

**“Do not marvel that I said to you,**

# **You Must Be Born Again”**

**Jesus Christ—John 3:7**

Observations on this most important  
subject by Jack W. Langford

## *Introduction*

It was nearly two thousand years ago that an important religious leader in the nation of Israel, named Nicodemus, approached Jesus of Nazareth one night to make a private and very personal inquiry. The words of response that Jesus Christ gave to him on that occasion were so simple and yet so phenomenal that they have intrigued both scholars and laypersons for the last twenty centuries. The account has been recorded for us by Divine inspiration in the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verses 1 through 21. This late night conversation has proved to be the basic revelation of truth upon which stands the pivotal determination of the life and destiny of every single one of us. In fact, it also stands as the very basis for the determination of either the reality or the superficiality of the whole of professing Christendom.

What did Christ mean by those words—“You must be born again”? Not only did Nicodemus ask what Christ meant, but people ever since continue to ask “Just exactly what does this mean?” It is not that Jesus never explained what He meant, for we shall see that He clearly did. Rather, it is to be realized that Christ’s own explanation of His words have never actually found a receptive resting place in the theological traditions of the major man-made religious organizations. You see, the big religious machines in Christendom today seem to “gag” on Christ’s explanation. Christ’s simplicity does not at all set well with religious, traditional, ritualistic complexity. Herein is one of the greatest ironies of all time—why is it that the words forming the very basis of Christianity are so little understood by the present institutions, both that which bears the imprimatur and nihil obstat of pontifical authority and also that by her daughter institutions as well??

In spite of the confusion that exists in religion over these words, it remains a fact that each and every person, much like Nicodemus, must have a very private and personal encounter with Jesus Christ. We all need to find out what it means to be “born again.” The one thing Christ emphasized (He said it twice, verses 3 and 5) was that there are no exceptions—“Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

## *Early Texts of John*

God has accurately and even miraculously preserved the whole Bible for us. I am thinking especially of this story from the Gospel of John on the subject of Christ's encounter with Nicodemus. I was personally intrigued recently by the actual long history of ancient manuscripts that have been found of John. What we have in our hands right here today, as we read the Gospel of John from our modern translations, can actually be traced back through time by manuscripts of every single generation—right on back almost to the very time John wrote that inspired treatise. In the science of “Textual Criticism” the oldest documents ever found of the Greek Scriptures are from the Gospel of John. In addition, far more fragments, sections and whole copies of John are found than all other books of the New Testament. It seems as if the Gospel of John is like a handout tract explaining salvation to the people of the Greek speaking world. In addition, when we see that these ancient Greek texts are generally identical to the ones we have today, it makes us appreciate the accuracy of this record. Indeed, when we place our present texts up to these ancient texts, there appears the apparent freshness of the story as if it had just been written.

Many different books containing photographic copies of these oldest fragments and manuscripts are available. I shared pictures of some of the findings of ancient New Testament manuscripts of John when I recently gave a Bible study on this subject. For instance, the Papyrus Rylands Greek 457 (P52) of John 18:31-33 is the oldest to date; it is said to have been written between A.D. 94 and A.D. 127. Keep in mind that the last book of the Greek Scriptures is the book of Revelation, which is traditionally believed to have been written by John in A.D. 95. So it is, as you lift up your modern translation, you are in effect reading from well within 25 to 50 years of when John actually wrote the earlier Gospel. The Papyrus Bodmer II (P66) is dated from the first half of the second century to A.D. 200. These are just two samples of the many dozens that have been found. The amazing thing is that these very early Greek texts are generally the same as what we possess today. The story has not been warped or distorted, though I am sure the Devil has attempted to do so.

## *Nicodemus*

Of further interest is the fact that this person, Nicodemus, was a well-known personality in rabbinic literature. For anyone who may be tempted to think that such a story about Christ's encounter with Nicodemus was merely a literary creation of later invention to enhance Christianity, this is most surely not the case. Nicodemus is not an invention of some religious fictional writer. Nicodemus was a real historical character. In fact, the references to Nicodemus in ancient rabbinic literature of Judaism correspond to the accounts in the Gospel of John written about him.

In ancient rabbinic literature Nicodemus is known as a member of the ruling counsel just as he is in John (John 3:1). His name in Judaism was “Nakdimon ben Guriyon” (Nicodemus the son of Guriyon, see, *EJ*, 12:801-802). Another account confirms that Nicodemus was probably from Galilee (see, *t. 'Erub.* 3(4):17, where the estate of the family was said to be in lower Galilee). Nicodemus also had good connections with the Roman government (see, *b. Ta'an.* 19b). In the account of the burial

of Christ, the Gospel of John says Nicodemus provided an unusual amount of myrrh and aloes (John 19:39–40). This is consistent with the fact that Nicodemus was known as one of the three richest men in Jerusalem. Later in the Jewish-Roman war, Jewish fanatics burned down his granary (see, *B. Git.* 56a).

The famous scholar of Israel, David Flusser, says “Thus, rabbinic sources complement John’s picture of Nicodemus” (see *The Sage from Galilee, Rediscovering Jesus’ Genius*, page 140). David Flusser (1917–2000) was professor of early Christianity and Second Temple Judaism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

### *An Enquiry At Night*

As Nicodemus walked away from that night of talking with Jesus, he would never be the same person. An inner struggle, much like birth pangs, was working like spasms in his innermost being. The struggle in Nicodemus’ soul would be marked, first of all, by his cautious night time visit. Many have asked why he came at night. Nicodemus obviously wanted to avoid any eyes that would start the rumor that he was succumbing to the preaching of this “so-called Messiah.” After all, the list of accusations against Jesus was overwhelming and well publicized. So, Nicodemus was being very cautious lest he damage his own reputation. It is important for us to realize this. Though multitudes would come to hear Christ, the religious elite kept their distance.

On the one hand, Nicodemus was a well-known and highly respected leader in Israel. In contrast, because of Christ’s continuous exposure of religious hypocrisy among the religious elite, the higher authorities came to consider Him with the utmost contempt. Jesus was perhaps the most controversial character of all times. Though multitudes came to hear His messages and witness the miracles, yet He lived constantly with the threat of death hanging over His head. For one, King Herod sought to have Him killed (Luke 13:31). Even many of His own local community were at one time filled with violent rage against Him (Luke 6:11). On another occasion He narrowly escaped being stoned to death while ministering in the Temple area (John 8:59).

Many times there was ridicule and false and slanderous accusations against Jesus. It had been propagated that Jesus was—an uneducated (John 7:15), illegitimate child (John 8:41), possessed by a demon ( John 8:52 and Luke 11:15), a blasphemer (Luke 5:21), a sinner (John 9:24), one who thought nothing of violating the Sabbath (John 9:16), a hated Samaritan (John 8:48), one who violated certain religious traditions (Mark 7:1–13) and who openly associated with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:30 and 15:2).

We might well realize, therefore, that no one of Nicodemus’ position would want to openly and sincerely identify with a man with a reputation like this. Certainly, one from among the very hierarchy group that so strongly condemned Him would think twice before he made any move on His behalf. In addition, it was understood in many circles that if anyone identified with Jesus of Nazareth, so as to confess Him to be the Messiah, he would be put out of the Synagogue (John. 9:22).

On the other hand, those “birth pangs” in the soul of Nicodemus could not be easily ignored. In fact, they compelled him on one occasion to defend this Man of Galilee Who had turned their world upside down and was so obviously hated by the religious establishment (John 7:50). And finally, at the end of Jesus’ humiliation here on earth,

Nicodemus, along with Joseph of Arimathea, took the body of Jesus and prepared it for burial. Herein, John tells us this was the same Nicodemus who had come to Jesus by night some three years earlier. It is noteworthy to read this last reference to Nicodemus here in John 19:38–40:

And after these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a *secret one*, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate granted permission. He came therefore, and took away His body. And Nicodemus came also, who had first come to Him *by night*, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. And so they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

### *Scandalized*

It becomes obvious from all these slanders against Him that anyone placing his faith in Jesus of Nazareth was seriously jeopardizing his life and standing in much of society. On one occasion Jesus said publicly, “And blessed is he who is not *offended* in Me” (Matt. 11:6). This word translated “offended” in most Bibles is from the Greek word *scandalizo*, from which we get our modern English word—scandalized. What Jesus is saying is “Blessed are those who will not allow themselves to be *scandalized* by association with Me.” True believers should strengthen themselves and come to count it a blessing and a privilege to be identified with Jesus Christ. One very obvious reason the nonbelievers turned from Jesus is because they chose not to be *scandalized* by identity with Him. To believe in Jesus Christ, especially at that time, meant persecution. Later in the Roman world, where Christians stood against pagan idolatry for Christ’s sake, they suffered untold persecution and death.

And yet in the context of this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, we shall see that belief in Jesus as the Divine Son of God was now a key factor in being “born again.” Personal trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior was the “faith” that triggered God’s gracious gift of the new birth. What a blessing it is to see individuals today who are not ashamed of Jesus Christ. But this passage illustrates that each person needs to “count the cost” of placing his faith in the Son of God. Persecution from this ungodly world for those who would serve Christ should make everyone think twice before becoming a Christian. However, such persecution should be counted as nothing when eternity is at stake.

### *“Rabbi, we know . . . .”*

The very first words out of the mouth of Nicodemus are very revealing as far as stating the realization of the religious rulers of Israel in their apostate condition—

Rabbi, *we know* that You are a teacher come from God;  
for no man can do those things which You have done  
unless God is with him (John 3:2).

This is a notable admission on the part of Nicodemus. He did not say “*I know* that You are a teacher come from God.” Rather, he speaks what all those in leadership knew

by virtue of the miraculous deeds Christ had recently performed in the Temple area. In the previous chapter of John we are told of the ministry of Christ in the Temple area during the Passover (John 2:13–25). Christ drew the hatred and animosity of the leaders by casting the money changers out of the immediate Temple area. It is noteworthy that Jesus did this on two different occasions, once at the beginning of His ministry and once at the conclusion (Matt. 21:12, 13). He severely rebuked them for their ungodly contamination of the Temple area through such merchandising. However, the text also says Jesus performed many “signs” which caused many people to believe in Him (John 2:23). It was these “sign” miracles that Nicodemus makes reference to. He knew, as did *all the other leaders* that these signs were the credentials of Jesus’ true and genuine ministry from God. And yet the fact that most of these leaders still rejected Christ is astonishing. Their hearts were clearly hardened. Thank God, there was an obvious difference in the heart of Nicodemus who wanted to know more.

*Unless one is born again. . .*

Jesus gets right to the heart of the essential matter. There may be great conflicts and various issues in religion, but what anyone and everyone needs is simply a new birth. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is *born again*, he cannot see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3). There it is, clear and simple; the only way anyone could ever expect to be in God’s domain of salvation and life, he must be “born again.” That seems simple enough. We all know what natural birth is, but what exactly does it mean to be “born again”? What exactly is this second birth Christ speaks of and why is it necessary??

Many people in high society and good upbringing could easily be offended by Christ’s demand that they need to be “born again.” Self-righteous religionists might recoil and think inwardly, “What is wrong with my first birth?” Obviously, Christ is saying that one’s natural birth into the human family, no matter his pedigree or upbringing, is not good enough to get him into God’s Kingdom. Every person, by virtue of his sin nature, is only qualified for Hell. It makes no difference who the person is or what is his particular religious discipline. Thankfully, Nicodemus knew this basic truth of the natural sinfulness of man from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Nicodemus asks what this means—“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (v. 4). Nicodemus realizes that this is a literal impossibility. The NASB captures the fact that it is a rhetorical question with a negative answer—“He (an old man) cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” Therefore, Nicodemus is asking for an explanation about this second birth. The next four verses contain Christ’s explanation—

Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God (v. 5).

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (v. 6).

Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again,” (v. 7) the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone having been born of the Spirit (v. 8).’

## *Major Mistranslation*

Here is where the Devil stepped in to bring confusion to the words which Christ used. He did this in great subtlety. One of the most dastardly translations of verse 5 was, no doubt, designed of the Devil to cause a lot of misunderstanding. For the English speaking world it originated in the first English translation made by the Roman Catholic Church called the Douay, or the Rheims Douay, back in 1609, just before the King James Version came out. They primarily translated from the Latin Vulgate and rendered verse 5 this way—

Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born ***again***  
of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the  
kingdom of God. (Bold emphasis, mine.)

In the Greek text the word for “again” *is not there*, and should not be placed there because it changes the meaning of Christ’s answer. The effect of adding that word in that particular place was to make the whole statement—“born of water and the Spirit”—the second birth of which Christ is speaking. This intentional insertion of the word “again” was designed to make the statement of Christ conform to the Roman Catholic doctrine of “water-baptismal regeneration.” They want the “water” as part of the second birth. And this error has been parroted by other denominations until this present time. For instance, I have heard preachers in such denominations as the so-called “Churches of Christ” make reference to this passage as saying, “unless a man be born ***again*** of water and the Spirit.” Now everyone should understand this is not at all what Christ said. Notice very carefully the following facts.

In reality, there are *two births* stated or implied in each verse—3 through 7.

In verse 3, by the words “born again,” Christ is saying a second birth is necessary.

In verse 4, Nicodemus, in effect, is asking, “the second birth could not be a repeat of the natural birth process of entering his mother’s womb and being reborn, could it?”

In verse 5, Christ is directly answering him by saying, whereas the first birth is by the natural birth process of the mother’s “water,” yet the second is “by the Holy Spirit” of God. In other words there are *two births* in this verse as well, one by the agency of water (as in the natural birth process) and one by the agency of the Holy Spirit in the Divine process. I will establish this more surely as we move along.

In verse 6, Christ gives further explanation by saying, “That which is flesh is flesh,” meaning that the first natural birth of water only produces another fleshly person. In contrast, by the words “that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit,” He meant that the second birth is only by the Holy Spirit of God and produces a new spiritual nature. Note in this verse that Christ did NOT say, “that which is born of the water and Spirit is Spirit,” but simply and singularly, “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” This means that “Spirit” in the previous verse (v. 5) is the second birth.

In verse 7, Christ repeats the initial demand for a second birth—“You must be born again.” So it is clear that there are two births in each of these verses 3 through 7. Verse 5 is not combining “water and Spirit” for the second birth as in the Roman Catholic false translation.

In verse 8 we actually have the “clinch” in demonstrating that the second birth has nothing whatsoever to do with “water.” Notice again how Christ illustrates the *second* birth—

The *wind* blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it,  
but do not know where it comes from and where it is going;  
so is everyone having been **born of the Spirit**.

Nothing that has to do with “water” illustrates or characterizes the second birth, but rather, “wind.” Wind, of course, is the essential meaning of the Greek word for spirit. The Greek word *pneuma* primarily denotes wind or breath and is also used of the Holy Spirit of God. Since the second birth is spiritual, Christ uses the “wind” as its illustration. The wind, like the Holy Spirit, is invisible to our eyes, except for seeing or hearing the effects of the wind as it moves through the trees. So it is with the new birth by the Spirit; it is invisible to our eyes and ears. However, like the effect of the wind, we can see and often recognize the change that takes place in a person’s life.

Again, it is important to note that Christ does NOT say—“so is everyone born of the water and the Spirit.” The second birth is only “*of the Spirit*.” We should recognize that this is Christ’s commentary on verse 5 so that it could not be misunderstood.

### *Water Baptism Eliminated*

The most common interpretation of the passage above by Christendom is that Christ is somehow talking about the regenerating power of ceremonial water baptism. This is the fable of Roman Catholicism and many of her daughter denominations.

This interpretation is impossible in this passage, or anywhere else in the Scriptures. First of all, we have shown that the idea of combining “water and the Spirit” with the second birth is done by their false translation of verse 5. This translation, by the way, traces all the way back to Jerome’s official Latin Vulgate, made for the “Imperial Church” of the fourth century.

Second, the words “born” and “baptism” are not synonyms, but antonyms. That is, they mean the *opposite* of each other. To be “born” means to “issue forth.” The word “baptism” means just the opposite—“to dip, plunge or immerse.”

To place the idea of “baptism” throughout this passage would show how stupid is the thinking that Christ is talking about a religious ritual. If your religious group thinks and insists that “born” means “baptism,” then just translate the passage that way—

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is BAPTIZED AGAIN,  
he cannot see the Kingdom of God.  
Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be BAPTIZED  
when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s  
womb and be BAPTIZED, can he?”  
Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is  
BAPTIZED of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom  
of God. That which is BAPTIZED of the flesh is flesh, and that  
which is BAPTIZED of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that  
I said to you, ‘You must be BAPTIZED again.’”

The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it,  
but do not know where it comes from and where it is going;  
so is everyone who is BAPTIZED of the Spirit.”

Most anyone can see that placing “baptism” in this passage would cause all kinds of contradictions and insurmountable problems.

### *Natural child birth vs. Supernatural child birth*

It has long been known that the most natural explanation of this passage is that Christ is simply contrasting natural child birth with the Supernatural child birth. Even scholars within the Roman Catholic Church admit to this. For instance, one of the most famous scholars of all in that organization of recent times is Raymond E. Brown, who has written prolifically on New Testament issues. Back in 1967 he represented the Roman Catholic scholarship in ecumenical efforts with the Lutherans. He made the first presentation in the booklet, *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, II, One Baptism for the remission of Sins*. On page 13 he makes several emphatic statements on the subject of interpreting John 3. First of all, he points out that the idea of placing the word “again” in verse 5 is from the “Latin tradition of translating John,” whereas, “the Greek has no ‘again.’” Then he states, “The evangelist [John] was not concerned with the problems that divided Calvin and Trent, i.e., a baptism in water vs. a spiritual baptism. The evangelist [John] was *contrasting natural birth and a begetting from above by God.*” (Emphasis mine.) This is an accurate admission.

The “water” mentioned in verse 5 is simply the water of natural child birth. In the physiology of the human body, the baby is contained in what is called to this very day “the Bag of Waters” until the time of its birth. It is further common knowledge and experience that at the climax of the mother’s labor the water is said “to break” and the channel for the baby’s delivery is lubricated. Even in the Scriptures, God speaks of the ocean waters in original creation, by metaphor, as bursting forth as “from the womb.” (See the book of Job, 38:8 and 29.)

Actually three times in this passage of John 3:1–8 Christ speaks of being “born of the Spirit.” The first time is in verse 5 with the words “Except a man be born of water *and the Spirit.*” The last two times Christ used this expression He leaves off the water. Verse 6, “that which is *born of the Spirit* is spirit.” And again in verse 8, “so is everyone having been *born of the Spirit.*” It is obvious that in verses 6 and 8 the words “born of the Spirit” are the equivalent of being “born again” in verses 3 and 7. Being born of the “water and the Spirit” is therefore simply a statement of the contrast between the two births. One is a natural water birth, whereas the other is the supernatural birth of the Spirit of God. Being “born of the Spirit” is undeniably being “born again.”

It is a physiological and linguistic fact that the two expressions Christ uses in this passage—“born of water” (v.5) and “born of flesh” (v.6)— are exact parallels and complementary to each other. Note the following parallel:

Verse 5, “Except a man be	<i>born of water</i>	and	(born of) <i>the Spirit</i> ”
Verse 6, “That which is	<i>born of the flesh</i>	and	<i>born of the Spirit</i> ”
	Natural Birth		Supernatural Birth

Even with this clear explanation, some antagonists to the truth have stubbornly insisted that Christ would not have said, “Unless one is born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God,” (v. 5) unless both elements are needed for entrance into God’s Kingdom! This, of course, is not taking into proper perspective the words of Christ to Nicodemus. Christ is answering in verse 5 Nicodemus’ confusion in verse 4. Nicodemus asks if the second birth was another physical birth which would require the reentrance into his mother’s womb to be born. What Christ is saying is that the first birth of “water” from the mother’s womb, i.e., natural child birth, is not enough to get him into God’s Kingdom. There must be a second spiritual birth to get into that Kingdom!

### *No Need to Spiritualize the Water*

Some Protestant interpreters, who realize Christ is not talking about water baptism in this context, will nevertheless try to “Spiritualize the Water” in order to find an explanation for it aside from natural child birth. However, whenever a Scripture text makes common sense as it literally stands, there is never a need to try to “spiritualize” certain elements in order to make it understandable some other way. Nevertheless, some therefore say the “water” here means the cleansing power of the Word of God. They will quote passages like John 15:3 where Christ spoke of the disciples being “clean through the Word.” Now, it is true that the Word of God cleanses, but it could never be proven that this is what Christ is herein talking about to Nicodemus.

The same would apply to others who quote 1 Peter 1:23 which says, “For you have been born again, not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God.” They would say that since our new birth is by the Word of God, the “water” in John 3 represents the Word of God. Now it is true that we are born again by the message contained in the Word of God, but it could never be proven that Christ means “the Word of God” by the use of “water” in John 3. That would be a mere supposition that is really not needed, nor does it fit the context of John 3 where Christ is talking about a *spiritual* birth in contrast to the *natural* child birth.

### *The New Birth is Common to all Ages*

Nicodemus responded with a further exclamation, “How can these things be?” (verse 9). He had obviously never heard this exact terminology used before nor did the idea of a new birth fully register in his understanding. It has been observed before that it is amazing what you don’t learn in many of men’s religious schools. The reason for this is that spiritual truth is ultimately conveyed by God only to those whose hearts are right with Him and not merely to those clothed in scholasticism. In this case, Christ actually gave what amounted to an embarrassing rebuke to Nicodemus—“Are you a teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?” (Verse 10.) This would be like saying to one of our modern theologians—“You mean you are an instructor of Biblical doctrine and don’t know this basic fact?” It is very important for us to understand that the New Birth can be understood from the Hebrew Scriptures.

I, myself, was one time rebuked as a younger preacher for not knowing that the new birth is common to all the ages. I know that this is a very misunderstood truth. Allow me to give the following reasons why the new birth is common to all ages—

1.) The very fact that Christ would issue such a rebuke to Nicodemus is the first important reason we know that the truth and reality of the New Birth is common to all ages. If Christ was giving new revelation which had never been understood before, then He would certainly not have grounds for rebuking Nicodemus for not knowing about it. However, Christ is herein telling us that one who is a teacher of the Jewish people should most certainly have known about this. This means that the truth was known, understood and experienced in past ages. We will turn in a moment to the evidence from the Hebrew Scriptures of a spiritual birth into the family of God.

2.) We must remember that Christ's conversation with Nicodemus, as recorded for us in John 3, was long before the Day of Pentecost when the Church was born. Christ was telling Nicodemus about the salvation of his soul right then and there "on the spot." Christ never told him he had to wait until Pentecost to get "born again." In fact, in verse 8 Christ speaks of the evidence of the new birth using the *past tense in the Greek*—"The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going; so is everyone *HAVING BEEN* born again."

3.) It should also be observed that verses 12 and 13, in the very first chapter of John, say very plainly that all those who "received" Christ during His earthly ministry "*were born of God,*" and "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, *who were born,* not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Again, note that in the Greek this is in the past tense. So it is that during Christ's ministry all who put their faith and trust in Him *were*, in fact, "born of God."

4.) In addition, since Christ very plainly stated twice in John 3 that "Unless a man is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God," we therefore conclude that the only way a person can see the Kingdom of God was by the new birth. Later Christ says to those rulers who had rejected Him—"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see ABRAHAM, and ISAAC, and JACOB, and all the PROPHETS, IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, and you yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:28). This must mean that all the saints of the Hebrew Scriptures were, in fact, "born again," since they will see the Kingdom of God.

5.) Of course, we must understand that this was also true of all the Apostles and believers who were saved under the ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and those ministering the gospel before Pentecost. The only reason the believers had to wait until Pentecost was for the promised "baptism of the Holy Spirit," not the new birth! 1 John 5:1 and 5 says, "One who believes that Jesus is the Christ IS born of God," and "One who believes that Jesus is the Son of God IS born of God." The Apostles and disciples believed both of these things long before Pentecost as illustrated in Matt. 16:16.

6.) Now here are a few of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves that clearly indicate a new birth had transpired among the believers of past ages—they are repeatedly regarded as God's own "*children,*" even His "*sons and daughters.*" On the other hand, and in contrast, the wicked were often regarded as "*children, sons or daughters* of Belial." In both cases these words are descriptive of a spiritual family relationship.

Deut. 32:5 Note, "His (Jehovah's) *children.*"

Deut 32:6 Note, "is not He (Jehovah) *thy Father?*"

Deut 32:18 Note, “the Rock (Jehovah) *that begat thee.*”  
 Deut. 32:19 Note, “the provoking of His (Jehovah’s) *sons and daughters.*”  
 Deut. 32:20 Note, “*Children* in whom is no faith.”  
 Psalm 82:6 Note, “*Ye are the Children of the Most High.*”  
 Psalm 103:13 Note, “As a Father pitieth his *Children.*”  
 Proverbs 3:11, 12 Note, “. . . even as *a Father, the son* in whom he delights.”  
 Isa. 1:2 Note, “I (Jehovah) have brought up *children.*”  
 Isa. 43:6 Note, “*My son, My daughter.*”  
 Isa. 63:8 Note, “*Children* that will not lie.”  
 Isa. 63:16 Note, “Doubtless, Thou art *our Father.*”  
 Jer. 3:4 Note, “cry unto Me, ‘*My Father.* . . .”  
 Jer. 3:19 Note, “Thou shalt call Me, ‘*My Father.*’”  
 Hosea 1:10 Note, “Ye are *the sons of the living God.*”  
 Malachi 2:10 Note, “have we not *one Father?*”

7.) Please keep in mind that all these passages, which state the “*sonship*” of the saints of old and their being the “children of God,” must of necessity imply their new birth into God’s family just as was true during Christ’s own ministry on earth—“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become *children of God*, even to them who believe in His name, *who were born* not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12, 13).

The New Birth, therefore, is not limited to one dispensation of time. It was truly common to all ages. Nor should the “new birth” be confused with the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” which began on Pentecost at the beginning of this present dispensation. Many have mistakenly thought that since the Holy Spirit was said to “come upon them” at the time of Pentecost as promised by Christ, that therefore the Holy Spirit was not in their lives until Pentecost. This is erroneous. For instance, John the Baptist was said to be “filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). Yet John was not “baptized by the Holy Spirit,” which is peculiar to this present Age of Grace. There are different works and manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is how God forms “the Church which is Christ’s body” during this age. During this age the baptism of the Holy Spirit happens at the same time one is “born again,” yet these are two different works performed by the Spirit of God. The one has to do only with the Spirit’s work of regeneration placing the individual into God’s family, whereas the baptism of the Holy Spirit has to do with placement of those saved into the organization of the “Church which is Christ’s body” (1 Cor. 12:13).

### *Was the Apostle Peter Born Again?*

This may sound like a very odd question to ask. Everyone knows Peter, as an apostle in the Church of Jesus Christ, must have been born again. So why would I ask such a question?

A number of years ago I was engaging a preacher from the so-called “Church of Christ” in a public joint discussion. Now they believe and teach that being born again did not happen until the Church began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. They teach that the “new birth” Christ spoke of in John 3 was a new plan of salvation by a new water baptism which did not begin until Acts 2. They teach that from Pentecost on no one could

get saved or enter into the kingdom of God except by water baptism. That is their hard and fast doctrine. They believe that Peter first preached this plan of salvation to the audience there in the Temple area on that day as recorded in Acts 2. We all know from reading Acts 1 and 2 that the apostles were waiting in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit which indeed happened in Acts 2. We are told by these teachers that when the people at the Feast heard a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind and then the disciples speaking in tongues, Peter immediately began preaching to them this new plan of salvation by water baptism for the first time. So I asked this preacher, publicly, if the apostle Peter, himself, and all the other apostles and disciples who had just received the Holy Spirit had themselves been “born again” by this new baptism. Now it just so happens that the record of Acts 2 says nothing whatsoever about Peter, the other apostles and other disciples getting water baptized on the Day of Pentecost.

The preacher knew this was an embarrassing question that they really could not answer, so he refused to answer it each night of this discussion. And I brought up the question every time I spoke. The apostles are the very foundation of the Church and there is no indication whatsoever that they were ever water baptized with this so-called new plan of salvation that first began on the Day of Pentecost. Finally, on the last night during his last speech, knowing I would have no opportunity to respond to any kind of an answer that he might give, he simply stated the following—

“Now as to that question that Mr. Langford has been asking me every night during this discussion (and the whole audience sat on the edges of their seats in anticipation of his answer), I will simply say, ‘the secret things belong to the Lord.’”

Of course, the whole audience, even his own people, roared with laughter.

Their false doctrine of water baptismal regeneration, which they teach was first preached on the Day of Pentecost by the apostle Peter, may have been good for all the rest of the people, but it obviously leaves out the very foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ. How did the foundation of the Church—all the apostles, prophets and disciples—get saved or into the kingdom of God? They were never said to have been water baptized with this new plan of salvation. Consequently, their theologians have come up with some pretty ridiculous ideas as to how the apostles themselves got into the kingdom of God.

Some say the baptism of John was good enough for all the early believers. Of course, if that is the case, and John’s baptism put all the early believers into the body of Christ, then they didn’t need another water baptism to do the same thing! They could just keep on observing John’s water baptism.

Others, realizing the weakness and inconsistency of that argument, just say that all the apostles and early believers didn’t need the new water baptism; they were just “set in the body of Christ.” And they quote a part of 1 Corinthians 12: 18 (KJV). Now it just so happens that 1 Cor. 12:18 actually states, “But now has God set the members *every one of them* in the body, as it has pleased Him.” So according to this passage everyone gets into the body of Christ the same way. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, bond or free, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” So, all believers get set into the body of Christ the same way—by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

And others of them, like the preacher I had the discussion with, don't even try to answer the question. Their own false doctrine on this important issue is the reason they have such inconsistencies.

Of course, the answer to the question is simple. Yes, the apostle Peter, and all the others saved before Pentecost were "born again," because the New Birth is not by some religious ritual of water baptism! Simply put, it is the work of God performed today when the repentant soul places his faith in Jesus Christ! Thank God! The new birth is not by some new baptism in water.

### *How to be Born Again—*

"But as many *as received Him*, to them He gave the right to become ***children of God***, even to those who *believe in His name*, who ***were born*** not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but ***of God***" (John 1:12–13).

According to this passage there is no religious catechism given to the applicant for salvation, no rules and doctrine to learn, and no ritual to submit to. The new birth does not take place by means of some human fleshly ritual of man's religious endeavor or discipline. It is solely and purely the work of God performed in the life of the one who "believes" in Jesus Christ. "As many as receive Him" (Jesus Christ) have in effect met God's requirement for obtaining entrance into the family of God.

This was further elaborated on by Jesus Christ, Himself, that night with Nicodemus—

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever *believes in Him* should not perish, but have ***eternal life***. For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, But that the world through Him should be ***saved***. He who *believes in Him is not judged*; but he who does not believe has been judged already, because he does not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16–18).

The apostle John later adds confirmation to the simplicity of this truth—

"Whosoever *believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God*: and every one that loves Him that begat loves him that is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1).

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation,  
which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord,  
and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him"  
(Hebrews 2:3).

THE END