

# Born of the Spirit

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

## **THE WORDS OF OUR TEXT**

were addressed by Jesus to Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came to the Master by night for the purpose of learning more about him and his teachings. The text calls our attention to another feature of the Divine plan, which is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, or power, of God—namely, that those who are to live and reign with Christ in the kingdom which is to bless all the families of the earth, must first of all be ‘born’ (Greek, begotten) into a new life. Jesus used the invisible power of the wind as an illustration of one of the characteristics of that new life—“So is every one that is born of the Spirit.”—John 3:8

Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus meant by being ‘born of the Spirit.’ He asked, “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (vs. 4) Jesus explained, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (vs. 6) It is doubtful if Nicodemus understood this explanation. It conveys to us the fact

that the thought of birth in connection with the new life that Jesus is discussing is used in a symbolic sense. It is not, as Nicodemus suggested, a case of entering again into a mother's womb to be literally born the second time.

Here, as the case so frequently is in the Bible, a figure of speech is used to help us understand a great truth. The word born, or birth, instantly conjures up in our minds the idea of a new life. So Jesus is saying that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, some were to experience a new birth, meaning simply that they were to attain to a new life—a life so unlike the one that is 'born of the flesh' that those who are born into it will be both invisible and powerful. Since these are born by the Holy Spirit, or power of God, they become spiritual "sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, . . . we shall be like him [Jesus]; for we shall see him as he is."—I John 3:2

While the birth of the Spirit does not involve the necessity of entering literally into a mother's womb to be born again, the metaphor is carried out with considerable detail by the various writers of the New Testament, as they refer to this aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in the hearts and lives of the LORD's consecrated believers. Unfortunately, our English translations of the Bible, in most instances, fail to present clearly what the writers had in mind. This has led to the erroneous view that one can be born of the Spirit while still in the flesh. Out of this error has come the expression, 'born-again Christians.'

Sometimes, in discussions, when a person is at a loss to think of a word that expresses exactly what he wishes to say, the remark is made, "The Greeks

have a word for it.” But this is far from being true with respect to classical, or New Testament, Greek. A case in point is in connection with the matter of being born again. In the English language, we have two words that describe the coming into being of a new life—‘begettal’ and ‘birth.’ But in the Greek language there is only one word to describe both the begettal or birth. That word is *gennao*. When used by Jesus and the apostles, one has to determine by the context whether begettal or birth is referred to, or whether or not what is meant is the complete process of bringing into existence a new life.

It is the Greek word *gennao* that is used in Matthew 1:1-16 where the genealogy of Jesus is given. “Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren,” the record states. The word ‘begat’ is used in this account in all thirty-nine times, and in every instance it is properly translated by our English word begat. Obviously in this instance begat is the correct translation. How odd it would sound, and how untrue, to say that “Abraham born Isaac”!

The Greek word *gennao* is used twice, and is translated both ‘born’ and ‘begotten.’ The text reads, “We know that whosoever is born of God [that is, by his Holy Spirit] sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” (I John 5:18) To be consistent the translators should have used the word begotten in both these instances. The only apparent reason for not doing so seems to have been a desire to make the phraseology of the translation less repetitious.

## BEGOTTEN NOW—BORN IN THE RESURRECTION

If we consider the full value of the birth metaphor we are bound to reach the conclusion that in order to be born one must first be begotten. In other words, when a new life is to be brought into existence there must first be the begetting, then a period of gestation during which the embryo is nourished and developed, and thus prepared for birth in the 'due time.' So is the work of the Holy Spirit presented to us in the Scriptures. When Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again," he was speaking of the completed work of the Holy Spirit in giving a new, and higher, life to those who would devote themselves wholly to the doing of God's will. In the brief lesson to Nicodemus, Jesus did not go into detail to show that before one is born of the Spirit he must first be begotten of the Spirit. However, elsewhere in the New Testament these details are clearly set forth.

We read, "Of his [the Heavenly Father's] own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." (James 1:18) This is an important text, for not only does it show that a begetting takes place in the heart and mind of a Christian, but also that it is accomplished by God's 'will . . . with the word of truth.' In I Peter 1:23, we are given this same information. Here we read, "Being born [*gennao*, which should here be translated 'begotten'] again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

How clearly this sets forth the thought of begetting, for reference is made to the 'seed.' In the natural process of procreation, it is the begetting that is

accomplished by the seed, not the birth; so Peter here refers to the beginning of the new life, not to its completion in birth. The seed of begettal, he says, is 'the word of God.' Here again we have a most revealing statement.

We have learned that every word of God in the Scriptures is Spirit-inspired. The Old Testament prophecies were written by holy men of old as they were "moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Pet. 1:21) All of Jesus' teachings are the direct result of the illumination of his mind and heart by the Holy Spirit. The same is true of the apostolic writings. When Jesus referred to the coming of the Holy Spirit he described it as "the Spirit of truth." (John 15:26; 16:13) It is clear, then, that to be begotten by the Word of Truth means that one is begotten by the Holy Spirit.

This is an important fact, and to grasp it clearly will help to guard us against the notion entertained by many Christians who believe the Holy Spirit enters directly into the life of the believer, cleanses him from all sin, and makes it impossible that he should ever fall from grace. It is this erroneous view that leads to the mistaken suggestion, 'Once in grace, always in grace.'

James and Peter give us the true thought. It is that through the Word of Truth the beginning of a new life takes place in the mind and heart of a believer. But would not this mean that all who read the Word of God are begotten by the Holy Spirit? Not at all. Let us further consider the metaphor. All conditions must be right for the reception of the seed in order for begettal to take place. So it is in the case of Spirit begettal. Many read the Word

of God whose minds and hearts are not receptive to its life-giving truths; and while they may receive some comfort from its pages, and some instruction to help guide them in their daily tasks, they are not begotten to a new life.

## **FULL SURRENDER**

Full surrender to the Divine will and to the holy impulses of God's Word is the condition necessary in order to be truly receptive to the begetting power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of Truth. God's part in this wonderful arrangement whereby a few are to attain immortal life on the Divine plane, was the supplying of his Spirit-inspired Word—the seed. Unlike any previous exercise of his power, this aspect of his plan is accomplished by the power of his thoughts over the thoughts of the believer. Even with unlimited power at his command, the Creator will not invade the mind of another, and begin the development of a new mind, without the consent and invitation of the one involved.

Here is reflected one of the most wonderful characteristics of our Heavenly Father. When the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters in connection with the original creation and preparation of the earth for human habitation, it was an arbitrary exercise of his power, but not so in the begetting of those who are to live and reign with Christ. He exercised his power to fill his Word with his thoughts which express his will concerning these, and assures them that all needed guidance and help will be given them in order to know, and to do, his will. Then he has waited for the individual,

whom his providence has brought into contact with his Word, to voluntarily decide whether or not they will yield wholly and completely to his will as the Holy Spirit has expressed it through his Word.

In his precious Word, God has caused his Spirit to record many wonderful promises of “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) He has revealed that by these “exceeding great and precious promises” we can be made “partakers of the divine nature.” (II Pet. 1:4) The Holy Spirit inspired Jesus to say, “I go to prepare a place for you. . . . And . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”—John 14:2,3

As we study the Word, these promises come to our attention and we realize how wonderful they are. But at first we rejoice even more in the glorious provision God has made for the world of mankind, which Peter describes as “restitution.” We are happy for the realization that all God’s holy prophets since the world began foretold the “times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:19-21), and we look forward to being a part of the body of Christ.

We do not overlook the heavenly promises of the Bible, but we realize that to attain to the High Calling requires surrender and sacrifice. We come to realize through continued study of the Word that the way that leads to the heavenly Canaan is a “narrow,” difficult one. (Matt. 7:14) We hear Jesus say, “If any man will come after me [be my disciple], let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” (Matt. 16:24) We read Paul’s exhortation to present our bodies a “living sacrifice.” (Rom. 12:1) These conditions of the High Calling seem at

first difficult, so we may think it is better just to keep on enjoying the Truth of the Divine plan, and wait for the Kingdom Age when the “highway” to holiness and life will be opened, and then walk in that “way” to perfect and endless human life.—Isa. 35:8

But can one be entirely content with this condition? The great plan of God as revealed in his Word continues to increase our appreciation of its Divine Architect. His love in giving his Son to be our Redeemer, and the Redeemer and Savior of the whole world, calls forth from us an increasing love for him. The love of Christ, in suffering and dying that we might live, reaches deeper and deeper into our hearts. Like Paul, we begin to reason that since Christ “died for all, then were all dead;” and now that we can have life through his great sacrifice, we really belong to him. This being true, then we “should not henceforth live unto [ourselves]” but unto him, and unto the loving Heavenly Father who sent him to be the Savior of the world.—II Cor. 5:14,15

Jesus said that no one can come unto him unless drawn by his Heavenly Father. (John 6:44) It is largely through his Word that the Father draws us to Christ. His wonderful love revealed through his plan begins to tug at our hearts, but at first perhaps we say, “All of self, and none of thee.” However, this attitude soon gives place to, “Some of self and some of thee.” But this does not allow the begetting power of the Word of Truth to give us a hope of a new life. Nor can we be begotten of the Spirit through the Word when we have reached the measure of surrender in which we say to the Lord,



“Less of self, and more of thee.” Finally, by the power of the Truth reflecting as it does the great love of God, we reach the point of full surrender and, with the poet, pour out our hearts to God saying, “Lord, thy love at last has conquered: None of self, and all of thee.”

We have learned that as members of a sinful and dying race we are not acceptable to God in our own merit, but only through the merit of the atoning blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:13) But with faith in this wonderful provision of Divine grace, we present ourselves to God in full and unreserved consecration. We say to him that no longer do we want to do our will, but his; that henceforth we will endeavor to be fully controlled by the Spirit-inspired directives of his precious Word. Now all resistance to the influence of his thoughts over our lives is gone. His will has become the supreme rule of all our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Then we awaken to a marvelous realization! Having accepted the invitation to take up our cross and follow the Master, we know that all the ‘exceeding great and precious promises’ of God to those who thus become the disciples of his beloved Son now belong to us. Jesus said to the rich young ruler, that if he would give up all and follow him he would have treasure in heaven. (Matt. 19:21) The Master attached no provision to this assurance. He did not say that his Father would take the matter under advisement and possibly decide that the young man should be given treasure in heaven. If you follow me, this will be your reward, is the promise Jesus made to this young man who went to him asking how he might inherit eternal life.

So now with us, having complied with the LORD's invitation to surrender ourselves to him, to be directed by his Spirit-inspired Word, we know that the promises of his Word to those who meet this condition apply to us. Those inspiring promises of a heavenly home and of the Divine nature, instead of being as they were before, something apart from us, viewed merely as an interesting feature of the Divine plan, now become a life-giving influence in our lives. Through surrender to God, the seed begins at once to generate the hope of a new life. We are begotten of God by "the word of truth."—James 1:18

## **MIRACLE OF THE NEW LIFE**

Just as only God can make a tree, so all life is a miracle in that our finite minds cannot comprehend it. We witness the miracle of a newborn infant and we instinctively realize that actually the parents did not give life to that child. They simply complied with the conditions that God designed whereby the earth would eventually be filled with his human creatures. (Gen. 1:28) On a much higher level, this is true with respect to those who are begotten of God by the word of truth. It is among God's greatest miracles, in which it is our blessed privilege to cooperate.

Some miracles are accomplished almost instantaneously, others over a long period of time. When Jesus called to the dead brother of Martha and Mary, "Lazarus, come forth," and he who was dead "came forth," (John 11:43,44) it was a miracle performed in a short time. But the miracle of the Creation as displayed throughout the universe involved long

epochs of time for accomplishment. The miracle of Spirit-begetting and birth is also spread out over a long period of time.

Think of the time consumed in preparing the seed of begettal—that is, the Word of God. God's Spirit miraculously guided the writing of the Bible. Thousands of years were involved in thus recording the thoughts of God in a manner in which they could enter the human mind and heart, be pondered over and accepted or rejected at the option of the reader. God could directly fill the mind of a person with his thoughts, but how would anyone know that they came from God? Besides, how disconcerting it would be for one to discover that his mind was being filled with ideas other than in the normal manner. How wise are God's ways! The miracle-working power of God is operative in shaping the circumstances of one's life in preparation for entrance into the mind of the seed of begettal. How many have testified of experiences in life by which they have been prostrated and caused to long for an answer to the many questions that have arisen from their difficult problems of life. No one who is thoroughly satisfied with his lot in life is likely to pay any serious attention to the Word of God, especially those portions of the Word which speak of sacrifice and suffering as the disciples of Christ.

It is only when one realizes his need of help from God that he is likely to give consideration to the Word of God. God, in his infinite wisdom, and in the tenderness of his love, knows exactly the sort of experiences which will most effectively touch the heart of whom he desires to call, that the called one might give heed to his Word. This work of preparing

for Spirit begettal is miraculous, even as the preparation of the seed of begettal was by the Spirit of God. Every aspect of God's part in this feature of his plan was, and is, miraculous.

It remains only for us to yield our minds to the influence of the Spirit, and accept the will of God as revealed through his Word. There can be no Spirit begetting when one does not yield to the will of God. On the other hand, in the case of those who have been made receptive by circumstances of life that have been overruled by God for this purpose and, having studied the Word and voluntarily surrendered to the will of God as expressed therein, Spirit begetting is a certainty. All who are thus dealt with by God may claim the promises of 'glory and honour and immortality,' in the certain knowledge that if they continue faithful to the LORD, they will receive the "crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

In keeping with the figure of begettal and birth, the Scriptures reveal that the embryo new life develops, and that this also is accomplished by the Spirit of God through his Word. Our new spiritual minds feed upon the promises of God. The spiritual growth, if pleasing to God, must be in conformity to the Divine image. Thus the Spirit of God promotes growth of the Christian fruitage of peace, joy, long-suffering, and love. (Gal. 5:22; II Pet. 1:5-7) Paul gives us a beautiful description of this work of the Holy Spirit, saying, "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind; . . . put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."—Eph. 4:23,24

When the new life is developed to the point where it is ready for birth, our corruptible bodies go into

death, and the birth of the new life is accomplished by means of the resurrection. Here the Spirit, or power, of God is further exercised. Paul speaks of this mighty power that was used to raise Jesus from the dead. Or, to use the symbol we are discussing, to bring about his birth of the Spirit. He speaks of “the exceeding greatness of his [God’s] power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.”—Eph. 1:19,20

In speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus used the wind to help illustrate some of the characteristics of those who are born of the Spirit. The wind is both invisible and powerful. So will all those be who, having first of all been begotten by the Spirit through the Word of Truth, and who, by feeding upon the Word, continue to develop until they are made “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” (Col. 1:12) Divine power will exalt these to heavenly life. They will be given celestial, or heavenly, bodies; and if they have been more than conquerors they will live and reign “with Christ a thousand years.”—Rev. 5:10; 20:4

Not all of the Adamic race who will be saved through the blood of Christ will thus be born again. Jesus did not say to Nicodemus that it is necessary to be born again in order to be saved. What he said was that one had to be born again in order to see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3) The reference is, therefore, to those who will be associated with Jesus as rulers in the long-promised kingdom. In any kingdom, or government, there are the rulers and

the subjects. Jesus and his true disciples of the present age will be the rulers in the kingdom of God. These will then be born again. Jesus was the first to experience this great change of life from human to spirit. His disciples—his true church—experience this new birth in the “first resurrection” at the end of the age. (Rev. 20:5) Then God’s promises of restitution life, which is restored human life, will flow out to all the families of the earth.—John 3:14-16 ■