
THE NEW BIRTH

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QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus at night time?
- 2) What was the purpose of miracles according to Jn 3?
- 3) If a father says to a young man, "*You may no longer see my daughter,*" does this mean the boy is no longer able to see the girl with his eyes?
- 4) Jn 3:3 teaches the necessity of the new birth. What does v5 teach?
- 5) What two elements are necessary for physical birth to occur?
- 6) What part does the Holy Spirit play in man's salvation?
- 7) Does a marriage ceremony change the way a couple feels about each other, or does it change their relationship toward each other?
- 8) How many times does the Greek word πνεύμα occur and how is it usually translated?

INTRODUCTION

John 3:1-8

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

² 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."

³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

⁴ 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?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷ "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

⁸ "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

TEXT (1)

Jn introduces Nicodemus to us and only Jn tells us anything about him. None of the other gospels say anything about him. He's mentioned in:

- Jn 3 – conversing with Jesus about the new birth
- Jn 7:51 – asking the Jewish council to give Jesus a fair hearing
- Jn 19:38 – helped bury Jesus

The introduction is plain and simple:

John 3:1

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

From this we learn at least three things:

- **He was a Pharisee** – part of a group that generally considered themselves holier than others.
- **He was a ruler** – rulers also tend to elevate themselves higher than others.
- **He was a Jew** – who typically thought that being in the blood line of Abraham and keeping the Law was enough to enter the kingdom of heaven when it arrived.

TEXT (2)

The meeting between Jesus and this prominent leader was initiated on the part of Nicodemus; Jesus did not seek him out, but he sought after Jesus:

John 3:2

² 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."

"By night" – there's no reason to mention the time of day unless Jn wanted to stress a point. Nicodemus was coming under the cover of darkness. It would have been "politically incorrect" for a prominent, Jewish leader to seek after Jesus. After all:

- Jesus was younger than most of those council members.
- He had not been formally trained and educated as they had been.
- He had just humiliated the rulers for turning the temple into a "house of merchandise."

"We know thou art a teacher come from God" – How did they know this? By the miraculous signs Jesus performed. This was the purpose of miracles. Miracles were not worked to simply make life easier or better for someone. They were worked as a sign to point out and emphasize the divine origin of prophets.

When Nicodemus said, "we know," he spoke on behalf of several other Jewish leaders who were not there that night.

TEXT (3)

John 3:3

³ Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Focus on the first two words:

"Jesus answered" – interesting, because no question has been asked yet. He knew Nicodemus' heart. He knew why Nicodemus had come and He answers a question about heavenly citizenship before it's even asked.

"Most assuredly" – This is used 25 times by Jn This is what Jesus would say before stating something of extreme importance.

"Unless one is born again" – "born anew" or "born from above" (ASV).

John the Baptist had already been warning people not to trust in their physical birth:

Matthew 3:9

⁹ "and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

This hadn't sunk in yet. It was unbelievable to the Pharisees that the descendants of Abraham stood on an equal footing with the Gentiles as far as salvation was concerned!

"he cannot see the kingdom of God" – i.e. cannot enjoy, or participate in the privileges and blessings of the kingdom.

ILL: A father might say to a young man, "You may no longer see my daughter." – He may no longer enjoy her company.

"the kingdom of God" – not heaven, but the church. The church of God is referred to as a "kingdom" in several passages (e.g. Mt 16:18-19; Heb 12:23-28).

The church is called a "kingdom" because it is operated on the same principles that govern a "kingdom." It utilizes a kingdom form of government.

NOTE: Jn 3:3 is teaching the necessity of being born again. That is all we learn in this verse. We do not learn from this verse how to be born again.

(This will be important to remember later.)

TEXT (4)

John 3:4

⁴ 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?"

After hearing of the necessity of a new birth, Nicodemus then asks these two questions:

- 1) How can a man be born when he is old?
(this will be answered in v5)
- 2) Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb?
(this will be answered in v6)

TEXT (5)

John 3:5

⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

In **v3 the necessity** of the new birth is taught. Now we are told **how** the new birth is accomplished.

Here we learn there are two elements of the new birth:

- **Water**
- **Spirit**

This should not surprise any of us. To have a natural birth there are two elements necessary:

- **A father** – **who begets the child**; this is the beginning of life. Life begins at conception, not at birth.
- **A mother** – **who bears the child**; this is when the child moves from one state to another.

Jesus used these facts of birth to demonstrate how man is saved from sin.

1) There must first be a begetting.

This is the part the Holy Spirit plays in our salvation. The Holy Spirit begets spiritual life in sinners thru the inspired word!

- The Holy Spirit was sent forth to reveal the word (Jn 16:13).
- Next, He confirmed it with miraculous power (Mk 16:20).
- When men read the inspired word and believe it, it changes their attitude; it changes their lives.

The Holy Spirit does not operate upon directly, nor miraculously upon us, for then we would be reduced to helpless robots – powerless to resist the mighty force of God.

Instead of operating directly upon man, the Holy Spirit operates indirectly by means of His inspired word.

When men hear the holy word and believe it, their attitudes begin to change; their lives change and it's a noticeable change.

1 Peter 1:23

²³ having been **born again**, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, **through the word of God** which lives and abides forever,

1 Corinthians 4:15

¹⁵ For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I **have begotten you through the gospel**.

James 1:18

¹⁸ Of His own will He **begat us with the word of truth**, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

¹³ For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, **the word of God, which also effectively works in you** who believe.

Romans 1:16

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for **it is the power of God to salvation** for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Romans 10:14

¹⁴ How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

1 Corinthians 1:21

²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God **through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.**

This is how men are "begotten" by God.

- They hear the inspired word.
- They believe it.
- It changes their attitudes.
- Once their attitude is truly changed, it changes their conduct. (They begin living differently.)

However: A man is not "born again" when he is "begotten of God" any more than a child is born into this world simply because he has been conceived in his mother's womb.

2) There must next be a birth.

Here is where so many make a mistake. They assume that because they are "begotten" they have been "born." This is not true.

- **Begettal** is only the first step.
- **Birth** is the final step.

John 1:11-12

¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave **the right to become** children of God, to those who believe in His name:

NOTE: Believing in Jesus did not make these people children of God, but it gave them the "power," or "right" to become His children.

One must move from the state of being lost to the state of being saved; from being an alien to being a citizen of the kingdom.

This "birth" involves water ⇨ which is baptism in water.

Romans 6:3-4

³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were **baptized into His death**?

⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in **newness of life**. [new birth!]

Mark 16:16

¹⁶ "He who believes **and is baptized** will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

Acts 2:38

³⁸ Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 22:16

¹⁶ 'And now why are you waiting? Arise and **be baptized**, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

Galatians 3:27

²⁷ For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ.

1 Peter 3:21

²¹ There is also an antitype which **now saves us: baptism** (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Notice this last passage. This is what Jesus told Nicodemus. The birth of water (baptism) was not for the benefit of man's flesh, but his spirit!

The "water" of the "new birth" is baptism – plain and simple! There's not getting around this!

MARRIAGE ILLUSTRATION

Let me try to clarify this by using a familiar illustration.

In the NT, conversion is sometimes compared to marriage.

Peggy / George	Sinners / The Lord
1) When Peggy first met me she didn't know what to think about me.	When sinners first learn of the Lord, they don't know what to think of Him.
2) When she learned more about me and listened to my "sweet talk" she changed her attitude about me. By my words I changed her attitude.	When sinners learn more about the Lord and listen to His word their attitude changes.
3) This changed attitude resulted in a change of life . I became more important to her than even her parents. She started doing things to please me.	The change of a sinner's attitude leads to a change in life. The Lord becomes more important than anything. They start doing things to please Him.
4) Peggy loved me as much as she could ever love me and treated me as well as she could ever treat me before we were married – but she was not yet my wife!	Sinners may love the Lord and treat Him as well as ever they could before being saved – but they are not yet "married" to him!
5) The moment our wedding ceremony was over we were legally married . She became legal heir to all my estate. The marriage ceremony changed her state, <u>not her heart</u> .	The moment sinners are baptized, they become legally "married" to the Lord. They are legal heirs to all His estate. The baptism changed their state.
6) Just because Peggy loved me and changed her life towards me did not in itself make her my wife. <u>We had to go thru a wedding ceremony, take vows and become formally married</u> .	Likewise, no one doubts the love that some have for Christ. No one doubts that a great change has overcome some. However, it's a mistake to interpret this new attitude as proof of legal marriage or birth.

DENOMINATIONAL ARGUMENTS

Scholars and preachers from various denominations argue that "water" in Jn 3:5 does not refer to baptism.

The most common argument is this: "**Water**" refers to natural birth from a mother's womb.

If this is what Jesus meant, then He wasn't listening very well to what Nicodemus was asking!

Nicodemus did not ask how a **child** could be born from his mother's womb; he was asking how could "**a grown man** be born when he is old!"

Men are desperate when they use arguments like this to get around baptism!

Suppose we had lived back then:

Matthew 3:5-6

⁵ Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him
⁶ and were **baptized by him in the Jordan**, confessing their sins.

John 4:1

¹ Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that **Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John**

Now ... after all this baptizing in water, here is Jesus telling Nicodemus, "Except a man is born of water and spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," what would be the most natural conclusion for a man to draw?

Furthermore, as time goes on we see both the Lord and his inspired apostles requiring men to be baptized in water:

- to become disciples (Mt 28:19)
- to be saved (Mk 16:16)
- for remission of sins (Acts 2:38)
- to wash away sins (Acts 22:16)
- to get into Christ (Rom 6:3-4)
- because it saves us now (1 Pet 3:21)

Is it really unreasonable to think that Jesus was referring to baptism in water in Jn 3:5???

T. W. Brents:

"Is there any man out of a lunatic asylum who could believe that any one of these quibbles would ever have been thought of had it not been necessary to devise some means to save some theory from being destroyed by the obvious meaning of the Savior's language?" (Gospel Plan of Salvation 163)

THE ORDER OF WORDS

The "new birth" is composed of two elements: **water – Spirit**.

- a) The sinner is begotten by the Holy Spirit when he reads the holy word and believes it.
- b) He is born of water when baptized.

Q: Why did Jesus say, "**water and the Spirit**" – in that order? It would seem more natural to put the Spirit first and then mention the water.

Alexander Campbell:

"In one sense a person is born of his father; but not until he is first born of his mother. So in every place where **water and the Spirit**, or **water and the word**, are spoken of, the water stands first. Every child is born of its father when it is born of its mother. Hence, the Savior put the mother first, and the apostles follow him. No other reason can be assigned for placing the water first." (Christian System 173-174)

Compare:

John 3:5

⁵ Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of **water and the Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:26

²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the **washing of water by the word**,

Notice that where Jesus put "*the Spirit*" Paul put "*the word.*" This is no contradiction, because the Spirit uses His word as the means in accomplishing His work.

Titus 3:5

⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through **the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,**

In all these passages water is mentioned first although the preaching of the word precedes baptism.

Water is mentioned first because it is improper to speak of a child being born to a father before it is born to the mother!

NOTE: Some argue it is improper to say that a child is "born" to a father and mother. They insist that the single word "born" cannot be logically used in the same sentence to describe both the begetting of the father and the birth of the mother (cf. Brents, 160b-161). In reply, see the following passages where "bare" and "born" come from the same Hebrew word, are used in the same sentence and applied equally to both father and mother: Gen 17:17; 21:3; 36:5; 41:50; 46:20; Dt 21:15; Jer 20:14-15. See also Jer 16:3.

TEXT (6)

John 3:6

⁶ "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

In v4 Nicodemus had asked two questions. His first question was answered in v5. Now Jesus turns to his second and answers it:

"Can a man enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" – Jesus is now answering that question.

Jesus is saying: "It's not necessary to enter a second time into your mother's womb because, even if that were possible, only the flesh would be affected, not the spirit."

The flesh is not the part that needs a rebirth – it's the spirit.

TEXT (7)

John 3:7-8

⁷ "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

⁸ "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Some preachers preach for 30 minutes explaining the "new birth" and after reading these verses declare that it is all unexplainable!

The problem in understanding v8 is because of poor translation. Let me point out a few facts about this verse:

πνεύμα is translated both "*Spirit*" and "*wind*" in this very same verse.

πνεύμα occurs 385 times in the NT, but is never translated "wind" in any other passage.

When the Lord wanted to talk about real wind, He used the word ἄνεμος.

By translating πνεύμα as "*wind*" we are left with a very difficult and confusing problem, but if we translated πνεύμα as "*Spirit*," the passage begins to make sense. We would then have this:

"The Spirit blows (breathes) where He wishes and you hear the voice (sound) of Him, but you do not know whence He is coming, and where He is going."

The next critical word is "so" – an adverb of manner. It describes how something is done.

"So (by hearing the voice of the Spirit) is everyone born of the Spirit."

You may not know where the Spirit comes from, or where He's going next, but when He does come you know it because He speaks and you can hear and recognize His voice.

Q: How can you recognize the voice of the Spirit?

1 John 4:6

⁶ We are of God. He who knows God **hears us**; he who is not of God does not hear us. **By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.**

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, remember these main points:

V3 shows the necessity of the new birth – you cannot enter into the kingdom without it.

V5 show how to be born again – of water and the Spirit.

- We are **begotten by the Spirit** when we read and believe His revealed word. This changes our attitudes and our lives.
- We are **born of water** when we are baptized. This changes our state.

V8 confirms we have interpreted this passage correctly – by hearing and believing the voice of the Spirit when He speaks thru inspired men we are "born of the Spirit."