*” (Matthew 4:17). That excited great interest among the Jews. They awaited the fulfillment of God's promises by His prophets that a Son of David would arise to reign over them and the whole world. As a teacher from God, Jesus spoke with authority. It is no surprise that Nicodemus would raise the question which many must have been asking, “Rabbi, how can I prepare to welcome the coming kingdom of God?” The answer of Jesus must have

startled them. He said unless a person (which means each person) is born again he can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God.

B. The new birth was required by a teacher who came from God.

He is the one who came down from heaven (John 3:13) not to do His own will but the will of God who sent Him (John 6:38). The words of Jesus are the words of God. So when Jesus called for a new birth, God was calling for a new birth. God himself set the requirements by which He would receive sinners, and He requires that each one be born again; God sent Jesus, His only begotten Son, to announce the requirement and provide the way by which one can be born again.

C. The new birth was effected by a teacher empowered of God.

Nicodemus saw the power of God manifested in Jesus' miracles and concluded He must have come from God. He did works of power that no other person ever did. Many believed that He was the long-awaited Christ because of those works of power. Jesus called on them to believe Him because He did "*the works of (His) Father*" (John 10:37). "*The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them*" (Matthew 11:5). When such a teacher says you must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven, you can accept it as being certain.

II. DEMAND FOR THE NEW BIRTH (John 3:3)

Jesus put His own veracity at stake in announcing the new birth. "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee,*" He announced. Think about what is involved in that preface to the announcement of the new birth.

"*Verily*" is a translation of the Greek word *amen*. It is the transliteration of a Hebrew word which means "truth." Its common meaning is "let it be so" or "it shall be so." Jesus used it to introduce a statement of great solemnity and significance. He intended such statements to be received as the very word of God.

"*I say unto thee*" places His own integrity on the truthfulness of the statement to follow. Jesus' words relating to the new birth are true and binding, or He is untrue and deceptive. The demand is valid because He is true.

"*Born again*" means to be "born anew" or "born from above." More than physical birth is involved. It is a birth that is related to heaven as the physical birth is related to earth. It is a taking away of the hard heart and the giving of a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). It is not related to birth resulting from human impulse, will, or design. It is a birth which is the

work of God (John 1:11-13). That new birth comes by hearing and believing the message of the Word of God so as to turn in faith to the Son of God as Savior (I Peter 1:23; I John 5:1).

The new birth is required for citizenship in the kingdom of God. Without the new birth, a person can neither see (understand) nor enter (experience) the kingdom of God. That kingdom is spiritual (Luke 17:21) and so not of this world system (John 18:36). The blessings of the citizen of that kingdom are *“righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”* (Romans 14:17).

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW BIRTH (John 3:4-12)

A. The new birth is illustrated by, but not identical with, the physical birth (verses 4-7). It was common for a Jew in that day to believe that God accepted him solely because he was a descendant of Abraham, whom God had chosen. John the Baptist warned his hearers against such a false concept of what peace with God truly involved (Matthew 3:9). Nicodemus probably had that same misunderstanding because Jesus went to great lengths to make clear the distinction between the physical birth and the spiritual birth. *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (John 3:6). Do not confuse the two.

B. The new birth is a special work of the Holy Spirit of God (verses 5-8). Three times Jesus spoke of being *“born of the Spirit”* (John 3:5, 6, 8). He meant for us to understand that the new birth is a work of the Spirit of God. Those who are born again are born *“not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:13). *“It is the spirit that quickeneth”* (John 6:63). One is born again when he experiences *“the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”* (Titus 3:5). To have anything less than that is to miss the kingdom of God. Be warned!

C. The new birth is understood only by spiritual enlightenment (verses 9-12). Nicodemus had relied so long and so fully on his physical descent from Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God, that he could not understand Jesus' teachings. *“How can a man be born (again) when he is old?”* he asked. *“Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?”* (verse 4). It is evident that he is thinking physically. The Holy Spirit has a blessed ministry of enlightenment in which He enables a person to understand and come to Christ. A person does not by nature comprehend spiritual things and must be taught of God to know them in truth (I Corinthians 2:9-16). That is the first work of the Holy Spirit in bringing a person to experience the new birth.

IV. DELINEATION OF THE NEW BIRTH (John 3:15-18)

A. The new birth is based on a redemptive deed. Numbers 21:4-9 reports the sin of Israel as she marched past the land of Edam. Travel was difficult and the people became discouraged. They spoke against God and against Moses. The Lord sent “*fiery serpents*” among the people. The bite of the serpents was so poisonous that it meant certain death. Many died before the people cried to the Lord in confession of their sin. The Lord instructed Moses to make a form of brass designed like one of the fiery serpents. He set it on a pole outside the camp. When one was bitten, he could look at the serpent of brass and not die of the bite.

Jesus used that incident to explain His part in the new birth. He was made in the likeness of man through whom the guilt of sin came, and He suffered under the spiritual death it produced. He was raised up outside the camp (on a cross outside Jerusalem). Those who look to Him by faith are born again and escape the certain death of judgment on sin.

There was no hope for the ancient Israelite who was bitten, unless he looked to the serpent of brass. There is no hope for any person today who has sinned, unless he trusts Jesus Christ. The death and resurrection of Jesus paid the redemptive price for sinners. Salvation is in Him alone. “*Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit*” (I Peter 3:18). “*Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, . . . but with the precious blood of Christ*” (I Peter 1:18, 19).

B. The new birth is experienced by personal faith. It was not the brazen serpent on the pole which brought healing and life to the bitten Israelite. The healing depended on the look of faith. Just so, it is not Jesus crucified and risen which delivers the sinner. It is personal faith in the once crucified but now risen Jesus which brings the ministry of the Holy Spirit in salvation.

Read John 3:36 and 5:24 from your Bible. Go ahead and read those passages now, then return to your reading here. What is the key to being no longer condemned? Believe! What is the way to pass beyond condemnation and have eternal life? Believe! God says what He means and means what He says in stating that requirement. Do you believe Him?

Read John 3:14-18. How many times do you find “believeth”? Remember those are the words of Jesus. On the basis of that testimony, what would you say a person must do to be saved from the condemnation of sin and have eternal life?

C. The new birth delivers from the destruction of sin (verse 18). No wonder Paul wrote, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8: 1). No person or power can condemn the believer for any reason because Christ who died and rose again is the one who justifies him and makes intercession for him (Romans 8:34). Think about that! When God says, “Innocent!,” no one has the authority to say, “No, guilty!” No one has the authority to condemn one who has been justified by faith in Jesus (Romans 5:1).

That is why we use the term *saved* to describe the condition of the believer in Jesus. To be saved means to be made safe! (A person made safe from drowning when a boat capsizes is said to have been “saved” by his rescuers.) So the believer in Jesus is made safe from the dangers of death and hell when he has been born again.

In recent years the public has caught up the term “born again.” Many misuse it. Many misunderstand it. But it is a biblical concept, and one must experience it in order to be saved.

“Ye children of men, attend to the word/So solemnly uttered by Jesus the Lord,/And let not this message to you be in vain,/‘Ye must be born again’” (William T. Sleeper).

Just one more word must be said, *“To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts”* (Hebrews 4:7). “

Questions

1. How is Christian conversion like a birth?
2. Why did Jesus say a person must be born again?
3. How did Nicodemus misinterpret what Jesus meant?
4. What does it mean to be born “*of water*” and “*of the Spirit*”?
5. What is the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth?
6. How did Jesus use Numbers 21:4-9 to explain the new birth?
7. How is personal faith in Jesus related to the new birth?
8. Why does being born again deliver one from condemnation?
9. What life does one live when he has been born again?
10. How can one be sure that he has been born again?