

What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?

“Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.’” John 3:3 NLT

- Do you know the difference between being “religious” and having a “born again relationship” with God?

The New Birth is one of the most important subjects in the Bible. It is the key to understanding what it means to be a Christian, but it is widely misunderstood. Jesus spoke about the New Birth in John chapter 3 when he had a conversation with a Jewish teacher and leader named Nicodemus (nik-o-deem'-us). The story of Nicodemus teaches us that good people don't go to heaven, but only those who have been born again.



The Central Lesson

Good People Don't Go to Heaven - Only Those Who Are “Born Again.”

Misconceptions About the New Birth

1. It is **more** than being a **GOOD**, sincere, religious person. It is not religion, but a spiritual relationship (John 3:1-7, 10).

Nicodemus was very religious - he was a **Pharisee** (3:1)

What was a Pharisee? It was the largest and most influential group in Judaism. Pharisees were very strict religious people. They observed all the religious holidays, festivals, rituals, and customs of Judaism and abstained from everything considered unclean by the Old Testament law.

Nicodemus was a **member of the Jewish ruling council** (3:1). Nicodemus was a **top leading teacher in Israel** (3:10). Nicodemus was a **sincere man in practicing his faith** (We get this by implication from the fact that Jesus often charged the Pharisees of being hypocritical [cf. Matt. 23:13-29; Mark 7:5-8], but NOT Nicodemus, which suggests that Nicodemus was sincere about his faith.

Here is the surprise in this passage. Even though Nicodemus was a good, sincere, and religious man, **he would not make it into heaven**. He was missing the one experience that is essential for entering heaven - **he needed to be born again!** *“So don't be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’”* John 3:7 *“...unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”* John 3:3

2. It is **more** than a **PHYSICAL** birth; it also means experiencing a **SPIRITUAL** birth (John 3:3-7).

“4 ‘What do you mean?’ exclaimed Nicodemus. ‘How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?’” John 3:4 NLT

Nicodemus was puzzled by Jesus' statement that **the only way to enter heaven** is through **the new birth** (John 3:3). What did Jesus mean? Is he saying that a person must enter his mother's womb and be born a second time? *“5 Jesus replied, ‘I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. 6 Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. 7 So don't be surprised when I say, ‘You must be born again.’”* John 3:5-7 NLT

The context of verse 6 makes it clear that **“born of water”** refers to physical birth. Jesus was contrasting natural birth to spiritual birth. A baby is enclosed in a sack of water that breaks at the time of birth. Someone has written: **“If you are born once, you are born in the devil's family. If you are born twice, you are born in God's family.”**

3. It is **more** than knowing about God **intellectually**. It means knowing Him **personally**, not just **HEAD** knowledge, but **HEART** knowledge (cf. John 17:3).

“...you are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things?” John 3:10 NLT

Nicodemus was very knowledgeable about the Old Testament (the N.T. did not exist then). The New American Standard Bible says Nicodemus was *“the teacher of Israel.”* Not just “a” teacher, but “the” teacher. He was a Bible scholar. He had devoted his life to studying and teaching the scriptures. **Yet, with all his Bible knowledge, Nicodemus needed to be born again** (John 3:7, 3).

4. It is **more** than **DECIDING** to live a different life (such as making a New Year's resolution). It means that Jesus actually **CHANGES** a person's life—starting from the inside (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When an individual decides to change his life, the change is only in his thinking and determination. When Christ changes a person's life, the change is in the heart, soul, and nature. *“...anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”* 2 Corinthians 5:17

The Meaning of “Born Again.”

The theological term for the New Birth is “Regeneration.” **Re** = *again*. **Generation** = *to produce*. In other words, it is “rebirth.” (Spiritual butterfly, spiritual metamorphosis).

1. It is the **WORK** of the Holy Spirit in a person's life (3:5-6).
“6 Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.”
2. It is the creation of something **NEW** that did not formerly exist in a person's life (3:6).
3. It is **LIFE** - spiritual life, eternal life, abundant life (3:6).
4. It is a **PACKAGE** that brings with it many gifts.
Forgiveness of sin (Eph. 1:7); Victory over the enslaving power of sin (Rom 6:6, 11); A new nature (2 Cor 5:17); Citizenship in God's Kingdom (heaven) (Phil. 3:20); Christ Himself and the Holy Spirit indwell the believer's heart (Col. 1:27; Cor. 6:19-20); Transformation to become the Holy Spirit's Temple (the Holy of Holies) (1 Cor. 6:19-20); A “seal” of God's ownership (Eph. 1:13); A God-given “spiritual gift” that enables the believer to serve God and others in a unique way (1 Pet. 4:10); The believer's name written in the book of life (Rev. 20:12, 15).

How to Experience the New Birth

(1.) **Apologize** (repent) for sin, (2.) **Accept** Jesus as Savior, (3.) **Trust** Christ alone for salvation.

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- ▶ Accept Christ as your Savior. ▶ As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ.
- ▶ Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ▶ Attend a small group. ▶ Read the Bible & journal meaningful verses. ▶ Pray for friends that need Jesus.