

# DO YOU *REALLY* WANT TO BE "BORN AGAIN"?

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again"

--John 3:7

Undoubtedly Nicodemus was startled. The emphatic and penetrating statements of Christ had raised issues that had not previously engaged his attention. Yet, really, he ought not to have been so shaken and bewildered. Thus Christ's gently rebuking, "*Marvel not.*"

We say this was a gentle rebuke for after further explaining the process of this new birth (v. 8), He responds to the dullness of Nicodemus (v.9) in much sharper terms:

**"Jesus answered and said unto him, ART THOU A MASTER OF ISRAEL, AND KNOWEST NOT THESE THINGS?**

**"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and YE RECEIVE NOT OUR WITNESS" (John 3:10-12).**

Before we think too poorly of Nicodemus, however, we should reflect upon the fact that this very subject is still one that eludes the grasp of most today. Although the term "*born again*" has come into popular usage, who can deny that its Scriptural meaning and significance has been almost totally lost and unnoticed.

The basic issue involved in the new birth is not *reformation*, nor is it *religion*; the basic issue is the doctrine of *regeneration*. This is clear from Christ's words to Nicodemus in John 3:5,6,

**"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."**

Notice how careful the Lord is to define the *character* of the new birth: It is not the reformation of the outward man, nor the education of the natural man, nor the purification of the old man for "*that which is born of the flesh is flesh.*" Rather it is the Spirit of God giving birth to a new life--a divine life and nature. It is partaking of the Divine nature (II Pet. 1:4). Simply put, it is being *born of God*--"*that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*"

## A COMMON DOCTRINE

Regeneration--i.e., being "*born of the Spirit*"--is a doctrine associated in Scripture with God's dealings *both* with the nation Israel *and* the Body of Christ. In fact, the word itself is found only twice in the Bible, once in relation to Israel's program and once in reference to the Body of Christ.

The first occurrence is found in Matthew 19:28, where Christ is speaking to His Apostles:

**"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, IN THE REGENERATION when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."**

Notice carefully the wording here: *"In the regeneration WHEN the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory."* This is a *future* regeneration associated with the time when Christ sits on "the throne of His glory." Regeneration, then, for Israel is clearly a part of her kingdom program and hope.

The second occurrence is from the pen of the Apostle Paul:

**"But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared. 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" (Tit. 3:4,5).**

Obviously the doctrine of regeneration is a spiritual truth which plays an integral part in God's purpose for *both* Israel's future kingdom program and the current administration of grace. Thus we must be careful to distinguish the dual applications of this doctrine.

## A CONTRASTING APPLICATION

Too often the true significance of John 3:7 is overlooked due to a failure to appreciate its usage of the second person pronouns *"thee"* and *"ye."* Notice the verse carefully:

**"Marvel not that I said unto THEE, YE must be born again."**

To the modern reader this may seem unimportant since most of us do not so readily understand the significance of the "thee, thou, ye, you" contrasts in our Bible. A bit of investigation, however, on this point will yield great rewards.

*"Thee, thou"* and *"ye, you"* are respectively the singular and plural forms of the second person pronoun. While our modern English uses the pronoun "you" for *both* singular and plural, the older English was able to distinguish between singular (thee, thou) and plural (ye, you). Thus "thee, thou" refers to an *individual* while "ye, you" refers to a *group*. This same distinction is made in many modern languages and, more importantly, is used by the Greek language of the New Testament.

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**1. This explains why God is *never* addressed in the Bible by the word "you." There is *one* God and *He* is always to be addressed in the singular. Thus the use of the grave style in addressing God in prayer is not simply a matter of reverence or respect--it is also a simple matter of grammar!**

**2. As an aside, it is interesting to observe that one of the very things often used to complain against the *King James Bible* is in reality a tremendously helpful study aid! Try it in other passages, such as Matt. 16:18,19; 18:18, Luke 22:31-34, etc.**

Thus our Lord was, in fact, saying to Nicodemus "Marvel not that I say unto THEE [i.e., Nicodemus], YE [i.e., the nation Israel] must be born again."

In light of this, we should look carefully at Israel's history: As a nation, Israel was born the *first* time when God led them out of Egypt. Two passages that make this very clear are Ex. 4:22 and Deut. 32:18. In the former, God declares Israel to be His "first *born*" and thus Moses later rebuked them:

**"OF THE ROCK THAT BEGAT THEE thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee."**

The Exodus from Egypt marks the *birth of the nation Israel* and stands as the great declaration of God's purpose for that specially favored people. Paul alludes to this in I Cor. 10:1,2:

**"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, now that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;  
"And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."**

They were "*baptized unto Moses*" and born as a nation. It is almost humorous--tragically so--to hear Moses "arguing" with the Lord over His rebellious people, saying,

**"...Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favor in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?  
"HAVE I CONCEIVED ALL THIS PEOPLE? HAVE I BEGOTTEN THEM..."  
(Num 11:11, 12).**

The point to notice here is that Moses clearly acknowledged that it was *God* who had conceived and given birth to this nation. They were *His!* And we are not left to wonder about His purpose for them:

**"And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;  
"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.  
"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:  
"And YE SHALL BE UNTO ME A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS, AND AN HOLY NATION. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel"  
(Ex. 19:3-6).**

God gave birth to a nation which was to be a holy nation, "*a kingdom of priests*." They were to be the agency and channel through whom His salvation and blessing was to be carried to "all the nations of the earth." This was what He had promised Abraham, when He had said:

**"And I WILL MAKE OF THEE A GREAT NATION, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:**

**"And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and IN THEE SHALL ALL FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED" (Gen 12:2,3).**

This was the hope set before them through the prophets He sent to them. For example, Isaiah declares,

**"But YE SHALL BE NAMED THE PRIEST OF THE LORD: MEN SHALL CALL YOU THE MINISTERS OF OUR GOD: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves" (Isa. 61:6).**

We do not have to read the sacred page for long, however, to learn the obvious fact that Israel failed--failed miserably--to keep the covenant made with them through Moses. Because they did not keep the Law, they were under the curse of God. Thus it became necessary for God to bring the nation to birth again--through a new covenant and a *new* deliverer, "greater than Moses."

Jer. 31:31-34 teaches that God was to make a "new covenant" with Israel, one which would provide *regeneration* and forgiveness of sin for the nation. When this new covenant is realized, it will issue in *spiritual regeneration* and a resultant *physical restoration* for the national people of Israel. As it were, the nation will be *born in a day* (Isa. 66:8).

It was to this *prophesied rebirth of the nation* that our Lord pointed Nicodemus in John 3 and which he was so painfully unable to comprehend. *Notice once again how the Lord used the "thou--ye" contrast as He responded to Nicodemus' dullness:*

**"...Art THOU a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?  
"Verily, verily I say unto THEE, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and YE receive not our witness" (vs. 10,11).**

Sadly, even the very teachers and leaders of God's favored people could not see the nation's true condition and need! Israel had lived under the Mosaic Covenant for nearly 1500 years and had failed to meet their end of the agreement over and over again. Their continued rebellion had led God to allow their deportation and captivity in Babylon so that the land, at least, could have its rest (II Chron. 36:20-21). It was during this time of captivity that Jeremiah had written about the "*new covenant*" through which God would provide *regeneration* and *restoration* for Israel.

This was also the time of Ezekiel and his prophecies concerning the future regeneration of Israel--a regeneration which would result in the glorious physical restoration of Israel and ultimately the whole earth. In fact, our Lord's words in John 3:5 seem certain to have Ezek. 36:25-30 in mind--a passage clearly describing the Divine preparation of Israel for her kingdom.

Also, in light of our Lord's words to Nicodemus in John 3:14, it is instructive to note that Psalms 22--a Psalm clearly associated with His being "lifted up"--concludes where *John 3 begins*:

"For the kingdom is the Lord's and he is the governor among the nations.

**"A SEED SHALL SERVE HIM; it shall be accounted to the Lord FOR A GENERATION.**

**"They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto A PEOPLE THAT SHALL BE BORN, that he hath done this (Psa. 22:28,30,31).**

The *infancy stage* of this "born again" nation is to be found among Christ's followers. He had promised them:

**"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).**

Thus we are not surprised to find the Apostle Peter later writing to the believers who comprised this "little flock,"

**"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath BEGOTTEN US AGAIN unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"**

**"BEING BORN AGAIN, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (I Peter 1:3, 23).**

And there can be no doubt as to the hope and calling of those who had thus been born again for he goes on to identify them:

**"But YE ARE A CHOSEN GENERATION, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, AN HOLY NATION, A PECULIAR PEOPLE; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9).**

The new birth spoken of by the Lord Jesus in John 3 is a reference to the future birth of the nation Israel when she is to be spiritually cleansed and then possess her land forever. But what about the Body of Christ and the believer today? If the new birth refers to the future hope of the nation Israel, do saved individuals today experience a new birth or does God have something else for them? Remember: *both* Israel and the Body of Christ are regenerated--but into what?

There can be no doubt that today when a person places faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior--when you rely exclusively on what Jesus Christ did for you at Calvary when He died to pay for your sins and was raised as the author of eternal life to those who trust Him; when you trust Christ today, that very moment God the Holy Spirit imparts His life to you.

Thus Paul declares:

**"And YOU HATH HE QUICKENED, WHO WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS'**

**"EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN SINS, [GOD] HATH QUICKENED US TOGETHER WITH CHRIST (by grace are ye saved)" (Eph 2:1, 5).**

We are therefore said to be *"His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus"* (Eph 2:10). But just what is it God is creating today? Eph. 2:15,16 spell it out clearly:

**"Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for TO MAKE IN HIMSELF OF TWAIN ONE NEW MAN, so making peace;**

**"And that he might RECONCILE BOTH UNTO GOD IN ONE BODY by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby."**

This is the *"new creation"* which God is forming during the dispensation of grace. God has temporarily set aside the nation Israel and His program for her (Rom. 11:11-15) in order to form *another* agency (Eph. 2:11-16) through whom He will accomplish a purpose which He planned *"before the world began."* This *other* purpose is called *"the mystery"* because He kept it secret--*"hid in God"* (Eph. 3:9)--until He revealed it to that *other* apostle, the Apostle Paul. It is summed up in the words of Eph. 2:7:

**"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."**

Today God is creating a new species of humanity--*"neither Jew nor Gentile."* Just as Adam was not *born* but was rather *created*, so we go from the *old creation* into the *new creation* as we go from Adam into Christ!

To sum up: Regeneration is associated with God's program for *both* Israel and the Body of Christ. Regeneration for a *Jew in the kingdom program* made him a part of a *born again nation*. Regeneration for a *person in the dispensation of grace* makes him a part of the Body of Christ, a *new creation*.

## A CONCLUDING QUESTION

Every person reading this article was born into this world spiritually dead in sins, "alienated from the life of God." The question is: Have *you* been regenerated? Have you passed from spiritual death to spiritual life by placing your faith in the finished work of Christ? If not, do so *now*!

**"BUT GOD COMMENDETH HIS LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT, WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US" (Rom. 5:8).**

**"BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED" (Acts 16:31).**