

# What Does it Mean to be Born Again?

by Gary T. Panell

Many American presidents have claimed to be "born again." President Jimmy Carter even ran his campaign on the platform that he was a born again Christian, and that he would not lie to the American people. (This was right after President Nixon resigned, as a result of the Watergate robberies.)

But what does it mean when people say, "I am born again?" To answer this question we need to go to where this phrase *born again* was coined. It was actually spoken first by none other than Jesus Christ of the Bible, and He used it when He was here on this earth answering questions from a religious leader by the name of Nicodemus. Let's look at the history of this slogan, "born again" as it was used by Jesus in his answer to Nicodemus, it is found in Saint John chapter 3 and verses one through 21.

"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. So 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? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

Notice that without this "new birth" a person will not see the kingdom of God, or in other words go to heaven. Then that makes this subject of vital importance in our lives! The choice we make about this *new* birth will determine where we spend eternity! First, you will notice that Jesus did not say that if you are baptized you will go to heaven. Next, He did not say that if a person has been good, or done more good works than bad works he will get to heaven. He simply says, "You must be **born again.**" So let us go back and see what He means by this. The context, in which something is said in Scripture, is very important. (Context means the verses before and after the verses or words to be studied.)

Jesus says first, that a person needs to be born of water. Water here could refer to the physical birth, because a person cannot be born again if he or she was not born the first time. When a child is born they say, "Her water has broken." Then Jesus also said a person has to be born of the Spirit. We see this in another passage of Scripture. Look at Romans chapter 8 and verses 9-11 where it says, "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

So if a person, who has been born into this world, wants to be saved, they need to invite Christ to come into their heart and life.

When a person asks God to forgive them for their sins and asks Christ to come in, He does by His Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus was very shocked by what he heard because he had never heard this term *born again* used before. Jesus told him, "do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" Then Jesus went on to explain what the term means. He explained that the Spirit of God is like the wind. You cannot see the wind, but you know what it is doing. So it is with the Holy Spirit when He is working in a person's life, that person knows God is convicting them of sin and showing them their need of salvation.

Jesus prophesied of this work of the Holy Spirit before He died on the cross. One day He was speaking with his disciples and He said to them concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit. "But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." We find these words of Jesus in Saint John 16 and 5-11.

Nicodemus was surprised that Jesus was telling him so many things he did not know about. So he said, "How can these things be?" Then Jesus went on to explain to Nicodemus about how he had to be lifted up (a reference to his coming crucifixion), and how that a person who believes in Him (Jesus) will not perish (go to hell), but have eternal life (go to heaven when they die). Then Jesus went on to say something extremely profound to Nicodemus. He told him that God (the Holy Father) loves him and this is the reason that Jesus (God's one and only Son) came to this earth to give people a chance to turn from their sins and believe in Jesus so they could be saved. That means that God loves you too, because He loves everyone in the world!

Being born again is a simple concept really; it only means that a person says to God, I am a sinner in need of salvation. I want to go to heaven to be with You when I die. I receive Jesus as my personal Savior and LORD. I invite Christ to come into me, and I believe He does by sending God's Holy Spirit to come into me, and I believe He saves me. You may have been baptized, but if you are not **born again** you are not going to heaven. What will your decision be? We believe Nicodemus, the religious leader, said, *yes* to God, because he helped take Jesus body down from the cross before Christ's resurrection. Can you say, "I am **born again** now?"

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