

Gospel Truth

Biblical Instruction and Encouragement for the Mission Field Worldwide.

YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

Under the veil of night, a man named Nicodemus sought out Jesus. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jewish nation. As a Pharisee, he believed in strict adherence to the Mosaic Law. His visit was likely clandestine, given his status as a Jewish ruler.

Nicodemus addressed Jesus as “Rabbi,” a title of respect for Jewish teachers. He acknowledged that Jesus was sent from God because of the miracles He performed. Jesus answered Nicodemus with words that have echoed through the centuries, challenging hearts and minds to seek something more than what this world has to offer. “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

True righteousness, peace, and joy in this world and eternal life in the hereafter—gifts of God’s kingdom— are unattainable without spiritual rebirth. Being “born again” signifies a spiritual transformation. It is not a physical transformation but a divine work of God by which He awakens the soul.

Birth signifies a beginning. As natural birth introduces us to earthly life, spiritual birth marks the beginning of a spiritual walk with the Lord. This spiritual birth is not the result of joining a religious group, moral reform, adopting good standards, or adhering to some tradition of worship. To be born again is the work of Jesus Christ. When people place their faith in the

sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, He extends forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. Regeneration, or being born again, is accomplished through the divine power of God. He regenerates our hearts and makes us new creatures. The power of sin is broken, and born-again individuals can live in the freedom and holiness of Jesus Christ, not because of their own strength, but because of a divine transformation of self through the power of God.

Salvation hinges on spiritual rebirth, without which people remain spiritually dead and disconnected from God. Worship alone in a mosque, temple, tabernacle, or chapel does not induce the new birth. Many religious adherents have not experienced the spiritual birth of which Jesus spoke. He told Nicodemus, “Except a man be born again....” Regardless of one’s socio-economic status, spiritual heritage, nationality, age, gender, or religious affiliation, ALL must have this spiritual birth to attain eternal life. Mere recognition of Christ as the Messiah is insufficient. A radical transformation of a new birth is essential. To be born “again” means “the second time,” and it also means “born from above.” Hence, spiritual birth is not just professing Christ or confessing sin, it is when the soul is transformed from sin and uncleanness to righteousness and holiness. This spiritual birth



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WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT...

Word of God

2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt. 24:35

Relationship of Love

Matt. 22:37-40; John 14:21-23; 1 John 4:7-11

Repentance

Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:10

New Birth

John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1-4;
Eph. 2:1, 5-6

Freedom From Sin

1 John 5:18; Matt. 1:21; John 8:11

Infilling of the Holy Spirit

Acts 19:2; Acts 15:8-9; Acts 1:8

Holiness

Luke 1:73-75; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16;
Titus 2:11-12; Rom. 6:22

Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-21; Romans 14:17; John 18:36

The Church

Acts 2:47; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col 1:18

Unity

John 17:20-23; Gal 3:28; Rev. 18:2-4

Ordinances

Matt. 28:19-20; Matt. 26:26-30;
1 Cor. 11:23-27; John 13:14-17

Divine Healing

Luke 4:18; Isaiah 53:4-5; James 5:13-16

Sanctity of Marriage

Matt. 19:5-6; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3;
1 Cor. 7:10-11

Outward Appearance

1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 11:14-15; Deut. 22:5

End of Time

2 Peter 3:7-12; John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10;
Matt 25:31-46

Pacifism

Luke 6:27-29; Luke 18:20

Worship

John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19; 2 Cor. 3:17

Great Commission

Mark 16:15

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is not a result of human effort. It is a divine, instantaneous birth of the spirit that occurs through a divine act of God.

Upon birth, children inherit their parents' identities and traits. Similarly, when people experience the new birth, their identity changes, and they become children of God. They are no longer bound by the carnal nature of sin but are partakers of the divine nature, having power with God to overcome sin.

Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The natural birth is after the flesh and our works and deeds are fleshly, but there is another birth. That which is born of the Spirit of God is spiritual. It is sad that so many

**"Being born again....
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people seek to satisfy the needs of the soul through the fleshly pursuits of sin, human organizations, religions, and the philosophies of humankind. Just as we were born in the flesh, we MUST have a spiritual birth.

Being born again is much more than a theological concept; it is an invitation and experience of a radically

transformed life that far supersedes what sin and religion offer. It is a spiritual awakening, a second chance, and a promise of eternal hope.

Have you been born again? The ONLY way to inherit eternal life is through a spiritual birth. Open your heart and place your faith in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God. Trust in the redemptive work of Jesus who died on the cross for your sins. Acknowledge your spiritual emptiness, confess and turn away from your sins, and surrender your life to God. Invite Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of your life. When you do that, He will work the miracle of a spiritual birth, and your soul will be transformed from death to life. ■



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Editorial



Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.
—Titus 3:5

It is by the mercy and love of God that we can be saved. None of us deserve salvation, but it is a divine gift of God. We need never fight for a gift, for by its very nature, a gift is freely given. Jesus came to this earth and gave Himself as a sacrifice that we might be cleansed from sin and inherit eternal life. This gift of salvation is of far more value than the pleasures and treasures of this world.

This quarter's theme, "A Spiritual Birth," reveals the profound theological truth and practicality of being born again. As I studied the scripture, I was once again in awe of the simplicity and power of the gospel.

Being born again is a concept misunderstood by many faiths and religions. Many religions teach that enlightenment or acceptance of God is earned through works and adherence to rules. People strive to find happiness and security of eternal life. For man to be free from the bondage of sin and to enter the wonderful kingdom of God, there must be a transformation of the soul. The miracle of salvation is not achieved through our own righteousness but through a spiritual rebirth. While there are important precepts of scripture to follow, the physical works of righteousness do not save us.

Participating in church life, being a member of a congregation, living morally, praying, studying scripture, giving, and serving others do not bring salvation. Salvation requires the divine work of God. The new birth is about God doing in our lives what we cannot do for ourselves. A spiritual birth is needed by all. Children who grow up in a Christian family need a spiritual birth just like children of the heathen.

With spiritual birth comes transformation. Something happens that is often inexplicable. By the power of God our sins are forgiven, our hearts purified, and our souls set free from the curse of death. Praise God for the new birth!

There is great consolation in a born-again experience. While we continue to submit to God's will and surrender our lives to Him, there is peace in knowing that we are the children of God. We will still make mistakes as we grow, but we can live free from sin. We can rest in the saving grace of Christ and in the knowledge that we have been born—we are alive, transformed, and forgiven.

While I rejoice to know what it means to have a spiritual birth, my heart cries for those who are striving so hard to earn God's favor through their own efforts. This striving is a futile endeavor that falls short of real holiness. Anything other than a born-again experience is a miserable experience. True righteousness, peace, and joy come from entering the kingdom of God through spiritual rebirth.

My prayer is for the message of spiritual birth to reach the lost and continue to transform lives.

Michael W. Smith

July 2024

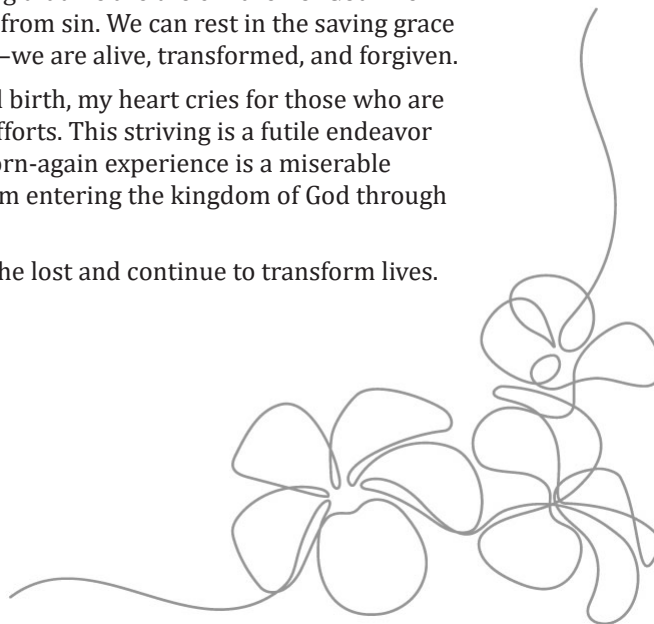


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Bible Study Guide

Subject: A Spiritual Birth

Scripture Reading:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. —John 3:3

Summary:

All humanity is under the sentence of death because of sin. Entry into the kingdom of God necessitates a spiritual awakening of the soul, a transformation wrought by God's power. This spiritual birth purifies the soul from sin and empowers us to be partakers of the divine nature.

I. Spiritual Death

- A. Romans 5:12 Death passed upon all men.
- B. Romans 3:23-24 All have sinned.
- C. Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is death.

II. Conversion

- A. Acts 3:19 Repent be converted.
- B. Matthew 18:3 Except ye be converted.

III. Born Again

- A. John 3:1-8 Except a man be born again.
- B. 1 Peter 1:23 Be born again of incorruptible seed.

IV. A New Creature

- A. 2 Corinthians 5:17 A new creature in Christ.
- B. Isaiah 1:18 Cleansed from sin.

V. Regeneration

- A. Titus 3:5 Washing of regeneration.
- B. Ezekiel 36:24-27 A new heart and new spirit.

VI. Spiritual Birth Is by God's Will

- A. John 1:12-13 Not born by the will of man.
- B. Ephesians 2:8-10 Salvation is the gift of God.

VII. Redemption

- A. 1 Peter 1:18-19 Not redeemed by things.
- B. Galatians 6:15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.

VIII. The Spiritual Man

- A. 2 Corinthians 4:16 Inward man is renewed.
- B. Colossians 3:9-11 Put on the new man.

IX. Divine Nature

- A. 2 Peter 1:3-4 Partakers of divine nature.
- B. Ephesians 4:24 New man is created in holiness.
- C. Galatians 5:19-24 Works of the flesh vs. works of the Spirit.

X. Evidence of the New Birth

- A. 1 John 3:9 Does not commit sin.
- B. 1 John 5:4 Overcomes the world.
- C. 1 John 2:29 Doeth righteousness.

XI. Identity and Growth in Christ

- A. Ephesians 3:14-17 Family is named after the Father.
- B. Ephesians 4:15 Growth in Christ.

Conclusion

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. —Ephesians 2:1



From Death to Life

At the dawn of creation, God fashioned mankind, endowing not only a body of flesh and blood but also an immortal soul. Yet, humanity defiled this soul with sin, bringing upon all the curse of physical and spiritual death. Nevertheless, God made a path to redemption, a means to escape sin's power and decree of death—a spiritual birth.

“Beyond natural birth, there exists a spiritual birth that profoundly alters and transforms the spirit of man....God changes what is corrupt, unrighteous, and contaminated with sin to purity, cleanliness, and godliness.”

Dead in Sin

The sentence of death was passed upon all people because of sin, which forever separates mankind from God. Romans 3:23 teaches, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” In His love, God made an avenue whereby His creation might be liberated from the curse of sin and death. He sent His Son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit to transform the soul of man from death to life. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). From a place of despair, we now have hope and the promise of eternal life through God's redemptive and sanctifying power. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Gospel Message of Hope

A core message of the gospel is the call to “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Conversion signifies a profound change, a complete turnaround. It redirects one's life, habits, philosophies, and paths. An untended soul leads to eternal ruin. Jesus declared, “Except ye be converted...ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

Remedy for Sin

What is the antidote to sin? How can one turn from the carnal passions and desires that dictate the direction of life? It requires divine intervention, a spiritual birth. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3-6, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God....

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Beyond natural birth, there exists a spiritual birth that profoundly alters and transforms the spirit of man. Spiritual birth demonstrates the miracle of life as does natural birth. God changes what is corrupt, unrighteous, and contaminated with sin to purity, cleanliness, and godliness. The apostle Peter refers to this rebirth in 1 Peter 1:23: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.” This spiritual birth stems not from earthly lineage, which ends in death, but from the Word of God, which imparts life.

The Miracle of Salvation

When one accepts Jesus Christ as their savior, God performs a miracle, transforming the life. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The power of sin is broken, and innocence and purity are restored through this spiritual birth. The believer no longer continues in sin but reigns over it through the power of the new birth. The prophet Isaiah describes the cleansing that occurs in this experience: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” God purifies and cleanses the soul in this spiritual birth.

Spiritual Birth

Scripture refers to this spiritual birth as regeneration, an act of renewal, revival, or rebirth. “Not by works of righteousness which

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we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). The full plan of redemption and salvation involves the cleansing of the soul from sin and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. This brings about the regeneration of the soul. Ezekiel prophesied of this wondrous experience: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezekiel 36: 25-27). Praise be to God! The Lord cleanses us with His blood and with the water of the Word. He removes the old, hardened, sinful heart and puts His Spirit within us. This spiritual birth empowers us to follow the Lord’s ways and live a life of holiness.

Only Comes From God

While one must willingly open their heart to God to undergo this spiritual transformation, no human decision or purpose alone can bring about a divine transformation of a sinful life. True spiritual rebirth comes solely from God, not through any spiritual or national heritage. As John 1:12-13 states, those who become the children of God are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Salvation is not earned or achieved through human effort. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Not by Our Works

Many seek spiritual life and redemption through their actions, deeds of goodness, moral virtues, or religion. Yet, true life and holiness are attained only through the divine work of God. “Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). Adherence to rites, rituals, traditions, or even high moral standards cannot earn us God’s acceptance. Redemption is beyond human capability; it requires the Creator’s power to initiate a spiritual birth.

The Spiritual Man

We exist as both physical and spiritual beings. While the outward man will perish with sickness and death, “the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). Paul refers to the spiritual man in Colossians 3:9-10: “Seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” The old, sinful self is replaced with the new self, created in God’s image.

Partakers of the Divine Nature

Salvation’s purpose is to bring people from a state of sinfulness to a state of purity. This spiritual birth brings about a profound change in nature and disposition. “That by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:3-4). While we still have human desires and temptations, there is a transformation of moral character. Ephesians 4:24 instructs us to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

Evidence of a New Birth

Though we still have the strengths and weaknesses of our natural personalities, once our soul has been converted, there is power with God to resist the moral sins that once separated us from Him. Evidence of the new birth is outlined in 1 John: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin” (1 John 3:9); “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4); “Ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him” (1 John 2:29). This signifies a radically altered moral and spiritual life.

Identity and Growth in Christ

As naturally-born children assume the identity and genetic makeup of their parents, so do those who have been born again. Ephesians 3:15 states that the whole family in heaven and earth is named after the Father. As born-again Christians, we identify with God; and our desires align with His will. Just as a newborn child grows and matures, so does a spiritually reborn individual. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him [Christ] in all things” (Ephesians 4:15). While this growth is a lifelong journey, there are no greater blessings than those that come from a born-again experience. ■



“Though we still have the strengths and weaknesses of our natural personalities, once our soul has been converted, there is power with God to resist the moral sins that once separated us from Him.”



What is the meaning of “born of water” in John 3:5?

In John 3, Jesus’ dialogue with Nicodemus about rebirth includes the phrase, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The term ‘water’ here is considered theologically ambiguous by some and is subject to various interpretations.

The statement in question came after Nicodemus’ query about re-entering his mother’s womb to be reborn. There are three interpretations which I will briefly consider.

1. Physical Birth: ‘Born of water’ could refer to a physical birth. The first birth is the natural birth of water (amniotic fluid), and the second birth is the spiritual birth of the spirit. Jesus contrasts the two saying: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” This statement delineates the natural from the spiritual.

2. Symbolic Cleansing: In Scripture, water is often used to represent purification and cleansing. Ephesians 5:26 speaks of Christ cleansing the church by “the washing of water by the word.” Similarly, Ezekiel 36:25-27 says: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean....and a new spirit will I put within you.” The use of ‘water’ and ‘spirit’ as in John 3:5 could both symbolize spiritual realities. Jesus said in John 15:3, “Now ye are clean through the word...” Paul also spoke of Christians having been “washed” (1 Corinthians 6:11). Born again is being born from above, which would indicate that the water and spirit in question would both be agencies of God of a spiritual nature. Hence, the born-again experience would come by the spiritual cleansing of the Word and the Spirit of God.

3. Misinterpretation of Baptism: A third view incorrectly equates ‘born of water’ with Christian baptism, suggesting baptism is necessary for salvation. However, this contradicts the principle that salvation is a divine act, not a human work. Scripturally, baptism is an outward work of man testifying to the inward work of God. The unbaptized thief on the cross who was promised paradise is a practical proof that this does not refer to water baptism.

5 Steps to Salvation

A spiritual birth is a divine work of God in the soul. Although it does not occur by our works, we must fulfill certain conditions for God to grant us this wonderful transformation. “Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:9).

Hear the Gospel

Romans 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Believe in Jesus as God's Son

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Call on God

Romans 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Confess

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Repent of Sin

Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.



DID YOU KNOW?

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, is uniquely mentioned only in the Gospel of John. He is not mentioned in any of the other gospels. His story unfolds in three significant events:

1. His profound conversation with Jesus about spiritual rebirth (John 3:1-21).
2. His defense of Jesus, advocating for a fair hearing according to Jewish law before the Sanhedrin (John 7:50-51).
3. His act of devotion, where he and Joseph of Arimathea anointed the body of Jesus with myrrh and aloes and then entombed Him (John 19:38-42).



A Word
in Season

BLESSING OF GOD'S CHILDREN

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Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel.
—Numbers 6:23

God gave Moses instruction on how Aaron, the high priest, was to convey a profound blessing upon the children of Israel. This eloquent, prayerful blessing reflects the heart of God Himself:

The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace (v. 24-26).

God's desire to bless His children remains unwavering. True blessings only come from God, the Creator. This blessing was an expression of what God still wants to do for His children today.

Salvation does not exempt people from passing through tribulation and difficulty. Sometimes our hearts cry with the burdens that life brings. In those times, let us lift our eyes beyond the visible troubles and turn to the Lord. Remember, His heart is touched by our infirmities. Listen to the still, small voice of the Spirit as He assures us:

I will bless you. I will keep you safe and be a refuge for you in the storm. I will look upon you and guide you with my light. I will be kind and merciful. I will cover you with my presence and give you peace.

More than poetry, this is the blessing God bestows on His children. When our heads are bowed low and burdens weigh heavily on our hearts, we can remember God's desire to bless us. Strengthened within, filled with God's peace, covered in His mercy, and embraced by God's love, we are equipped to go share this blessing with the world.

We can reassure others of His love and comfort, and we can bless them just as Aaron blessed the children of Israel in the name of the Lord. We are not alone; we are not left comfortless. Instead, we can rise, empowered by God's grace, ready to be vessels of His blessing.

Let us go forth, sharing the peace that surpasses understanding, the love that knows no bounds, and the comfort that sustains even in the darkest hour. May we be conduits of God's grace and may the light of His countenance shine upon us as we walk in the power of God. ■

HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD

