

How can you be “born again” if you weren’t even born a first time?

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Just as a heads up, this Bible study is an edited excerpt from my (much longer) Bible study titled: *“What the Bible really says about heaven, hell, judgement, death, evil, sin, and salvation”* (and I’d highly recommend reading that one all the way through from beginning to end if you’re able to, in order to get the full picture of what the Bible is talking about when it comes to salvation; but for those who don’t have the time to read that one right now, please do read this Bible study carefully).

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, 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. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. — John 3:1–7

Modern-day evangelicals are obsessed with this passage, insisting that everyone has to choose to be “born again” if they want to experience salvation. Unfortunately, just like Nicodemus, they have absolutely no idea what Jesus meant by the term.¹ To get the obvious out of the way first, nobody can choose to be born a first time, and this second birth is no different² since it happens to those who “received him [Jesus]” and were “given power to become the sons of

¹ Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? — John 3:9-10

² 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. — John 3:8

God” not “*of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,*”³ so it’s obviously not something any individual can choose to experience out of the strength of their own will power, but is instead something that is ultimately decided for them by God (demonstrating that receiving something isn’t necessarily based on a choice we make ourselves, as I also covered using other passages in that longer Bible study).

But equally important to know, unless you’re an Israelite, you can’t be “born” a second time, because you haven’t been “born” a first time, at least not when it comes to the sort of “birth” that Jesus was talking about there. Remember, Jesus wasn’t talking about the same sort of salvation Paul primarily wrote about (in fact, throughout Paul’s epistles, he never even once spoke about a new birth; instead, he taught about a whole new creation altogether—or “*a new creature,*” as the KJV puts it⁴—which is even better than being “born” a second time), but was referring to getting to live in the part of the kingdom of God that will exist for 1,000 years in Israel, so from that fact alone it should be obvious that this statement is only relevant to Israelites and not to Gentiles. But to make this even more clear, Jesus’ question (“*Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?*”) in response to Nicodemus thinking that any of this was about biological childbirth tells us that this Pharisee should have already known exactly what Jesus was talking about based on the Scripture available to him at the time. This tells us that we have to look to the Hebrew Scriptures (meaning the books of the Bible generally referred to as “the Old Testament”) to determine exactly what Jesus meant (and we know there’s nothing in the Hebrew Scriptures about “asking Jesus into your heart,” as most evangelicals

³ He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. — John 1:11-13

⁴ Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. — 2 Corinthians 5:17

explain being “born again” as meaning when they share their “gospel,” or really anything else they use to try to explain the meaning of being “born again” either, for that matter).

So what was it in the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus was referring to here? Well, Jesus was talking about a nation that was figuratively said to have been “born” a first time by Moses in Exodus 4:22 when he said, “*Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn*”⁵ (along with similar statements he made in Numbers 11:12⁶ and in Deuteronomy 32:18⁷). That would be the first “birth” of those whom Jesus was referring to in this passage, telling us that it only applies to the nation of Israel. As for the second birth, this also has to be something spoken of in the Hebrew Scriptures if Nicodemus should have known this already as “*a master of Israel*,” so we have to look to passages that refer to Israel being born another time, and this would be Isaiah 66:8 which asks, “*shall a nation be born at once?*”⁸ prophetically referring to something that will happen to the nation of Israel in the future. Simply put, Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about Israelites

⁵ And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: — Exodus 4:22

⁶ Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? — Numbers 11:12

⁷ Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. — Deuteronomy 32:18

⁸ Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. — Isaiah 66:8

experiencing their New Covenant⁹ (which never applied to Gentiles, since we didn't have an old covenant to be replaced with by a new one to begin with, because we weren't given any covenants in the first place¹⁰), and the rebirth of the favoured nation of God when they're returned to their land and sprinkled "*with clean water*"¹¹ (this is why Jesus said they need to be born not just of the Spirit, but also of water¹²), which will take place at the end of the Tribulation, when Jesus returns and the thousand-year kingdom of heaven finally comes fully into effect on earth.

⁹ Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. — Jeremiah 31:31-33

¹⁰ That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: — Ephesians 2:12

¹¹ Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. — Ezekiel 36:22-32

¹² 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. — John 3:5

This is also why Jesus specifically said, “*Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*” Unfortunately, people who aren’t using the *King James Version* are unlikely to be aware of this, because most other Bible versions don’t use the precise grammar in their translations of that passage the way the KJV does (and even many people who do use the KJV won’t realize it, since few today know about 17th-century grammar), but “ye” is a plural word in the KJV, which means Jesus was simply saying: “Marvel not that I said unto thee [Nicodemus], Ye [the nation of Israel] must be born again.”

Now, it is true that Jesus said, “*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,*”¹³ and combined with the fact that they make the same mistake Nicodemus made in assuming the first “birth” was biological (which is what led him to ask his question about entering “*the second time into his mother’s womb*”), this has led evangelicals to assume that individual Gentiles today have to choose to be “born again” or they won’t be able to go to heaven, but going to heaven is only for members of the church known as the body of Christ and not for members of the church known as the Israel of God, so this can only be referring to getting to live in the part of the kingdom that will exist on earth for 1,000 years rather than in the part of the kingdom that exists in heaven.¹⁴ Simply put, Jesus was just referring to the specific Israelites¹⁵ God chose to be a part of Israel’s second birth when it occurs (because Jesus didn’t specify that He was referring to or including the nations in this statement the way He did

¹³ Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. — John 3:3

¹⁴ If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? — John 3:12

¹⁵ For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. — Romans 2:28-29

in Matthew 25:32,¹⁶ and because we know that His teachings were pretty much only relevant to Israelites¹⁷—not to mention the fact that Gentiles weren’t “born” a first time in the manner that Jesus was referring to there, so there’s no way they could be “born” a second time as well—it should be pretty obvious that His statement should be understood as meaning: “Except a [Jewish] man be born again...”), including a few who can be said to have (at least proleptically, if not literally) experienced the second birth earlier than the rest, such as those¹⁸ Peter wrote to¹⁹ in his first epistle²⁰ (where he called back to prophecies about this from Exodus 19:6²¹ and from Psalm 22:30–31²²). And even then, we know that an Israelite only needs to be “born again” to “*see the kingdom of God*” during the first thousand years of its existence on earth, since the Mosaic law (and hence the New Covenant) will be irrelevant after those thousand years have been completed, and heaven and earth have passed

¹⁶ And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: — Matthew 25:32

¹⁷ But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. — Matthew 15:24

¹⁸ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, — 1 Peter 1:3

¹⁹ Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. — 1 Peter 1:23

²⁰ But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; — 1 Peter 2:9

²¹ And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. — Exodus 19:6

²² A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this. — Psalm 22:30-31

away,²³ which means the “born again” figure of speech will no longer be relevant either. This tells us that Israelites who missed out on getting to enjoy life in the kingdom of heaven (which refers specifically to the part of the kingdom of God that will exist in Israel for 1,000 years) will finally have an opportunity to enter the kingdom of God on the New Earth (when it will be centred within the New Jerusalem). Some will try to argue that Jesus’ “*except a man*” statement means this *has* to apply to all humans, of course, but they’re ignoring the context of the passage. This is just like Paul’s “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” statement, which we know is only referring to the part of the kingdom of God that will be in heaven, since we know that flesh and blood *will* inherit the part of the kingdom of God that’s going to exist on earth during the thousand years (because not everybody who gets to live in the part of the kingdom that will exist on earth during those thousand years will have been made immortal at that time), as well as on the New Earth (at least until the end of the ages), and there’s no reason the word “man” can’t be just as context-defined here as “kingdom of God” is in that passage.

So no, unless you’re a member of the Israel of God, you haven’t been “born again,” and neither can you be (since you weren’t “born” a first time in the manner Jesus was speaking about), nor do you need to be, since the salvation of those in the body of Christ won’t be enjoyed in the same part of the kingdom of God that Israel is looking forward to living in when it begins in earnest on the earth, and keeping the New Covenant in the way that being born again refers to is entirely irrelevant to us anyway, because we’re not going to follow the Mosaic law perfectly in heaven (since we’re not under law to begin

²³ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. — Matthew 5:17-19

with) the way Jeremiah said those in the house of Israel and the house of Judah will when the New Covenant comes fully into effect.

I realize that evangelicals and other Christians have various ideas about what it means to be “born again,” but if their ideas can’t be shown to be laid out in the Hebrew Scriptures, they have no basis for the claims, because otherwise Jesus wouldn’t have criticized Nicodemus for not knowing what He meant by the term. And I’m sure you’ve heard “testimonies” by certain Christians about how they were “born again” and became a whole new person, walking away from a life they considered to be sinful thanks to God changing them when they “got saved” (and, in some cases, it’s true that they were leading particularly sinful lives, although it’s also true that most Christians misunderstand even more of the Bible than just the topics we’ve been discussing, and misinterpret large parts of it to be teaching that many things are sinful which actually aren’t sinful at all, but that’s a discussion for another time). And yes, God was indeed behind the change, at least from an absolute perspective, because God is behind absolutely *everything* that happens (since all is of God²⁴). But from a relative perspective, their changed lifestyles had nothing to do with being “born again” at all, since we know from what we just covered that being “born again” is only for the Israel of God (and that’s not to say the lives of Israelites who are “born again” won’t change drastically, but that’s because they’ll finally be able to keep the Mosaic law perfectly when it happens, which isn’t something Gentiles are meant to keep, and members of the body of Christ certainly aren’t, whether they’re Jewish or Gentile, which is another clue that being “born again” isn’t for us).

²⁴ For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. — Romans 11:36

So when you hear a Christian's "testimony" about how getting "born again" changed them, and are tempted to think it means you should remain a member of (or return to) the Christian religion (or to join it, if you've never been a member), remember that *many* people who have hit rock bottom have realized how destructive their lifestyles were and dramatically changed their lives for the better *without* becoming Christians at all (and that people who join other religions have similar "conversion experiences" to the ones Christians talk about as well), so joining this religion isn't proof of anything other than that they decided something in their life needed to change. And if "fruit" is evidence of having believed the truth, just remember all the negative "fruit" of all those Christians you've met throughout your life (and even those who might seem to be living better lives now in some ways than they were before they converted all have "secret sins" they hide from the rest of us, so remember that you're only seeing the "fruit" they've made public). As nearly everybody who hasn't been blinded by the "light" of the leaders of the Christian religion²⁵ knows, the fruit of Christianity is anything but good, so don't be tempted to return to it if you've already been saved from it, or to give it a try if you've been blessed enough to never have been imprisoned by it (and if you're still a member, get out as quickly as you can). Those of us who have escaped the Christian religion (as well as many of those who were wise or blessed enough to never join it) know very well that, while nearly everything Christians think is sinful actually isn't, almost all of the actions and attitudes that they live by are extremely wrong (and often quite evil, all the while calling their actions and teachings righteous and good²⁶). As nearly everyone who looks in at it from the outside

²⁵ For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. — 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

²⁶ Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! — Isaiah 5:20

can see, greed, fear, paranoia, hunger for power, peer pressure, envy, hypocrisy, arrogance, prejudice, intolerance, anti-intellectualism, malice, spite, and all manner of other actual sins²⁷ are the hallmarks of the Christian religion, but most Christians within the religion somehow just can't see what is plainly evident to the rest of us. That said, where sin abounds, grace much more abounds,²⁸ so even Christians can technically experience God's grace (and eventually all of them will, of course, just as all humanity will, as demonstrated in that longer Bible study, so please go read it if you haven't already). But as far as those who don't embrace His grace go, I really wouldn't want to be a religious leader or Christian "evangelist" at the final judgement, and those who willingly follow these leaders are in for a world of sorrow at that time as well (yes, it's likely that most Christians will actually end up at the Great White Throne Judgement due to their believing a false "gospel"). If the citizens of the cities that rejected Jesus' disciples are going to be judged more harshly than those of Sodom because they had the light revealed to them,²⁹ how much more severely are those in Christendom who have the completed Scriptures going to be judged for ignoring, and even rejecting, the truths found therein, following the myths of their religious leaders instead, because they prefer to have their

²⁷ This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. — 2 Timothy 3:1-5

²⁸ Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: — Romans 5:20

²⁹ But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. — Luke 10:10-12

self-righteous ears scratched?³⁰ (And for anyone who is wondering, yes, members of the body of Christ might have been called Christians at one time,³¹ and while this label *does* seem like it might have been used by members of the Israel of God in the past,³² there's no indication that any believers in the body of Christ used it for themselves, but rather it appears to be a label applied to them by others outside the body, and as such most of us avoid the label — so as to not be confused with those in the religion that uses the label today, which some of us suspect began with people such as Phygellus and Hermogenes and others who turned away from Paul³³ creating the adulterated “gospel” of the Christian religion³⁴ by merging parts of each of the two legitimate Gospels into one — and simply call ourselves members of the body of Christ, or sometimes just “believers.”)

³⁰ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. — 2 Timothy 4:3-4

³¹ Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. — Acts 11:25-26

³² Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. — 1 Peter 4:16

³³ This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. — 2 Timothy 1:15

³⁴ I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. — Galatians 1:6-7