

The New Birth

Or

How and When is One Born Again?

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FOREWORD

This tract has been written with a fervent desire that an honest, sincere study of its contents may lead many souls to see the simplicity of the Lord's teaching on this important Bible subject and to enjoy "all spiritual blessings" in Christ Jesus.

Because of the confusion of so many people concerning the New Birth, this subject should be studied carefully. There is no better way to explain Scripture than by Scripture.

If after you have read this tract you believe that it will do good whenever it is read and that it will enlighten many on this long-misunderstood Bible theme, why not distribute it?

—THE AUTHOR

CHAPTER ONE: THE NEW BIRTH

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:1-8).

Jesus said that a man *must* be *born again* to enter into the kingdom of God. It follows that a more important study has never engaged the attention of man than that of the *new birth*. To many people, however, this subject is considered to be one that can neither be explained nor understood. But it should always be kept in mind that whatever is necessary for one to understand about what is essential to his salvation has been clearly revealed in God’s Word. Therefore, one should take the language of Christ and study it carefully in connection with other Scriptures on the same subject and learn what the *new birth* is.

I. THE MAN NICODEMUS

The person with whom Jesus discussed the *new birth* was Nicodemus, a Pharisee (Acts 23:7). He was a ruler of the Jews, that is, a member of the Jewish supreme court. He seems to have been a

very kind man. Moreover, he was willing to investigate (John 7:50-52; John 19:39). These are commendable traits of character.

It is not known why Nicodemus came to Jesus “by night,” for the Bible does not say. The *truth* Christ taught him is the important thing to consider.

When Nicodemus opened the conversation with the words, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” he expressed a vital truth concerning the miracles of Jesus. No man whom God did not send could do such works (John 5:36, 10:25). But Jesus, knowing the mind of Nicodemus (John 2:24-25), overlooked the compliments and addressed himself directly to the question of *how* to become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. He answered: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, *except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*” In effect Jesus said, “Nicodemus, the miracles testify of me, but if you think that because you are a Jew or because you are a privileged person you are entitled to a place in my kingdom when it is established, you are wrong. The kingdom that I shall soon establish is not an earthly, fleshly kingdom and *you* will have to be *born again* to get into it. Your old birthright will not give you membership in this kingdom.”

II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

By “the kingdom of God” Christ meant the church, the spiritual institution soon to be set up by himself (cf. Matthew 16:18-19; Hebrews 12:22-23, 28).

To “see the kingdom of God” simply meant to experience the blessings of the kingdom by entering into it.

Nicodemus entered the Jewish kingdom by a physical birth (Genesis 17:13); but Christ’s kingdom was to be a spiritual one and it would require a different kind of birth to put him into it. The Jews were expecting the establishment of an earthly kingdom and doubtless this is what Nicodemus had in mind, but the Lord corrected that idea.

A. A NEW KINGDOM AND A NEW COVENANT

A new kingdom would come shortly with a new covenant and a membership of new born creatures, and Nicodemus would have to be born again to partake of the blessings of that kingdom (cf. Mat-

thew 3:7-9; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:8-12; Hebrews 9: 15-17). Under the Old Testament one became a part of God's favored people by *natural birth*, but today one enters into covenant-relationship with the Lord by a *different birth*, a birth "of water and of the Spirit." (John 3:3-5).

Under the Mosaic Law, spiritual qualifications were not among the requirements for membership. The Jewish economy included *all* the Jewish people, whether good or bad. A Jew was a part of that economy by *natural birth*; any person born of Hebrew parents or bought with Jewish money had membership in it. No faith, change of heart, or spiritual birth was required. But it is different under the New Testament. Now a person must be *born of water and of the Spirit*, for without this birth he cannot belong to the kingdom of God. Infants were members of the old economy (they were born into it and *later* taught to know God), but they cannot be members of the new by virtue of a fleshly birth, for under the Christian economy everyone who becomes a member of the church must first be taught of God (John 6:45). *Teaching now precedes one's entrance into God's family* and all those who are incapable of understanding are excluded (Matthew 28:19-20). The organic law of Christ's kingdom *excludes* infants (cf. Acts 8:12; Romans 10:17). Those who are members of the church are members by *faith*:

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:26-27).

Therefore, since the church of our Lord was to be an entirely *new* institution, even those of the old Jewish religion were required to be "born again" to become members of it. In fact, no one can enter the church unless he is born again, for the condition of entrance, as given by Jesus, is "you must be born again."

B. THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

Christ's kingdom was established on the first Pentecost after his resurrection. For proof, let us note the following:

1. The kingdom was to come with power (Mark 9:1).
2. The power was to come with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).
3. The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Therefore, the kingdom came at that time.

Hence, Christ is now reigning in heaven as “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” (1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 17:14, 19:16).

If the claim of some be true that the kingdom of Christ has not yet been established, then the *new birth* is not a reality and no one today is being born again. But Paul wrote to people who had been *translated into the kingdom*, and the apostle John said he was a brother *in the kingdom* (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). The kingdom was in existence in the days of these apostles and people were citizens of it. Since this kingdom was not to be *shaken* but to *stand forever* (Hebrews 12:28; Daniel 2:44), it is *now* in existence and people are entering into it.

C. THE NEW BIRTH—THE DOOR INTO THE KINGDOM

Do you ask, “What sort of birth is this *new birth*? How is it accomplished?” The language of Jesus also puzzled Nicodemus. He could not understand how an old man, such as he, could experience another physical birth. Hence he inquired, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”

The Savior explained by saying, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” In this way he told Nicodemus what the *new birth* is, or *how* it could be possible to be *born again* when old. *Even if Nicodemus could have been born again physically, this would not have been the birth that Jesus had in mind.* So, Christ first expressed the *necessity of the new birth*; then he told of *what it consists*. It is a birth of water and of the Spirit. There are not *two births*, but one. Both elements—*water and Spirit*—are required.

“Born again” is a figure of speech. The metaphor is used because there is a similarity in some respects between the *new birth* and a natural birth, but not an identity. Birth is the beginning of new life in a new environment. Since one enters into new life—being translated out of one state into another—and becomes a new creature spiritually, this process is called a *birth*. The change wrought by the new birth is so great, both in the mind and conduct of a man, that one may say, “He is a new creature; he has been born again.” In other Scriptures this change is called conversion, reconciliation, etc. It is a spiritual change—a spiritual birth into a spiritual kingdom. To

become a Christian is what Jesus meant by being *born again*.

D. THE NEW BIRTH NOT A PHYSICAL BIRTH

Christ taught Nicodemus that the *new birth* was not a fleshly birth. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” said Jesus. As a birth of the flesh produces the physical man, so the birth of the Spirit produces a spiritual man. Like produces like in each case. Nicodemus had in mind a physical birth; Christ had in mind a spiritual birth. Consequently, Christ said, “Marvel not (do not be surprised) that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again.” It seems that this ruler of Israel failed to realize the existence of the inner man who experiences the *new birth*.

E. THE NEW BIRTH A NECESSITY

Since all must be born again to enter into the kingdom of God, it is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of the *new birth*. None shall enter the kingdom until they have been born of water and of the Spirit, for this is the only way to enter into it. Therefore, the creation of a new spiritual being in Christ Jesus is essential (Galatians 6:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Sinful man needs a new nature. It is impossible for unregenerate and sin-loving people to enjoy the things of God, either in this world or the world to come. Those in this state are unfit for a holy relationship with God. Heaven would be a place of torment to the sinner steeped in sin, hating God and righteousness. Jesus said:

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”
(Matthew 5:8).

Christianity is the only system that can change, regenerate, and cleanse the sinner. This it does by introducing new principles of action in the mind and filling the heart with heavenly influences. The philosophies of man cannot make a mean man good, but the teachings of Christ, when believed and obeyed, will purify the heart and reform the life (Peter 1:22). Therefore, sinners need a conviction of sin; they need to be converted, or born again. The new life *must* begin with this.

III. BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT

Having seen that the *new birth* is absolutely necessary for en-

trance into the kingdom of God, the meaning of the term “born of water and of the Spirit” needs now to be determined.

A. ESSENTIALS FOR A BIRTH

For a birth, two things are necessary: (1) a begetting and (2) a bringing forth. Whatever is born is first *begotten* and that is always through seed; later it is *brought forth* as a new creature. Thus, in the spiritual realm one is also begotten and brought forth.

B. THE BEGETTING

Since there cannot be life in either the physical or spiritual realm without first a begetting, and since God is to all Christians their Father (Matthew 6:9; Ephesians 3:14-15; Romans 1:7; 1 John 3:1-2), one is said to be *begotten of God*: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God.” (1 John 5:1, American Standard Version, cf. 1 John 2:29; 4:7).

In the physical birth, when the *begetting* and the *bringing forth* are spoken of together, the word *born* is used; but if they are considered separately, the work of the father is spoken of as a *begetting*. In the Greek language only one word is used—“*gennao*”—and it is translated both *begotten* and *born*. In English we have two words corresponding to the one in the Greek. When the idea relates to the father, it is properly rendered *begotten*; but when the idea relates to the mother, the word is translated *born*; and when the relationship of the child to both parents is referred to, it is *born* (cf. Matthew 1:2; 2:1).

1. *Begotten of God — Begotten of the Gospel*

The following Scriptures show *how* people are begotten by the Father:

- (a) “Of his (God’s) own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.” (James 1:18). Hence, God begets by the Word of truth.
- (b) “The seed is the word of God.” (Luke 8:11; cf. Mark 4:30). So, the Word of God is the instrument of the new birth, the spiritual seed by which one is spiritually begotten.
- (c) “Being born again (or, “having been begotten again,” as the American Standard Version renders it) not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever And this is the word which by the

gospel is preached unto you.” (1 Peter 1:23-25). Here again it is affirmed that the gospel is the incorruptible seed with which one is begotten.

- (d) “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 4:15). In addition to the gospel being the instrument of begetting, this verse also states that God employs agents to wield the instrument by means of which his begetting power is brought to bear on human hearts. God begot the Corinthians through the agency of Paul and the instrumentality of the Word of truth. So, in literal terms, Paul might have said to them, “I have made you believers by preaching the gospel to you.” (cf. Philemon 10).

To be begotten and to be made a believer are the same thing.

Since faith comes by hearing God’s Word (Romans 10:17), and since the one who has faith is begotten (1 John 5:1), this is how God begets: He produces faith in the heart by the gospel. Hence, when the apostles preached the gospel to people and these people received it and believed it, they were begotten of God. Thus, ***the power to beget in people a spiritual life is in the gospel*** and without it there can be no spiritual life.

2. Begotten of God — Begotten of the Spirit

The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit gave the gospel through inspired men (cf. 1 Peter 1:12; 2 Peter 1:21; John 16:13; Acts 2:4). Thus, when one is begotten by the Father through the Word in believing the gospel, he may also be said to have been begotten, or born, by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit begets by implanting the Word of God, the incorruptible seed, in the heart of man through the gospel. The gospel was first spoken by the Spirit through inspired men, then later written by men under his guidance. Today the New Testament is the inspired book which contains that gospel message.

Therefore, in the Scriptures the begetting act is attributed to these persons: (1) God (2) the Holy Spirit, and (3) the preacher (John 1:13; John 3:5-8; 1 Corinthians 4:15). For this reason the Bible contains such expressions as: “born of God;” “born of the Spirit,” and “begotten through the gospel.” These all relate to the same birth. One is not born of God, then of the Spirit and then of the Word of God.

One must remember, however, that the Spirit always begets

through the gospel; the begetting is accomplished by one's **hearing** the Spirit's message, the Word of truth, as contained in the New Testament. As an illustration, in Paul's sermon at Antioch, he spoke of "the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day." Acts 13:27). Those people heard the **voices** of the prophets. Although the prophets had been dead several hundred years; yet, when the Old Testament was read the people heard the prophets speak by hearing the **writings** of the prophets. Likewise, people today hear the voice of the Spirit by hearing the Word of God—the message given by the Holy Spirit through inspired men (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:13; Revelation 2:7-11). And, this is the only way one hears the Spirit's voice. People may "resist the Holy Ghost" by rejecting his words and refusing to obey him (cf. Acts 7:51-52; Nehemiah 9:26-30).

When the gospel, the seed of the kingdom, finds a place in the heart and is allowed to remain there, it produces spiritual life. The one who has been born again by its influence has been born of the Spirit. Christ said:

"It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (John 6:63).

Therefore, God and the Spirit impart the divine life in the process of begetting through the Word.

Summarizing, these are the facts presented to this point:

1. A **begetting** by the Spirit is necessary for re-birth.
2. The gospel has been given by the Spirit.
3. God, through the Spirit, begets people by the Word of truth.
4. Those who believe that Jesus is the Christ are begotten of God.

Thus,

1. God is the author of the **new birth**.
2. The Holy Spirit is his agent.
3. The gospel is the instrument employed by the Spirit.
4. The message is proclaimed by men.

5. The Word of God is received by the sinner.

These five facts are always found operating together in the work of regeneration. No one is born again by unbelief, nor is there an example in the Bible of any man's being regenerated against his will. Although one does not have anything to do with his physical birth, he does with his spiritual birth; he must hear and obey the gospel.

Thus, the spirit of man is operated upon by the Holy Spirit. The inner man is renewed in knowledge (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24). The *spirit* of man is born anew, but the body will not be changed until the resurrection.

3. *Begetting not Enough*

The expression "that which is born" (John 3:6), denotes the *entire process of birth* from conception to deliverance.

After one has been *begotten*, he may then be delivered (cf. John 1:11-13). When one believes, he has the power, the right, or the privilege, to *become a son*. A person is not a child of God, or saved, the very *moment* he believes. If he were a son from the moment of his faith, power could not be given him to *become* a son. The Bible says one is *not* saved by "faith only." (James 2:24). After the *begetting*, there must be a *bringing forth* to complete the process of birth. A person may be begotten and never born to life.

C. THE BIRTH

1. *Born of Water*

To be "born of water" means to be baptized. "Water" simply means water. If not, why not? Although the process of entering the kingdom of God is explained by the analogy of a birth, this does not mean that the word *water* is figurative. The words *water* and *Spirit* are used literally; they mean what they say—water and Spirit. No one could ever read John 3:5 and think that Christ meant anything but water and spirit if there had not been so much false teaching on baptism.

If "water" does not mean water, does "Spirit" mean Spirit? If "water" means "Spirit" as some say, then the passage should read, "Except a man be born of spirit and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." This is absurd! If *water* and *spirit* mean the same, would Christ have needlessly repeated the words? *Water and Spirit* are not the same, nor is water a symbol of the Spirit. Some say

the word “water” symbolizes the Word of God, but this is contradicted by Ephesians 5:26. Some try to make it read “living water” (John 4:10; John 7:38), but this idea is refuted by Revelation 22:17. Others say, “I do not know what it means, but I know it does not mean water.” How do they know this? Certainly not from the Bible!

A common error in the teaching of man is that “born of water” refers to the natural birth and “born of the Spirit” refers to the *new birth*. But this theory does violence to the language of Jesus. Christ did not say, “Unless a baby be born of water and a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” But he said, “Except a *man* be born again, born of *water and of the Spirit*, he (the man, already born physically) cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” The natural birth is *not* the birth of water in John 3:5. *Amniotic fluid* is the substance in the natural birth, not water (See *Webster's Dictionary*). Nicodemus had been born of human parents—the natural birth; now Christ tells him he must be born again—not physically, but of water *and* of the Spirit (both) in order to become a citizen of the kingdom of God. The water of this passage pertains to the spiritual birth and not to the physical. Nicodemus had not asked how a child could be born into the world, but, “How can a man be born again when he is old?” The answer of Christ was, “He is born of water and of the Spirit.”

The reason “water” does not mean *water* to some is that it makes baptism essential to salvation and these people do not want to believe that baptism is a condition of pardon. In an effort to save their false doctrine, much quibbling has been done to avoid the obvious teaching of Jesus.

Most scholars agree that the word “water” refers to baptism. *Baptism is the only act to which it can refer*. It is the *only* religious ceremony pertaining to salvation which makes use of water. *There is nothing which corresponds to a birth of water in all of God's plan of redemption except immersion in water*. In the Christian system water is *never* used in any ordinance or ceremony except baptism. Thus, by the order of Christ, the highest authority in heaven and on earth, *baptism is essential* for obtaining all blessings of the kingdom (Matthew 28:18-19).

(a) *Baptism is Immersion*

The *act* of baptism is immersion; it is both a burial and a resurrection. One is submerged completely and comes forth out of

water. The apostle Paul declared:

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4).

“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” (Colossians 2:12).

Paul used an expression similar to Christ’s (John 3:5) in referring to the resurrection of Jesus. He said that Christ was the first-born from the dead (Colossians 1:18). The Lord was buried in the grave and from it he came forth; hence, *born* from the dead. The Savior is the first to come from the grave to die no more and is, therefore, the first-born from the dead. If to arise from the grave means to be born from the dead, then to arise from the water means to be *born of water*.

The individual who has had water sprinkled or poured upon his head cannot truthfully say that he has been *buried* with Christ in baptism. A person cannot be *born of water* when only a few drops are used. *Water alone was never sprinkled on any person for any purpose in any age of the Bible by the Lord's authority.*

Therefore, *born of water* means *baptism*; that is, the baptism of a believing penitent. To be *born of water* and to be *immersed and raised to walk in newness of life* are identical. Hence the person who has not been immersed is not in the kingdom, for immersion is part of the *new birth*.

(b) The Entire Man Participates

It has been said that the entire man (body included) participates in the *new birth* and that this birth is not completed until the *whole* man has participated. This is true. The *body* is immersed in water, but in this overt act the changed spirit in man is obeying the command of the Lord (Romans 6:16-18). Baptism is not merely a physical act; if this were true, baptism could be effected by forcing a man under water and bringing him out. But Scriptural baptism requires that the subject have faith and repent (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38, 8:12, 35:38). For this reason a baby

cannot be Scripturally baptized for it lacks the prerequisites of baptism. The spirit of man (the inner man) hears the gospel, believes and turns to God with a sincere desire to serve him. Consequently, when the *new birth* is accomplished *the mind is renewed*, the heart is changed, faith is produced, and *the individual is baptized into Christ*.

2. Born of the Spirit

By following the Spirit's instruction one is immersed. He is baptized according to the direction of the Spirit after he hears and believes the Spirit's message. The Holy Spirit is the divine agent in both actions of the spiritual birth—the begetting and the delivery, and the written Word of God is the instrument the Spirit uses in bringing about these actions.

So, in being born of the Spirit, the human spirit undergoes a deep and vital change in its conceptions and affections, which is effected by the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit the human heart is regenerated with new and holy principles of life and the love of sin is abandoned. The person resolves to turn to God in complete obedience and is immersed in water, arising to live a life of holiness. In this way people are “born of the Spirit”; they are made Christians by “the law of the Spirit.” (John 3:8; Romans 8:2). *Every change in the whole process is directed by the Spirit of God.*

(a) The Illustration of the Wind

There has been much controversy, however, concerning the work of the Holy Spirit as an agent in regeneration. Much of this discussion has been caused by a misconception of the Savior's language as recorded in John 3:8:

“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit”

Many think that this verse teaches the direct, incomprehensible and mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion; that regeneration is a sudden, miraculous, and inexplicable experience, better felt than told. They say that as the wind moves mysteriously, so does the Spirit, breathing upon whom he will arbitrarily, thereby affecting the inward change called the birth of the Spirit. Some try to

make “so is everyone *that* is born of the Spirit” mean “in a mysterious manner.” Jesus was not talking about the *new birth* as a miraculous process, nor was he talking primarily about the operation of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, he did not say that the *new birth* is like the wind blowing, or that the Spirit is like the wind blowing.

H. Leo Boles said:

John 3:8 has reference to “the one” and not the process of birth.¹

David Lipscomb made this comment:

The man which is born, or begotten, of the Spirit is not the fleshly man that you can see, but the intangible, spiritual part of man—the spirit, invisible, like the wind.²

So, does not the illustration of the unseen blowing wind show that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom; and that it is the spirit of man, the inner man, that is begotten or born of the Spirit? Then Christ’s statement in John 3:8 cannot support the false theory of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. It is absurd for anyone to insist that the Spirit works like the wind, blowing here and there, converting people independent of their wills, that is, by an irresistible act of God’s will.

(b) *How The Spirit Operates*

The Bible teaches very clearly that the Spirit works in regeneration through the Word of God and not independently (cf. Psalms 19:7; James 1:18). The Spirit came to the apostles and they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance (John 16:7-14; Acts 2:1-4). When the people heard the apostles, that is, *heard the Spirit speaking through the apostles*, and believed and obeyed this message, the *new birth* was produced. There is no record in the Bible of one person who was born again by any influence of the Spirit that could not be ex-

¹ BOLES, H. LEO, *Boles’ Outlines*, Page 106, Nashville: B. C. Goodpasture, Publisher, 1945.

² LIPSCOMB, DAVID, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Page 46, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1939.

plained or understood. No inspired teacher of the gospel ever said that regeneration was accomplished by a direct work of the Spirit apart from God's Word. They did not teach alien sinners to come to the altar and *pray* for salvation, nor to *pray through* that they might be saved. Neither did they say anything about *Instantaneous conversions, getting religion*, nor *having an experience of grace*. All of this is of modern origin and shows a misconception of the teaching of the Scriptures on the subject of *how* the Holy Spirit works in the *new birth*. The power by which God saves and makes people his children is the gospel (Romans 1:17). That the sinner cannot regenerate himself is true, yet he can and *must* receive the Word.

Therefore, a miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit in the *new birth* is not taught in the Bible. The Spirit always does his work of regeneration through the Word and *never* in some direct, mysterious manner. The gospel is the medium through which spiritual life is communicated; the germ is in the living seed. Even though inspired men are not living today, people have the *words* they wrote, for the Holy Scriptures are inspired (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Then, when people hear that message they are hearing the message of the Holy Spirit, and when they obey the gospel, they are born again by the Spirit. When people hear and believe the Word of God, they are *begotten*; and when they are then baptized by the Spirit's direction (1 Corinthians 12:13), they are *born of the Spirit*. The second birth is a birth of the Spirit and the gospel is the instrument the Spirit always uses in this work.

3. Summary

In the spiritual realm one is begotten of God, the Father, through the gospel, the seed. Being then *begotten*, or made a believer, one is *born* into God's family when his faith, working by love, leads him to repent, confess and be immersed according to the teaching of the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9-10; Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:26-27, 5:6; John 14:15). He is then brought forth from baptism to lead a new life.

IV. A NEW LIFE BEGINS

The new birth embraces an imparting of life through seed and bringing forth of the new creature into a new state. A birth is a translation, a change of state or relationship, which results in a new

life in a new realm. By the *new birth* one is translated into a new environment. When is this transfer made? What is the realm?

“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).

Since one is a new creature *in Christ*, he enters into the new life when he enters into him. But *when does* one enter into Christ?

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3).

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:27).

Thus, life begins when the gospel is preached and a person believes it; then the believing penitent is baptized into Christ by the direction of the Holy Spirit, and it is here that the new life is enjoyed.

A person is *baptized into Christ*, and the person *in Christ* is a new creation, a new being—a Christian. Baptism is the means appointed by the Spirit for translating the believer from one realm into another and puts one into Christ.

The *new birth* is the process by which one enters into Christ, and water baptism is a part of it. One is not a *new* creature (born again) until he gets into Christ and one is not *in Christ* until he has been *baptized into him*. By being born again one is translated from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ where he obtains the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14).

Paul says one is raised from the water to “walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4). Why *newness* of life? Because one is born again. A *new life* is produced by a *new birth* and as one comes up from the watery grave of baptism, he is then a new born babe in Christ, born of water and of the Spirit. Hence, “baptism doth also now save us.” (1 Peter 3:21). If one is born again, or *saved*, before he is baptized, as many people falsely assert, why does he not walk in newness of life prior to his baptism?

After the spirit of man has been changed by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, it should maintain mastery over the body, consecrating it to divine service (Romans 6:12-13, 19). The Christian must continue to live the new life. Because one has been born again it does not necessarily mean that he will be saved in heaven, for a child of God can apostatize and be eternally lost, (cf. 2 Peter 1:4-11; 1 Corinthians 10:1-12; Galatians 5:4; Revelation 2:10). The spirit of man is responsible for the deeds of his body since the spirit of man controls the body (1 Peter 2:11; Proverbs 4:23; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The Bible teaches that the converted man must bring his body into subjection and use it as a holy instrument to the glory of God if he is to receive his eternal salvation (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27; 6:19, 20; Romans 12:1; 8:12, 13; Matthew 15:18-20).

CHAPTER TWO: The Voice Of Scholars

The statements of men cannot add any weight to the authority of God's Word; yet let us notice a few brief comments made by recognized men of the religious world on the meaning of "born of water" in John 3:5.

According to William Wall, a reliable ecclesiastical historian of the Church of England, all writers from the time of Christ to the days of John Calvin said "born of water" meant baptism.

"There is not one Christian writer of any antiquity in any language but what understands it of baptism. And if it be not so understood it is difficult to give an account how a person is born of water, any more than of wood" (William Wall, *History of Infant Baptism*, Vol. I, p. 92).

"All the ancient Christians (without the exception of one man) do understand that rule of our Saviour (John 3:5) 'VERILY, VERILY, I SAY UNTO THEE, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN OF WATER AND OF THE SPIRIT, HE CANNOT ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD,' of baptism. I had occasion in the first part to bring a great many instances of their sayings: where all that mention that text, from Justin Martyr down to St. Austin, do so apply it: and many more could be brought. I believe Calvin was the first that ever denied this place to mean baptism. He gave another interpretation, which he confesses to be new" (Ibid., p. 443).

J. R. Graves was for a number of years an outstanding preacher and debater of the Baptist Church. In the *Tennessee Baptist* he made the following statement:

"If Brother Vaughn convinced us that born of water refers to anything but the baptism of one previously born of the Spirit, we never knew it, and we would have

owned it to him and to our readers. It means nothing else, and no Baptist that we ever heard or read of ever believed otherwise until A. Campbell frightened them away from an interpretation that is sustained by the consensus of all scholars of all denominations in all ages” (Tennessee Baptist, October 30, 1886, p. 5, as quoted in David Lipscomb, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* Gospel Advocate Co., Nashville, p. 45).

Dean Alford, in his notes on John 3:5, says:

“There can be no doubt, on any honest interpretation of the words, that gennethenai ek hudatos (born of water) refers to the token or outward sign of baptism—gennethenai ek pneumatos (born of the Spirit) to the thing signified, or inward grace of the Holy Spirit. All attempts to get rid of these two plain facts have sprung from doctrinal prejudices, by which the views of expositors have been warped” (*Greek Testament*, notes on John 3:5, Vol. I p. 714, as quoted in J. W. Shepherd, *Handbook on Baptism*, McQuiddy Printing Co., Nashville, p. 320).

For many years Albert Barnes’ *Notes on the New Testament* has been a popular commentary. Barnes was a member of the Presbyterian Church and one of its outstanding preachers. Commenting on John 3:5, he says:

“By water here, is evidently signified baptism. Thus the word is used in Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5 (*Notes on the Gospels*, Vol. II, page 210).

The very learned Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College, made this statement in reference to “born of water”:

“To be ‘born of water,’ as here intended, is, in my view, to be baptized . . . That to be born of water, and of the Spirit, is the same thing with being born again, must be admitted by every one, who is willing that our Savior

should speak good sense, since he obviously mentions in this whole discourse but one birth” (Timothy Dwight, *System of Theology*, sermon CLVI, Vol. V, p. 223, as quoted in J. W. Shepherd, *op. cit.*, p. 325).

H.A.W. Meyer has been called the “prince of all exegetes.” He was a Greek scholar and a member of the Lutheran Church. In his notes on John 3:5, in reference to baptism, he says:

“ . . . the necessity of baptism in order to participation in the Messianic kingdom (a doctrine against which Calvin in particular, and other expositors of the Reformed Church contend) has certainly its basis in this passage” (Commentary on the New Testament, Vol. III, page 124).

Alvah Hovey (Baptist), president of Newton Theological Institution, Newton Center, Massachusetts, and professor of Theology in the same institution, writes in his commentary on John:

“We may say that being ‘born of water’ (baptized) must signify being cleansed from sins or forgiven; while being ‘born of the Spirit’ cannot signify less than being ingenerated, if we may use the word, with a new and holy principle of life by the Spirit of God. It is not, therefore, surprising that Jesus alludes to baptism in the briefest manner, while he dwells with special emphasis upon the work of the Spirit” (American Commentary on the New Testament, commentary on John, p. 422).

H. B. Hackett (Baptist), in his comments on Acts 2:38, says:

“In order to the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28; Luke 3:3) we connect naturally with both the preceding verbs. This clause states the motive or object which should induce them to repent and be baptized. It enforces the entire exhortation, not one part of it to the exclusion of the other” (American Commentary on the New Testament, commentary on Acts, p. 53).

The name of John Wesley is well known to the religious people of America. In his *Notes on the New Testament*, Wesley says:

“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit—Except he experience that great inward change by the Spirit, and be baptized (wherever baptism can be had) as the outward sign and means of it” (Notes on the New Testament, comments on John 3:5).

In his comments on Acts 22:16, Wesley said:

“Be baptized, and wash away thy sins . . . Baptism administered to real penitents is both a means and a seal of pardon. Nor did God ordinarily in the primitive church bestow this on any, unless through this means” (Notes on the New Testament, under Acts 22:16).

And his brief statement on Rom. 6:4 is correct:

“We are buried with him—Alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion” (Ibid).

Conybeare and Howson in their great work on *The Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul* make this fine comment on Romans 6:4:

“This passage cannot be understood unless it be borne in mind that the primitive baptism was by immersion.” (p. 497).

J. W. Willmarth (Baptist) said:

“Suppose we force eis in Acts 2:38 to bear the unnatural and unauthorized meaning of “on account of.” After all we have gained nothing. Other passages there are which cannot be explained away. Thus our Saviour said, just before He ascended the heavens: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” We shall hardly dare to tamper with His royal word and make it run, “He that believeth and is saved shall be baptized.” And unless we do thus change His saying, we have by the highest

authority, an importance attributed to Baptism certainly not less than that given to it in Acts 2:38, translated according to its obvious meaning. What then is the advantage of violently torturing eis, the construction and the context?"

"Christ himself, in His early Judaeian ministry, "made and baptized disciples." His preaching at the outset, was of similar purport with that of John. It is natural to suppose that His Baptism (in connection with Repentance and Faith) was, like John's, in order to Remission. We are confirmed in this by our Saviour's words to Nicodemus, who came to Him during that early period to learn more fully, no doubt, of the kingdom which Christ and John were preaching. Christ said to him: 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God', i. e., Baptism and Renewal by the Spirit are the conditions of true citizenship in the kingdom of God on earth."—Baptism and Remission, in *Baptist Quarterly*, July, 1877, p. 306, 309.

Many more quotations could be given, but these should suffice. The effort to destroy the reference to baptism in John 3:5 is MODERN. The whole religious world has agreed, until recent years, that the immersion of a believing penitent in water constituted the NEW BIRTH, and that to be "born of water" meant to be baptized. Truly, it can be said that this interpretation "is sustained by the consensus of *all* scholars of *all* denominations in *all* ages," and that "all attempts to get rid of these two plain facts have sprung from doctrinal prejudices."

CHAPTER THREE: Parallel Scriptures

There are other passages of Scripture in the New Testament, besides John 3:5, which refer to the spiritual change called “regeneration.” These should be studied also, for there is no better way to explain Scripture than by Scripture.

I. STATEMENTS OF JESUS REGARDING ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM

Note these three statements of Christ relating to entering the kingdom:

1. Born again, enter the kingdom—John 3:5

“ . . . Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

2. Be converted, enter the kingdom—Matthew 18:3

“ . . . Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

3. Do God’s will, enter the kingdom—Matthew 7:21

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

If one cannot understand the expression, “born of water and of the Spirit,” then perhaps he can understand “conversion.” But if conversion, or turning to the Lord, cannot be understood, then surely “doing the Lord’s will” can be. Both terms are the same; and the result is the same — entrance into the kingdom. A person who does not obey the will of God cannot be a citizen of the kingdom. These three are equal to the same thing and must, therefore, be equal to each other.

II. THE NEW BIRTH EXPLAINED BY THE GREAT COMMISSION

During the Lord's personal ministry he often taught the principles of the kingdom of heaven in figures and parables, but after his resurrection he gave plain commands. Prior to his ascension, Christ said to his apostles:

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:15. cf. Matthew 28:18-20 and Luke 24:46-47).

When he stated the terms of salvation on this occasion, Jesus gave the same requirements that he had given to Nicodemus earlier in his public ministry, but this time he did not use a figure of speech. The two statements of Christ in John 3:5 and in Mark 16:16 are identical in their teaching.

Since Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” would anyone dare affirm, “He that believeth and will not be baptized shall be saved?” Notice that Jesus did not say, “He that is baptized shall be saved”; nor did he say, “He that believeth is saved, and may be baptized later if he desires”; but, rather, “He that believeth (Step 1) and is baptized (Step 2), shall be saved (Result).” Here again the Bible teaches that baptism is a condition of pardon. The sinner, to obtain salvation, must believe and be baptized. Furthermore, the metaphor of the *new birth* is ruined by either of the following processes: (1) when baptism is put before faith, as when infants are baptized, the birth occurs before the begetting; (2) when immersion is changed to sprinkling, there is no coming out of the water and, so, no birth of water.

III. COMPARISON OF THE LANGUAGE OF JESUS AND PAUL REGARDING ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM

The language of the apostle Paul is in harmony with the statements of Christ on the subject of regeneration. Compare these three verses of Scripture:

1. “. . . Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit,

he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5).

2. “. . . that he might sanctify and cleanse it (i. e., the church) with the washing of water by the word.” (Ephesians 5:26).

3. “. . . 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).

The essentials of these passages, placed in parallel arrangement, look as follows:

Paul declares that people are cleansed “with the washing of water by the word.” (Ephesians 5:26). The **washing** is baptism, (cf. Hebrews 10:22; Acts 22:16). The “washing of regeneration” mentioned in Titus 3:5 is the washing that pertains to, or is a part of, **regeneration**. It, too, is baptism. And, the “renewing of the Holy Spirit” is the Spirit producing faith in the heart through the word of truth. Literally, these passages teach that people are saved by faith and baptism in obedience to God’s Word (a parallel to John 3:5 and Mark 16:16). Again the Bible teaches that a person must be baptized to have his sins forgiven.

<i>John 3:5</i>	<i>Ephesians 5:26</i>	<i>Titus 3:5</i>
<i>Born of water</i>	<i>Washing of water</i>	<i>Washing of regeneration</i>
<i>Born of the Spirit</i>	<i>By the Word</i>	<i>Renewal of Holy Spirit</i>
<i>Enter into the kingdom</i>	<i>Cleansed</i>	<i>Saved</i>

A. Baptism Compared to Works of Righteousness

Baptism is not a work of righteousness—that is, of man’s righteousness; it is, rather, a work of the righteousness of God (according to Titus 3:5, where it is contrasted to self-righteousness) (cf. Matthew 3:15; Romans 1:16-17, 10:1-3; Acts 10:34-35; Psalms 119:172). Paul did **not** refer to baptism as a **work of the righteousness of men**. In fact, the Bible never calls baptism a **work**. Therefore, it cannot be called a work of man’s righteousness, (cf. Isaiah 64:6; John 6:28-29). In obeying the gospel and becoming a

Christian (which includes baptism for the remission of sins), a person is not saved by his own plan or system; he is saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; James 2:14-26).

The one other place where the word *regeneration* is found in the New Testament is in Matthew 19:28, where Christ alludes to the time in which people will be regenerated (or, re-born spiritually) under his reign. In Titus 3:5 Paul shows that the process of regeneration is in operation at the present time.

B. The Nature of Baptism

The *new birth* is regeneration, for regeneration means “being born again.” It is the *entire process* of quickening and initiating into the kingdom of God. The renewal of the Holy Spirit is a necessary part of this process, but it is not all of it. Baptism is also a part of the process of regeneration. To complete regeneration, the believer must be baptized. After the inward change is accomplished by the Spirit through the word, the individual is ushered into the kingdom by immersion.

When the truth concerning baptism is taught, some way, “This is water regeneration.” If baptism alone were taught as the means of salvation, this would indeed be water regeneration, but to dip an *unbeliever* in water is not New Testament baptism. Those who sprinkle water on babies surely believe in water salvation for in this act there is no faith nor repentance. The infant does not even know what is happening. The Bible teaches that those who have been *taught*, who have *believed* and *repented* are to be baptized, confessing their faith, in order to obtain the remission of their past sins (cf. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 8:12-37, 18:8). Since genuine faith and repentance *must precede baptism# baptism is not, therefore, the whole process of regeneration*. On the other hand, infants are not proper subjects of baptism for they have no sins to be forgiven. Infants are *safe* (Matthew 19:14).

Again, when the Lord’s teaching about the conditions of salvation is proclaimed, some remark, “This makes water one’s Savior.” But it should be remembered that there is no mystical power in water, nor in baptism itself; neither is there any power in faith or repentance. However, when the believing penitent is baptized, he is initiated into the kingdom of God—but this does not make baptism his savior no more than faith or repentance is his savior (cf. 1 Peter

3:21; Acts 2:40). Obedience to the Lord is what saves. And there can be no complete obedience without being baptized. The saved believer is the obedient, baptized believer.

Gospel preachers accused of teaching *water salvation* should remember that the Savior was often misunderstood and sometimes deliberately misrepresented. Thousands will never be saved, and some will never hear a true gospel sermon, because their religious leaders have prejudiced them against the truth (cf. Matthew 13:14-15; 23:13; 2 Timothy 4:3-4).

CHAPTER FOUR: The New Birth Demonstrated

By studying the many cases of conversion which occurred after the church was established, one may learn exactly what the *new birth* is, for these examples describe how souls were *born anew* into the kingdom of God. In their preaching the apostles explained the *new birth* in a very simple way when they told sinners, in plain language, what to do to be saved. Though there is no record of their saying, “You must be born again,” they preached its equivalent. In the *Book of Acts* the process of the *new birth* is amply demonstrated. Some of the examples from this book are discussed below.

1. The Three Thousand on Pentecost (Acts 2)

On the day of Pentecost as the Savior had promised, the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles to guide them into all truth (cf. John 14:16-17, 26; John 15:26-27; John 16:7-13; Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:1-4). On that day, for the first time, the gospel of Christ was presented. After the people had listened to Peter’s sermon, many were convinced that Jesus was the Christ and cried out, “Men, and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter did not tell them to be *born again*. He said, “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.*” (Acts 2:38). They were clearly instructed in the way of salvation. Three thousand of them obeyed and entered the kingdom of God that day.

Several years afterward Peter wrote to Christians scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1. cf. Acts 2:9-10) and said:

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.” (1 Peter 1:22-23).

These individuals who were born again were some of the very people who had been saved on that Pentecost day. When Peter

preached the first gospel sermon, he sowed the seed of the kingdom; they heard it, believed it, and received it into their hearts and were begotten. When they asked what to do to be saved, they were told to repent and be baptized.

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41).

The command given on Pentecost has remained the law of induction into the kingdom. Peter had the *keys of the kingdom* (Matthew 16:19)—that is, the power to tell people how to enter the kingdom of God—and he used them on this occasion by telling believers to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. Here again baptism is a condition of pardon. However, baptism in the name of Christ for the remission of sins is a ceremony pertaining only to the Christian dispensation and was never commanded until the first Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection. Previous to this date one cannot, therefore, find examples of people entering the kingdom of Christ. Those who object to baptism as a condition of pardon usually mention the Thief on the Cross and other examples of salvation which occurred before Pentecost. But these are not examples of salvation under the reign of Christ. The Savior, in his conversation with Nicodemus, was merely announcing what the law of entrance into his kingdom would be when the kingdom was established.

The record of the conversion of the three thousand at Pentecost demonstrates *how* and *when* one is born again. The second chapter of Acts is the best explanation of John 3:5. On the first Pentecost after the resurrection Christ’s kingdom, or church, was established and people entered it. The events of this great day are summarized by Isaac Errett as follows:

- (1) The Spirit descended upon the apostles, in fulfillment of the promise made in John 16:7-15.
- (2) The apostles, filled with the Spirit, preached the truth to the people, and through this means the Spirit convicted a great multitude, of sin, of righteousness,

and of judgment.

(3) The preaching wrought on the spirits of the hearers, to change them in their convictions and feelings, and bring them to believe in Jesus as Lord and Christ.

(4) They were then taught to repent and be baptized, upon the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.

(5) As many as were quickened into new life by the Spirit of God through the word of the apostles, were baptized, and thus born of water and of the Spirit, entered into the kingdom of God.³

THE STATUS OF THE SAVED

The second chapter of Acts closes with these words:

“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (Acts 2:47).

Therefore, the process by which one is saved from his past sins, or is born again, is the same process by which one becomes a Christian and a member of the church. The requirements for salvation are the requirements for church membership. Salvation is in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10; Ephesians 1:3), and to be in Christ is to be in his church, for the church is the body of Christ (cf. Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 12:20). Hence, the process which makes one a Christian also makes him a member of the church, and one cannot be a Christian without belonging to the church. The person who does what the Lord requires, and nothing more, will be a member of Christ’s church and of nothing else.

Nevertheless, people talk today about “joining a church” because they are told that membership in *some church* is necessary. Indeed the struggle for numbers has placed thousands of names on church rolls; however, they are names of people who have *never* been *born again*. In reality these people are not in the Lord’s

³ Errett, Isaac, Evenings with the Bible, Vol. III, Page 285: Cincinnati, Standard Publishing Company, 1893.

church. Christ's statement, "*Ye must be born again, . . .* born of water and of the Spirit," puts the *new birth* between the sinner and the kingdom of God. Human beings may fix the terms of membership in their own organizations, but the Lord determines the basis of membership in *his*.

When people are *born again*, they enter God's family, which is the church (1 Timothy 3:15; Romans 8:16-17). In the New Testament, people do not *join the church*; they are *added* to it by the Lord, as children do not *join* the family but are *born* into it. No one *joins* the family of God, the church; he is added to it because of his new spiritual birth. Those who have been *born anew* are new creatures in Christ

There is uniformity in the spiritual birth, just as there is uniformity in the natural birth; each is accomplished by divinely established law. There is only one plan for the pardon of all alien sinners: the process by which people became Christians in the first century of the Lord's church is the process by which people become Christians now. For this reason the conditions of salvation which were announced by Christ must not be denied, although his teaching may be offensive to some people. One may not be able to understand everything concerning the new birth, even as he may not understand some of the aspects of the natural birth; but he can understand and follow all that is required to be *born again*.

After the church was established on Pentecost the apostles always referred to the person who had believed and had been baptized as a child of God. In the Apostolic Age no one came into the church without immersion. *Baptism was not a command to Christians*. It was one of the requirements for coming *into* the church, the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

2. The Samaritans (Acts 8:5-12)

Another example of the *new birth* is the Samaritans. Philip, an inspired evangelist, went to their city and preached Christ. Many heard, believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12). When they believed and were baptized, they were saved (according to Christ's statement in Mark 16:16). That made them citizens of the kingdom, for the saved are added to the church and the church is the kingdom (Acts 2:47; Matthew 16:18-19). Those people, therefore, were *born again, born of water and of the Spirit*.

Since belief and baptism were essential to put people into the kingdom at that time, how can one expect to get into the kingdom by doing *less* than that *now*?

3. The Eunuch (Acts 8:26-39)

In the same chapter of *Acts* is a record of the conversion of an Ethiopian treasurer, and again the *new birth* is clearly demonstrated. The process of events which occurred that day on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza was the same process Jesus had in mind when he spoke to Nicodemus about being born of water and of the Spirit. It was the same process which Christ had in mind when he gave his final commission. The eunuch heard the gospel story, believed it, confessed his faith in Christ (cf. Romans 10:9-10; 1 Timothy 6:12-13), and having a contrite spirit, he was immersed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the remission of his sins. The eunuch arose from the water to a new life as a new creature in Christ.

It will be observed that the nobleman rejoiced because of his forgiveness *after* he had been baptized. After the church had been established and the great commission of Christ had become effective, no one prior to his baptism ever rejoiced because of his pardon.

4. Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-19; 26:9-20)

Another clear example of the *new birth* is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Saul was on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians when he saw Jesus, became convinced of his own disobedience to the Lord, and cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Jesus answered, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou *must do*." (Acts 9:6). Saul arose and went to Damascus, where he waited for three days to be told what to do. Ananias, who knew the plan of salvation, was sent to him. To Saul—believing, sorrowing, praying, penitent—Ananias said, "And now, why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). As soon as Ananias came to Saul, he arose and was baptized. Saul was instructed what he *must do*, and he did it. In baptism his sins were washed away (forgiven) by the blood of Christ (cf. Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 1:13-14; Revelation 1:5). Saul did not obtain forgiveness until he was baptized, at which time he was *justified by faith* and had *peace*

with God (Romans 5:1).

The Lord did not appear to Saul to save him nor to tell him that his sins were forgiven, but to qualify him to be an apostle (Acts 26:16; 1 Corinthians 9:1). Before Saul could be an apostle, he had to see Jesus after his resurrection (cf. Acts 1:21-22). But, to be saved Saul had to obey the Lord's law of pardon, as announced by Christ in the world wide commission and preached by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This is the same law that one must obey now if he is to be saved from his past sins.

CONCLUSION

People err, therefore, when they think they have found in Christ's conversation with Nicodemus the full and final announcement of the terms of admission into his kingdom. While on earth Jesus purposely spoke in figures of speech, often veiling the truth in somewhat puzzling metaphors (John 16:25). What was metaphorical *before* the establishment of the kingdom of heaven became literal and clear in the proclamation of the gospel *after* the church was established.

So, if the language of John 3 seems difficult to understand, it should be studied in connection with the simple examples of conversion recorded in *Acts*. Passages which are obscure or difficult must be studied in the light of those Scriptures which are clear and explicit.

When one sincerely believes that Jesus is the Son of God, he is begotten of God; and when he, as a believing penitent, is baptized (immersed), he is *born of water and of the Spirit*. The *new birth* is completed, and the individual is in the kingdom of God. The entire process is expressed simply in these words: "And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." (Acts 18:8). People who obeyed the Lord in this manner in the days of the apostles, after the kingdom was established, were *born of water and of the Spirit*. Since that time, those who have done these same things have also been *born anew*.

"Marvel not that *I* say unto thee, *Ye must be born again.*" You must hear the gospel and believe in Christ as God's Son (Hebrews 11:6; Acts 16:31; John 20:30, 31; Mark 16:15, 16); you must repent of all sins (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30); and you must be baptized unto the remission of sins following a confession of your

faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:10; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16;
Mark 16:16).

CHAPTER FIVE:

General Summary and Conclusion

Christ spoke to Nicodemus of a kingdom soon to come and of a law soon to be in operation. He told that member of the Jewish commonwealth that neither he nor any person could enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.

The one *born of water and of the Spirit* is the believing penitent who has been immersed in water. When he was baptized, he entered into the kingdom of God. He has heard the voice of the Spirit speaking through inspired men; he has received the Word into his heart and obeyed it. Thus, he is *born of the Spirit; born of water and of the Spirit; born of God*, and *born from above*.

"Born of water and of the Spirit" in John 3:5 means the baptism of a believing penitent. It is the process by which one is translated from the world into the church, from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. One birth with two factors translates a man into the kingdom.

Many, like Nicodemus, ask, "How can these things be? How can a birth of water and the Spirit make one a child of God? Can water have anything to do with salvation?" Yes! Our Lord plainly said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It must be true. Christ said it.

In this study of the *new birth* these facts have been noted:

1. Everyone who enters the kingdom must be born again and this birth consists of being born of both water and the Spirit.
2. A person is begotten by the gospel, the seed of the kingdom.
3. Since the Holy Spirit has given the gospel, one is begotten or born of the Spirit by means of the Word of God when he believes.
4. When the believing penitent is baptized—dipped in and brought forth from the water, according to the Spirit's instructions—he is then *born of water and of the Spirit*.
5. When any individual is born again of water and of the Spirit, that person, by virtue of that birth, enters into the kingdom of God, which is the church of God. Hence, the one who has been born again is in the kingdom, saved, pardoned, a new creature, a child of God, a member of the church, a Chris-

tian.

6. Therefore, except an individual is immersed in water after believing in his heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (cf. Mark 16:16; Matthew 7:21).
7. ***Hearing the gospel, believing the gospel, sincerely repenting of sins and being baptized in the name of the lord constitute the new birth and make one a child of god. When one does these things, he enters into the kingdom of god.***

Have you been ***born again?***