

What Do You Mean “Born Again”?

by Irvin Baxter, Jr.

The term “Born Again” is one of the most used phrases among present day religious people. Yet, if asked what the term “Born Again” means, ninety percent of the world’s church members could not give a clear explanation. The vital importance of this study is shown in that Jesus said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Here Jesus is saying that **TO BE BORN AGAIN IS TO BE SAVED**. Being born again is the plan of salvation that Jesus authored at Calvary. It is imperative that we understand what is required for us to be born again!

All agree that when Jesus went to the cross, he brought in the means of salvation for everyone who will accept it. But what really happened at Calvary? What can it do for me? How do I accept what was done there in my own personal life?!

Let us first consider what really happened at Calvary. There were three steps to the work of Christ—death, burial, and resurrection. It is very easy to see that these three steps make up the act of being born again spoken of by Jesus. To die, to be buried, and to rise again—that’s to be born again. So we see that Jesus through his death, burial, and resurrection bought for us the plan of being born again spoken of in John 3:3, whereby we receive salvation.

The fact that Jesus purchased a plan of salvation for us is the greatest news the world has ever received. The thing we must understand is that not only was it necessary for Jesus to do something, but also it is absolutely essential for us to act upon what he did. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Ye **MUST** be born again” (John 3:7).

Now the astonishing thing is that Nicodemus was a religious leader of his day; yet, he had no conception of what it meant to be born again! We find that the very same thing is true in the day in which we live. Many men who fill positions of spiritual leadership in our world have no real understanding of the “Born Again” experience. Nicodemus inquired of Jesus in John 3:4, “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and

be born?” 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.” Nicodemus, you can’t be born again of a woman. The second birth is a spiritual birth.

Notice that Jesus said without being born again we cannot see or enter the kingdom of God. In other words, we cannot be saved. On the day of Pentecost when Peter preached the first message after Calvary, the men cried out, “What must we do?” “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Here Peter was giving to them the plan of salvation—repentance, baptism, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost. If being born again is to be saved, Peter was evidently talking to them about being born again.

Remember, there were three steps to Calvary—death, burial, and resurrection. The way to accept Calvary in our individual life is to accept the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. We don’t have to literally die, literally be buried, and literally rise again. Jesus was our substitute and did this for us. All we must do is accept what he did by spiritually dying, symbolically being buried, and spiritually rising again.

We take on his death by repentance which is spiritual death. When a person truly repents, he dies out to his own will, renounces it forever, and vows to live from that time on according to the will of Jesus Christ.

We take on his burial by baptism in water, by immersion into His name. Romans 6:4 says, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism”. Baptism **MUST** be done by immersion; for something cannot be buried by sprinkling a little dirt on the top of it. That burial after a few days would certainly prove to be insufficient! Furthermore, **EVERY** baptism of which we have Biblical record was administered by immersion. That alone should determine our course of action on this matter.

Finally, we partake of the resurrection of Jesus Christ by the infilling of the Holy Ghost. This is the new life that enables us to live as a Christian should.

We see then that being born again means to spiritually die—repent, symbolically be buried—baptism, and spiritually rise again—receive the Holy Ghost.

Thus, in plain language an individual must repent of his sins, be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ by immersion, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. I John 5:8 tells us, “And there are three that bear witness in the earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” What is the one thing in which the spirit, water, and blood agree? Is it not the new birth? Blood covers our sins at repentance; the waters of baptism wash them away, thus making us clean for the spirit to come into our lives to dwell. When the Roman soldiers thrust the spear into Jesus’ side after he died, the scripture tells us that there came forth blood and water (John 19:34). This was for cleansing of the nations. It takes blood and water to eradicate sin. Blood is the cleansing agent, and water is the flushing agent. When a jar is washed for canning, soap **AND** water are necessary to cleanse that jar so that it might be filled with good fruit. Likewise, blood and water are necessary to cleanse the human soul so that it may receive the spirit of Christ which is the Holy Ghost. This teaching was verified by Peter when he said, “Repent and be baptized **FOR** the **REMISSION** of **SINS**” (Acts 2:38). Repentance and baptism are both absolutely essential for the remission of sins!

Paul taught that the three steps of Calvary was the gospel that we should preach. In I Corinthians 15:1-4 he tells us, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the **GOSPEL** which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I have preached unto you, unless ye **BELIEVED IN VAIN**. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ **DIED** for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was **BURIED**, and that he **ROSE AGAIN** the third day according to the scriptures:”. Paul went on the say in II Thessalonians 1:7-8, “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that **OBEY NOT THE GOSPEL** of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul told us that the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. How can we **OBEY** the death, burial, and resurrection?—by repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost as we have previously explained. Notice that the Lord Jesus is to appear “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel.” It is absolutely necessary for every human being to obey the gospel by being **BORN AGAIN**. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Ye **MUST** be **BORN AGAIN**” (John 3:7).

Old Testament Speaks Of Born Again Plan

Let us consider another Biblical lesson given to us concerning this subject. The Bible teaches us that the things of the Old Testament were types and shadows of the things to come. When the priests of the law ministered by offering sacrifices, there were three major steps to their duties.

First they slew the animal to be offered on the brazen altar. The blood here was shed and caught in a container for use in the Holy Place. The flesh of the animal was to be consumed by fire. This teaches us of the first step of salvation—repentance. When we repent, we present our bodies a living sacrifice, and our sins are covered by the blood of Jesus.

After the shedding of blood, the priests were ordered to wash at the laver and to cleanse themselves with water in preparation for entering the Holy Place. The laver, a round fountain-like structure, was overlaid in the bottom with a looking glass. When the priests bent over to wash, he was able to see himself so that he could be sure that he was clean. When an individual is baptized, he should examine himself to be sure that he is leaving the world behind once and for all. We see then that the second step of the tabernacle ministration plainly teaches us of water baptism. Blood and water cleansed them to prepare them for entry into the Holy Place, even as blood and water cleanses us in preparation of receiving the Holy One into our lives! After cleansing, the priest would then take the fire from off of the brazen altar and would enter through the veil into the Holy Place. The Holy Place had no doors or windows through which light could come. The only light to be provided here was to come from the golden candlesticks. These candlesticks consisted of seven wicks fed by oil from seven bowls. The wicks had to be lit with the fire brought by the priest from the brazen altar. The uniting at the candlesticks of the oil and fire to produce light is a perfect type of the Holy Ghost and fire promised to New Testament believers (Matthew 3:11). Without the light of the Holy Ghost, we could not see to live in the Holy Place which is where every Christian should live. God spoke of His great plan of redemption in the Old Testament in types and shadows; and then in the New Testament He spoke plainly to us so that we would have no doubt of His will! Once again we recall the words of 1 John 5:8, “There are three that bear witness in the earth, the **SPIRIT**, the **WATER**, and the **BLOOD**; and these

three agree in one". This Old Testament lesson beautifully reaffirms to us the absolute necessity of the full Born Again plan in each life for salvation!

Some Common Misconceptions

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ

Acts 16:30-31 reads this way, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Many have taken this scripture to teach that all that is required for salvation is to believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world; and from that point on, the individual is saved. It is definitely true that an individual must believe that Jesus is the Savior in order to be saved. However, Paul, who spoke these words in Acts 16, has some further teaching on the subject in Romans 10:13-15. Let's consider the text: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him OF WHOM they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" If we wanted to be absurd, we could take this thirteenth verse to teach that all an individual must do for salvation is to call out the name of Jesus one time and he has received salvation. Paul tells us they can't call on him in whom they have not believed. Furthermore, he said that they can't believe in him OF WHOM they have not heard. We cannot merely believe. We must believe SOMETHING about Christ. When Paul told the jailer in Acts 16 to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, he went on to speak unto him the word of the Lord (verse 32). The word which Paul spake was apparently the GOSPEL; for the result in verse 33 was that the jailer and all his house were baptized at midnight. That's how essential baptism is for salvation. Paul took all these people out AT MIDNIGHT and baptized them!

Some would object here by saying that we are saved by faith alone. It is true that we are saved by faith, but it is also true that true faith always produces action on the part of the believer. Let's study from James 2:14-22 to verify this point.

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye

give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works IS DEAD? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thus how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?"

When an individual believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, what do they believe about him? They believe the gospel, which is the death, burial, and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:1-4). James teaches us that faith without action is dead, or it is not really faith at all. When a sinner hears the true gospel and truly believes, he will obey the gospel. An individual obeys the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ by repentance, baptism, in Jesus' name, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost, evidenced by speaking with other tongues. (Write for our free booklet "*Tongues—Devilish or Divine*"). This is the salvation of Calvary! "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" (or complete).

If you are still having trouble conceding to this teaching because of the element of works involved, let's reason concerning one more point. Being born again—repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost is not considered by God to be a work. In Titus 3:5 we are taught, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost;". This scripture tells us that regeneration which is being born again is NOT a work of righteousness.

Concluding this matter, we will cite a familiar Biblical example. In the great revival at Samaria in Acts 8:5-23, a sorcerer named Simon heard the preaching of Philip. He believed and was baptized and continued with Philip beholding the signs and miracles which were done. Many people would say that because Simon believed, he was saved. Yet the Apostle Peter said of him in Acts 8:23, "For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

It is impossible for anyone in the bond of iniquity to be saved; for the scriptures tell us, "If the Son there-

fore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Simon believed and was baptized, but he had not received the Holy Ghost; therefore, he was not born again. We cannot be half-born and survive. The entire work of Calvary is necessary for our salvation.

The thief on the cross

Many have asked, "If an individual must repent, be baptized, and receive the Holy Ghost for salvation, how was the thief on the cross with Jesus saved?" (Luke 23:38-43). First of all, it was impossible for anyone to be born again at this time, for the born again plan was not yet complete. Jesus had not died, been buried, and risen again. God has always had a plan of salvation for each dispensation of time. In Noah's day the only way of salvation was to get in the ark. In Moses' day the only plan was the law. In the church dispensation, the only way to be saved is to be born again. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Ye MUST be Born Again."

Conclusion

May we point out as we conclude this study that we have been given the first church and the Apostles after which to pattern our teaching and practices. In each recorded account of conversions under the Apostles' ministries, the three steps of being born again are evident. In Acts 2:38, it was repentance, baptism, and the Holy Ghost. In Acts 8:12, Acts 10:44-48, and Acts 19:1-6, we find the born again experience taught and received. Why should we vary from this practice when we are to be built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone?

Do not allow anything to turn you aside from this truth—You must be BORN AGAIN. If you haven't as yet, you should do so TODAY!

For more information or assistance on the above subject, please call or write us.

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Produced by

endtime

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