

The New Birth

John 3:1-12

Introduction

1. Nicodemus Comes To Jesus

JOH 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;

JOH 3:2 this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

2. Nicodemus (Jn. 3:1; 7:50; 19:39).

- a. He is called "a Pharisee" (Jn. 3:1).
- b. "A ruler of the Jews" (Jn. 3:2; 7:50). He was likely a member of the Sanhedrin.
- c. He seems to be an old or older man. (Jn. 3:4).
- d. He is called "the teacher." (Jn. 3:10). ASV, NASB. NIV has "you are Israel's teacher."
- e. He came to Jesus "by night" which was likely because he was afraid to come to Jesus by day because of the Jewish leaders, or it may reflect the common practice of meeting at night in order to study and converse about the law.

3. Nicodemus called Jesus "Rabbi" (teacher) and acknowledged Jesus "as a teacher" "from God" because of the "signs" He had done.

- a. "Rabbi" was respected title for recognized teachers.
- b. It is not known if this was the extent of Nicodemus' conception of Jesus or if he held Him to be the Messiah and the Son of God.
- c. The text does not say.
- d. We know later he had the love and courage to bring "a mixture of myrrh and aloes" for the burial of Jesus. (Jn. 19:39).
- e. We do not know what became of Nicodemus. He is never mentioned in the early church, but many others are not mentioned, such as, Lazarus, Mary, Martha.

4. Nicodemus used the pronoun "we".

- a. Though he comes alone Nicodemus speaks in the plural.
- b. This indicated there were others besides Nicodemus who considered Jesus "as a teacher come from God."
- c. His "signs" (miracles) were convincing men He was from God. See Jn. 20:30, 31.

Jesus' Response

1. Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see [enjoy, enter] God." (Jn. 3:3).
2. The words "truly, truly" are a way of giving positive, absolute affirmation to the truths He is about to utter. See John 1:51

JOH 1:51 And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

3. Jesus knew what was in man and knew the heart of Nicodemus. (Jn. 2:25).
4. The word "again" comes from the Greek word "anothen" [**ah** noh then] which means "again, from above."
 - a. The word means "from above" in some other passages. (Jn. 3:31; 8:23; 19:11; Jas. 1:17; 3:15,17).

JOH 3:31 "He who comes **from above** is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.

JOH 8:23 And He was saying to them, "You are **from below**, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.

JOH 19:11 Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you **from above**; for this reason he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin."

JAM 1:17 Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is **from above**, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.

JAM 3:15 This wisdom is not that which comes down **from above**, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

JAM 3:17 But the wisdom **from above** is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

- b. "Again, anew" (Gal.4:9).

GAL 4:9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back **again** to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

5. The word "anothen" [**ah** noh then] could be used with both meanings here.
 - a. One must experience a new or second birth.
 - b. One is born physically through being begotten by an earthly father, but one is born "from above" by being begotten from the heavenly Father.
 - c. Barclay translates [interprets] "unless a man is reborn from above."

Nicodemus' Question - "How Can A Man Be Born When He Is Old?"

Nicodemus *said to Him, "**How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?**" (Jn. 3:4)

1. It seems Nicodemus understood Jesus to be talking about a second physical birth.

2. It was absurd to think a man could literally be born a second time.
3. He anticipated a negative answer by his use of the Greek negative particle "me" [may] at the beginning of the sentence in the Greek.
4. His question suggests he was an old man which would usually be the case with those in the Sanhedrin.

Jesus' Response - One must "Born Of Water And Spirit"

JOH 3:5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

JOH 3:6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

JOH 3:7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, '**You must be born again.**'

JOH 3:8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

1. Jesus argued one must be "born of water and the Spirit."
 - a. Read John 3:3,5 - Jesus used the words "unless one" or "except" to stress the importance of the new birth.
 - b. "must" - John 3:7,14; 12:34, 20:9; 4:4,9,10; 10:16; 3:30; 4:20,24.
 - c. "Must" means this birth is not optional, but absolutely essential.
2. The Greek has literally "born of water and Spirit."
 - a. There is not a definite article before the noun "water" or the noun "Spirit."
 - b. Both nouns are governed by the same preposition "ex [ehks]."
 - c. The phrase replaces and explains "anew" in verse 3.

Number of interpretations of this difficult phrase.

Interpretation One

1. Some teach Jesus was affirming one must experience two births to enter the kingdom - a physical birth and a spiritual birth.
2. This is done to get rid of any connection of baptism with the new birth. Nearly all that hold this view do reject baptism as essential to salvation.
3. It is argued that "water" refers to the fluid that surrounds the fetus in the womb.
4. Some affirm that "water" refers to the male semen. There are some Rabbinic sources which show that terms like "water," "rain," "dew," and "drop" were used of male semen.

Interpretation Two

1. It is argued that "water" is a reference to John's baptism that was in water. (Matt. 3:6; Jn. 3:23).

MAT 3:6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

JOH 3:23 And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and they were coming and were being baptized.

2. It is further argued that "Spirit" means the new birth would be spiritual and would be the activity of the Holy Spirit.

Interpretation Three

1. Jesus is here referring to Christian baptism.
2. Jesus is describing not two births, but a single birth - "born of water and Spirit."
 - a. This new birth is brought about by the Spirit of God.
 - b. The Spirit of God, through the word, creates faith and repentance in the heart of the sinner.
3. The new birth is complete when the believing, penitent person is immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins and emerges from the water to live a new life. (Rom. 6:1-5; Col. 2:12).
4. There must be these things in either a physical birth or new birth
 - a. There must be a conception
 - 1) This is true of a physical birth. There can be no birth without a conception.
 - 2) It is true of the spiritual birth. (Jas. 1:18,21; 1 Pet. 1:22,23; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 4:15; Mk. 16:15,16).
 - 3) The conception of the new birth comes through the word of God.
 - b. There must be a delivery.
 - 1) This is true of a physical birth. There must be a coming forth from the womb. Without this there is no birth.
 - 2) It is true of the spiritual birth. There must be a coming forth from the water.
- Without this there is no spiritual birth.
- Those emerging from the waters of baptism are new creatures. (Rom. 6:1-5; Col. 2:12).
- There sins are forgiven. (Acts 2:38; 22:16)
5. Titus 3:5 has the same idea behind it.

TIT 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

- a. "washing of regeneration [rebirth]"
- b. "renewing [moulding anew] of the Holy Spirit"
- c. The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the new birth before and after baptism.
 - 1) It is through the word, the message of the Spirit, the gospel that one is brought to faith, repentance and

baptism.

2) It is through the Spirit that one produces "the fruit of the Spirit." (Gal. 5:16, 22, 23).

Baptism Essential

1. The scriptures clearly set forth the necessity of baptism. (Mk. 16:16; Matt.28:19,20; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 10:48; Gal. 3:26,27; Rom.6:1-4; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21).
2. For Nicodemus being a Jew and a child of God was a matter of physical birth into the covenant people of God, Israel.
3. But Jesus says that only those who are born anew "of water and the Spirit," thus receiving spiritual regeneration, could "enter" into the kingdom of God.
4. It is "the spirit" of man that would be changed by the Holy Spirit.
 - a. "That which is born of Spirit is [the human] spirit." (Jn. 3:6).
 - b. The "spirit" is the thinking part of man. (1 Cor. 2:11).

1CO 2:11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

- c. The "spirit" or "soul" is immortal. (Matt. 10:28; Lk. 12:4,5; Dan. 7:15; 1 Cor. 5:5; Jas. 1:21; Heb. 12:9; Eccles. 12:7).
 - d. The Greek word "pneuma" [**pnoo** mah] is used 386 times in the New Testament. It is translated "spirit" 384 times.
5. It can refer to the human spirit. (Acts 7:59; 1 Cor. 5:5).

ACT 7:59 And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

1CO 5:5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

- a. It can be translated "wind." NASB, KJV, ASV, NIV, NRSV
- JOH 3:8 "The **wind** blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."
- b. It makes good sense to render it "wind" in this context.
 - 1) Just as the wind is invisible (one cannot see it coming or going), so is the change of the new birth.
 - 2) You cannot see physical changes. The changes are invisible. They are in the heart. They are in the human spirit.
 - 3) There has been a circumcision of the heart, that is, a cutting away of sin from the heart. (Rom. 2:28, 29).

ROM 2:28 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.

ROM 2:29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by

the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

c. It makes sense to render it "Spirit" in this passage.

Joh 3:8 the Spirit where he willeth doth blow, and his voice thou dost hear, but thou hast not known whence he cometh, and whither he goeth; thus is every one who hath been born of the Spirit.' YLT

1) The passage would mean that man cannot predict the movements of the Spirit.

2) The Spirit breathes where He wills. As man cannot comprehend the Spirit neither can he comprehend him that is born of the Spirit.

d. A weakness of this interpretation is the man who cannot comprehend the Spirit or him that is born of the Spirit can hardly be said to hear "the voice" of the Spirit.

e. The verb "pneo" [pneh oh] always refers to the blowing wind in its other 6 occurrences. (Matt. 7:25,27).

MAT 7:25 "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock.

MAT 7:27 "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall."

Nicodemus' Second Question - Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" (Jn. 3:9)

Jesus' Third Response

Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you (singular), we [probably God witnessing through His Son] speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and you (plural) do not receive our witness. If I told you (plural) earthly things and you (plural) do not believe, how shall you (plural) believe if I tell you (plural) heavenly things? (Jn. 3:10-12).

Earthly Versus Heavenly Things

1. Jesus called Nicodemus "the teacher of Israel."
2. One of the important aspects of the last days in the Old Testament is the pouring out of God's Spirit (Isa. 32:15; Joel 2:28,29), and the promise, "a new spirit I will put within you." (Ezek. 36:26).
3. "Earthly things" must refer to what Jesus has been talking about concerning the new birth as a necessary condition for entering the kingdom of God. The teaching of the new birth is possibly called "earthly things" because it takes place on earth and is presented through events of the physical world, such as birth and the blowing wind.
4. The "heavenly things" refer to what Jesus is going to say in the succeeding verses concerning God's plan to save man through the sending of God's Son. It may be called "heavenly things" because God is in heaven and He had sent His Son from heaven to save man.

Conclusion

1. Those who enter heaven must not only experience a physical birth, but they must experience a spiritual birth - the new birth.
2. This new birth is not optional, but is absolutely essential to salvation and entrance into the kingdom of God.

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