

A STUDY OF THE NEW BIRTH (1)

BY KEITH GREER

One night during Jesus' public ministry, a Jewish ruler named Nicodemus came to talk with Him. Their discussion concerned a spiritual birth Jesus referred to as the new birth. "Jesus answered and said to him, *'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'* Nicodemus said to Him, *'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?'* Jesus answered, *'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, You must be born again.'*" {John 3:3-7} Nicodemus' reaction to Jesus' teaching tells us it was new to him and that he did not understand the spiritual application Jesus wanted him to see. He equated the new birth to physical birth. Nicodemus is not the only person who has failed, or continues to fail, to grasp the meaning of the new (spiritual) birth. This subject remains a mystery to many in today's religious world. Let's examine the new birth a little more closely and attempt to understand its elements...

Spirit. Key to fully understanding the meaning of the new birth is understanding the Spirit's role in this process. As the result of erroneous theology and religious teaching, many struggle with this part of the equation. First, we need to understand that the new birth is a part of God's will for mankind. *"If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority."* {John 7:17} Opposition always arises when one balks at doing God's will on any subject. The Pharisees did this very thing during Jesus' personal ministry: *"But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him."* {Luke 7:30} When these religious leaders rejected John's baptism, they were rejecting what the Spirit had revealed to them—many still suffer from the same problem.

The Spirit's job is revelation: *"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds."* {Hebrews 1:1, 2} How did the prophets arrive at the words they prophesied? *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were*

moved by the Holy Spirit.” {2 Peter 1:20, 21} But the same words the Spirit gave to the prophets were given to Jesus. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” {John 6:63} Life proceeds from a seed, and in the spiritual realm, the seed is God’s word {Luke 8:11}. When Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure back to heaven, He made a promise: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” {John 14:26} Consider the implication of Jesus’ promise. The gospel message would not come via men’s wisdom but by God’s mind. This promise was fulfilled on Pentecost, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” {Acts 2:4} The Spirit moved the apostles to speak God’s word, and their message included the new (spiritual) birth. The apostles’ preaching convicted the audience to request an answer to their spiritual problem. “...Men and brethren what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37)

Unless one truly understands the Spirit’s role in the new birth, many misconceptions and wrong conclusions will be drawn. Remember this point: the Holy Spirit birth, which is not the subject of this article, happened only twice in *Acts 2* and *Acts 10*. Holy Spirit baptism was a promise not a command! We obey COMMANDS not PROMISES. The remainder of this article addresses the second element in Jesus’ answer to Nicodemus questions about the New Birth. ***