



# *Foundations of*

# FAITH

## The New Birth Lesson 14

A ruler of the Jews once said to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” The reply of Jesus to Nicodemus was, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Any birth which is essential to seeing or entering into the kingdom of God must be extremely important and warrants our careful study. This birth, usually called the new birth, is discussed in John 3:1-13. The student should read these verses at this time before proceeding further with this lesson.

**THE NATURE OF THE NEW BIRTH.** The question in the mind of Nicodemus when Jesus first mentioned the new birth was how it might be possible for a man to experience a second physical birth. When Jesus said, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” he showed that the new birth is spiritual rather than physical. But it is a birth because it changes our spiritual relationship just as a physical birth changes our physical relationship.

The new birth is only one birth, not two – not one of the water and another of the Spirit, but a single birth in which both the water and the Spirit have a part. It may clarify our understanding if we think of the water and the Spirit of the spiritual birth as corresponding to the mother and the father of the physical birth. Just as one cannot be born physically without both parents, so one cannot be born spiritually without both the water and the Spirit.

In the Greek language (in which the New Testament was written) there is but one word which is

variously translated in the English version as “beget” or “born”. Literally it means “to bring forth”. When applied to the father it is translated “beget”. (Matt. 1:2) When applied to the mother it is “born”. (Matt. 11:11) Sometimes in the King James Version “born” is used when “beget” would be more appropriate. Let us now examine the parts played respectively by the Spirit and the water.

**THE SPIRIT’S PART.** Briefly, the birth of the Spirit is the inward, spiritual change wrought by the Holy Spirit of God when the word is planted in the heart of man and believed. In birth two things are necessary – (1) begettal; (2) delivery. This is true in the animal and vegetable kingdoms and likewise in the spiritual realm. Notice the following passages from the American Standard Version which show that we are begotten of God: “Every one that loveth is **begotten** of God.” (1 John 4:7) “Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is **begotten** of God.” (1 John 5:1) “But as many as received him to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on 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)

This begettal is accomplished through the planting of seed. Later, as this seed grows, it is brought forth (delivered) as a new creature. “Seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently: having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and abides ... And this is the

word of good tidings which was preached unto you.” (I Peter 1:22, 23, 25 A.S.V.) Notice that the begetting is accomplished **through the word of God**, which is the incorruptible seed. Again, “Of his 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) In the parable of the sower Jesus explains, “The seed is the word of God.” (Luke 8:11) Putting all of this together we learn that we are begotten of God when the seed is planted in our hearts and germinates or, in other words, **when the gospel is preached and believed**.

Where does the Holy Spirit enter in? The Holy Spirit is the agent of God in planting the seed. When Jesus left his disciples he promised them a comforter who was the Holy Spirit. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” (John 14:26) “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself: but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you all things to come.” (John 16:13) The role of the Holy Spirit, then, was to act as the agent of the Lord in setting forth the word of God through the apostles. When they wrote the books of the New Testament, they wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. When one believes these teachings **inspired by the Holy Spirit** and on that basis resolves to accept Christ, he has been begotten by the Spirit. The word of God, the seed, has been planted in his heart by the Spirit of God, and the part of the new birth that pertains to the Spirit has been accomplished.

Of course, there are differences between physical and spiritual birth. We had no choice in our physical birth. But the one who is begotten by the Spirit by believing the gospel is voluntarily begotten. We must “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls,” (James 1:21 – A.S.V.) or, in other words, believe. If we do not believe, no begetting takes place. We are told, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God.” (I John 5:1 – A.S.V.)

The begetting by the Spirit works an inward change. This change is expressed in repentance. Repentance is a change of heart and is necessary to salvation. “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:3) The one who truly repents will live a different kind of life after he has turned to Christ.

Having been begotten by the Spirit, he will bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. (Eph. 5:9). This will be studied in another lesson.

**THE WATER’S PART.** It is possible for one to be physically begotten without being brought forth as a living creature. Likewise, one can be spiritually begotten by believing without being delivered and, hence, without entering the kingdom of God. **Both** the water and the Spirit are necessary for entrance into the everlasting kingdom. As we are begotten by the agency of the Spirit, so we are delivered by means of the water.

Some contend that in this passage water is figurative and means word, and that to be born of the water is to be born of the word. This cannot be since any fair interpretation requires that both water and the Spirit be understood in the same manner – either literally or figuratively. If water means word, Spirit cannot mean Spirit. But since virtually all agree that Spirit must be understood literally, water must also be literal and must mean water and nothing else.

The only important use of water in the New Testament is in connection with baptism. Consider these passages. “Wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by **water**. The like figure whereunto even **baptism** does also now save us.” (I Peter 3:20-21) “And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the **water**, both Philip and the eunuch: and he **baptised** him.” (Acts 8:38) Therefore to be born of water is to be baptised in water.

How is the water to be applied in baptism? In physical birth one cannot be born of that which is smaller than himself. So in spiritual birth, the element in which we are delivered must be larger than the individual so that only in immersion in water can one truly be born of water. In sprinkling or pouring there is too little water and the figure of birth is not carried out.

This agrees with other passages which show that water baptism is a burial in water. “Therefore we are **buried** with him by baptism into death.” (Romans 6:4) “**Buried** with him in baptism.” (Col. 2:12) A burial implies a complete immersion. In both figures – birth and burial – immersion in water is clearly taught.

**IS THE NEW BIRTH NECESSARY?** Jesus teaches that the new birth is essential to entering the kingdom of God. He says, “**Except** a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... **Except** a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into

the kingdom of God ... Ye **must** be born again.” (John 3:3, 5, 7) The words “except” and “must” denote essentiality. No other construction can fairly be placed upon them, especially since they are the words of Christ himself.

It therefore follows that since the new birth is accomplished by one’s believing the words of the Spirit and by being immersed in water, then both faith and baptism are essential to entering the kingdom of God. Since the kingdom of God is composed of the saved (see Matthew 19:23-25), faith and baptism are also essential to salvation from sin. Most will grant the necessity of faith, but since some deny the necessity of baptism a few more scriptures should be noted. “He that believeth and is baptised shall be **saved**.” (Mark 16:16) This places baptism between faith and salvation. “The like figure whereunto even baptism both now **save** us. (I Peter 3:21) “Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**.” (Acts 2:38) “Arise and be baptised and **wash away thy sins**, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16) Since the washing away or remission of sins is necessary to salvation, we must conclude that baptism is essential to salvation.

This does not make water our saviour. Christ is our saviour. But only by the birth of water and the Spirit can we get **into Christ** where salvation is. For this reason **both** the water and the Spirit are necessary.

**IS THE NEW BIRTH MYSTERIOUS?** In John 3:8 we read, “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 every one that is born of the Spirit.” Some have thought that in some mysterious way we are born again when the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and tells us we are saved. Since in nine cases of conversion in Acts we have no example of such a mysterious “experience”, we must conclude that this theory is not founded upon the Bible.

Then what does this verse mean? The answer is in the expression, “So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.” Jesus is comparing the one born of the Spirit with the wind. As you cannot see the wind, but can see what it does, so with the one born of the Spirit. You cannot see an outward or physical change in him, after his new birth. But there is a difference in the way he acts, speaks and lives. There is a change, but it is no more visible to the naked eye than the wind. The change is in the **manner of life**, not the physical appearance.

#### TEST ON LESSON 14

**Fill in the blanks after the following questions:**

1. Who was Nicodemus? .....
2. Is the new birth physical or spiritual? .....
3. To what in the physical birth may the water and the Spirit of the spiritual birth be compared? .....
4. In birth, before there can be a delivery, what must there be? .....
5. What is the seed? .....
6. By what agent does God plant the seed? .....
7. If Spirit is understood literally, in what sense must water be understood? .....
8. What is the only important use of “water” in the New Testament? .....
9. Since the element in which one is delivered must be larger than oneself, what action is baptism must be employed to carry out the figure? .....

10. What does the word “must” denote in connection with the new birth? .....
11. To what does Jesus compare the one born of the Spirit? .....

**Underline the phrase that correctly completes each of the following statements:**

1. Nicodemus came to Jesus: (a) in the morning, (b) at noon, (c) by night, (d) at sunset.
2. Jesus told him that except a man be born again he cannot: (a) get rich, (b) enjoy good health, (c) see the kingdom of God, (d) expect a long life.
3. Jesus explained that the new birth is a birth of: (a) flesh, (b) the Spirit, (c) water, (d) water and the Spirit.
4. In 1 Peter we are told that we are begotten again of incorruptible: (a) seed, (b) experience, (c) light, (d) wind.
5. We further learn in James 1:18 that the seed with which we are begotten is: (a) love, (b) the word of truth, (c) faith, (d) hope.
6. The written word of God is inspired by: (a) angels, (b) the apostles, (c) the devil, (d) the Holy Spirit.
7. However, one is not begotten of God unless the gospel is: (a) rejected, (b) believed, (c) heard, (d) investigated.
8. The one who is begotten by the Spirit will: (a) repent, (b) deny Christ, (c) hear the gospel, (d) not alter his ways.
9. It is necessary for entrance into the kingdom of God, and hence essential to salvation that one be born of: (a) water only, (b) the Spirit only, (c) neither the water nor the Spirit, (d) both the water and the Spirit.

**In the blanks after the following scriptures state the purpose that baptism is said to accomplish:**

1. Mark 16:16 .....
2. Acts 2:38 .....
3. Acts 22:16 .....
4. Romans 6:3 .....
5. I Peter 3:21 .....

# The New Birth

## Lesson 14

### Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

- Section 1 –
1. Ruler of Jews
  2. Spiritual
  3. The mother and father, or parents
  4. A Begettal
  5. Word of God
  6. Holy Spirit
  7. Literally
  8. Baptism
  9. Immersion
  10. Essentiality or necessity
  11. The wind

Section 2 – (c), (c), (d), (a), (b), (d), (b), (a), (d).

- Section 3 –
1. Salvation
  2. Remission of sins (or gift of Holy Spirit)
  3. Wash away sins
  4. Baptised into Jesus Christ (or into his death)
  5. Saves us (or answers good conscience)

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