

# THE NEW BIRTH

*Jesus replied to him, "Truly, I tell you with certainty, unless a person is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus asked him, "How can a person be born when he is old? He can't go back into his mother's womb a second time and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, I tell you with certainty, unless a person is born of water and Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don't be astonished that I told you, 'All of you must be born again.' The wind blows where it wants to. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. That's the way it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:3-8*

The Lord made it clear in this conversation with Nicodemus that to be part of His Kingdom we need to be born into it. He also expands on it mentioning a birth of “water and spirit” as contrary to a birth of fleshly nature. He also spoke here about the anonymity of those working in the nature of the Spirit.

God, as a sovereign King, has power and authority to grant or refuse access to His Kingdom. The Lord spoke about it in the parable of the guests to the wedding feast, for example. Later, the apostles taught on this and we can see throughout the book of Acts what people were asked to do in order to come into the Kingdom of Light.

Here, for example, we see what was narrated with each conversion described in the book of Acts:

	OCCASSION	REPENT	BELIEVE	BE BAPTIZED	RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT
Acts 2:22-38	Pentecost	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acts 8:12-17	Philip in Samaria		✓	✓	✓
Acts 8:35-38	Philip and the eunuch		✓	✓	
Acts 9:3-18	Paul's conversion	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acts 10:42-48	Cornelius conversion		✓	✓	✓
Acts 16:13-15	Lydia's conversion		✓	✓	
Acts 16:29-34	Philippian jailor	✓	✓	✓	
Acts 19:1-7	Ephesian disciples		✓	✓	✓
Acts 19:17-20	Ephesian sorcerers	✓	✓		
Acts 22:6-16	Paul's conversion story	✓	✓	✓	

In most of them, repentance was implied in the context of the story. In all but one, was believing key to their conversion. Also, in all but one is baptism an immediate response of the convicted sinner. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is mentioned 5 of the 10 times that new births are mentioned. The fact that some of these aspects are not always mentioned does not mean they did not happen. It is just based on the focus of the story.

We see these four aspects coming forth again in the book of Hebrews:

*We have much to say about this, but it is difficult to explain because you have become too lazy to understand. In fact, though by now you should be teachers, you still need someone to teach you **the basic truths of God's word**. You have become people who need milk instead of solid food. For everyone who lives on milk is still a baby and does not yet know the difference between right and wrong. But solid food is for mature people, whose minds are trained by practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore, **leaving behind the elementary teachings** about the Messiah, let us continue to be carried along to maturity, not laying again a **foundation of repentance from dead actions, faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment**. Hebrews 5:11-6:2*

The writer here rebukes his readers about their slow growth in their faith, and reminds them the basic rudiments of their faith. Besides the four elements shown on the table, resurrection and judgement are added. Those two are knowledge, the first four are actions to be carried out or received.

So clearly we see, specially from the account of Peter's first preaching in Acts 2 and Hebrews 6, plus all the other examples previously mentioned, that there are 4 clear steps to enter into the Kingdom through what the Lord called in the gospel of John "the new birth," or as other translations put it, "being born from above." In the following pages we will take time to briefly look into the reason and effect of each one of them, following the same order presented in Hebrews 6.

## REPENTANCE

What we see in the Bible as the act of repentance, "turning away" or converting, has a very deep meaning. It implies much more than remorse, and actually remorse is never seen as a definite requirement for or sign of repentance. Emotions are presented more as a natural consequence of what is going on in the emotions of those involved, but not as a must since repentance is more a conscious than an emotional choice.

Repentance, in its general definition, implies a change of the way of thinking, a change in opinions and perspective. Related to our faith in God, the element of guilt before a holy and almighty God is vital. When we sin is not only against our bodies or other people, but mainly against God. But it does not stop there. It implies also a declaration, a recognition of one's responsibility for wrong choices. We might have been victims of other people's sins, but that does not exempt us from responsibility from our sinful reaction to their acts, or from our indulgent behavior towards our lusts and desires.

Ultimately, repentance needs a radical change of our way of living. If we use to steal, we pay back. If we lied, we will tell the truth. If we cheated, we confess. It implies acting in the total opposite direction than what we did before.

Thus, these three elements are just as important as each other: the understanding and recognizing in the **mind** (through a clear explanation and the revelation of the Holy Spirit to the conscience of the sinner), the confessing with our **mouth** (coming to the Light, as the apostle John would put it), and a change in our **actions**, even if it means starting a long process. This can be easily seen in the stories of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8-10), the sinner woman who washed Jesus' feet (Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 7), and also in some of the conversions seen in the chart above.

## FAITH TOWARDS GOD

It seems strange when we see the Bible presenting faith after repentance, on Hebrews chapter 6. One would think that it requires faith to repent. But what the Word means with faith is quite different from what we think it means in our modern days.

The Greek word used for faith is *pistis*, which means trust and faithfulness. The modern definition goes more in the direction of admitting that something we cannot prove to be true is true. The contrast between these two definitions brings dramatic implications.

If we hold the main stream modern definition, recognizing Jesus as Savior or admitting God exists would be enough, regardless of our lifestyles. But if we keep the original meaning, we come up with a very different message.

If "having faith towards God" means trusting to the point of unconditional and endless faithfulness, that requires a conscious analysis of the costs of such a choice, and understanding if the God of the Bible is worth that level of trust, even to the point of risking our future and the future of our loved ones.

This kind of faith fits with all the teachings of Jesus about His Kingdom: not looking back after having taken the plow, calculating the costs before building a tower, taking daily our cross, put family in second place, let the dead bury the dead, being hated and persecuted for the Kingdom, dying to oneself, etc.

To reach that level of confidence requires getting to know the other party, and getting involved in each other's lives. Requires determination to get closer to one another, and that takes time and openness. That is why repentance comes first, opening our hearts and submitting to God's authority, but without a choice to committing ourselves to get to know Him and remain faithful to Him, repentance becomes a dead and temporary religious act.

## BAPTISM IN WATER

As we have seen in the chart above, with the exemption of one story, baptism was always the act that showed the full commitment to a new life and a new beginning. The only story that omits it does not imply that it did not happen, it just moves on to the main point of the narrative.

Baptism was a practice that did not start with Christianity. It was used also in Judaism, described in the Old Testament as ritual baths. Gentiles that wanted to join the people of Israel, called proselytes, would need to get "bathed." Baptism, on the other hand, was not a sacramental word. In the New Testament the same Greek word was used when talking about washing anything, like in Luke 11:38 when it was used about the washing of hands before eating.

There are many Bible verses that speak of baptism and its effect in a believer's life. Romans 6 is probably the most detailed one, stating that it is baptism what makes Jesus' death our own, and His new life our own. The Lord mentioned it was required for salvation in Mark 16 and John 3. Besides these, we see it described as what dresses us with Christs, crucifies us with Him, makes us walk in newness of life, saves us from sin, forgives our sins, washes away our sins, etc.

It is important to clarify that baptism alone is powerless, unless it is done in faith and repentance. They all interact together, and baptism alone is never taught in Scripture. But usually all of these elements and choices happened together and immediately. The only example of it not happening the same day is the baptism of Paul, three days after his conversion. That explains why when Ananias came to him, he said, "what are you waiting for?"

## BEING BAPTIZED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul explained that the promise made to Abraham was already a pact that started before the Law of Moses. This pact was about "the promise" whose fulfilment became the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

*that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Galatians 3:14*

Also, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews explains in chapter 5 that Jesus is the High Priest of a greater pact, from the order of Melchizedek, which was a priest for Abraham centuries before Moses and the Law, who blessed Abraham and to whom Abraham paid a tithe of the battle's spoils (Genesis 14). It explains that the pact with Abraham was greater, and included that promise which was recently reached through the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2.

And after the Lord Jesus' departure, when Peter preached openly for the first time to the Jewish crowd that had rejected Jesus and asked for His crucifixion, he explained how their speaking in languages unknown to themselves was a sign of what the prophet Joel had spoken about in Joel 2:28-29.

*Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, **I will pour out my Spirit on everyone.** Your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will even pour out my Spirit on my slaves, men and women alike, and they will prophesy. Acts 2:16-18*

As we see, the entire Scripture is pointing at the times in which the Holy Spirit would be poured upon all flesh. We see also that the Lord Jesus taught often on this matter, and gave it the highest importance:

*Jesus answered, "Truly, I tell you with certainty, unless a person is **born of water and Spirit***

*he cannot enter the kingdom of God. John 3:5*

*Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater works than these he shall do, because I go to My Father. [...] And I will pray the Father, and **He shall give you another Comforter**, so that He may be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him nor know Him. But you know Him, for He **dwells with you and shall be in you**. John 14:12, 16-17*

*While he was meeting with them, he ordered them, "Don't leave Jerusalem. Instead, **wait for what the Father has promised**, about which you heard me speak. For John baptized with water, **but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit** a few days from now." [...] **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you**, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:4-5,8*

So, we see how important was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon every flesh throughout the entire Bible. There are many more texts and examples of this all through Scripture, both symbolic and literal, like what John the Baptist declared about Jesus as being the One who would baptize in the Spirit in Matthew 3. From the beginning of our history as humans the Father had planned to send His Spirit on every flesh on our days, and His outpouring had been orchestrated from the very first pages of the Old Testament.

Further, we see in the New Testament teachings the importance of the role of the Spirit in the fulfilment of the mission of the church, the teaching of the Word, and in the guidance at a personal and church level in matters of the Kingdom. Here a list of examples of how the Holy Spirit provided practical guidance to the disciples of the first-century church.

- Acts 5:1-11 Ananias and Saphira's sin revealed to Peter
- Acts 8:29-31 Philip and the eunuch
- Acts 8:38-40 Philip being snatched away to Azotus.
- Acts 10:9-16 Peter's vision of the unclean animals on a cloth
- Acts 10:17-23 The Spirit telling Peter to go with the men at the door
- Acts 11:27-30 Prophecy of Agabus about a future famine in Judea
- Acts 13:1-3 Calling and ordaining of Barnabas and Paul as apostles
- Acts 15:22-29 Inspiration for the letter to the Gentiles about not been necessary to follow the Law of Moses. First, they wrote that it seemed good to the apostles, elders and the church. Later, to the Holy Spirit and them.
- Acts 16:6-10 Paul forbidden to go preach in Asia and to go to the northern regions. Then getting a vision of a Macedonian man and *concluding* that God wanted them to go there.
- Acts 21:4 Disciples in Tyre said by the Spirit that Paul shouldn't go to Jerusalem
- Acts 21:10-14 Agabus confirms that Paul was going to be arrested in Jerusalem, but he was determined to go and they could not change his mind, concluding it was Lord's will.

Besides, we must mention that in other visions and dreams they quoted the Lord, an angel of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit interchangeably.

Furthermore, Paul explains in the letter to the Galatian churches, chapter 5, that the Spirit develops the character of a disciple into what was there called "the fruit of the Spirit," which had nine characteristics. Another main role of the Spirit was described by Paul again in his letter to the church in Corinth, in chapters 12 to 14. There we can read that the Spirit provides supernatural gifts, such as speaking in other tongues (human or of angels), interpretation of those tongues, healing, faith to do great miracles, etc. and it is also through the Spirit that different functions are given to certain brothers (what we call nowadays "ministries") for the equipping of the church for the work of the ministry. The same is mentioned in the letter to the Ephesian church, chapter 4.

In conclusion, we see that the role of the Holy Spirit in the church is vital as the One who leads, equips, reminds, and reveals all things. Therefore, baptism in the Holy Spirit was always a must, and it was ministered as soon as possible after conversion and mostly during or right after baptism.

A clear example that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a separate individual experience is what happened in Samaria with Philip: he baptized everyone who had repented and believed in the name of Jesus, but for a reason unknown to us, he did not give them the Holy Spirit. Then, Peter and John walked more than 60 kilometers from Jerusalem to give the Holy Spirit to these already-baptized new disciples:

*For as yet He had not fallen on any of them, **they were baptized only in the name of the Lord Jesus**. Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:16-17*

An important point to highlight here is that when a person receives the Holy Spirit, there should be a visible evidence. It is mostly necessary to give a simple but clear explanation of this subject before we lay hands on people, since people need to **understand and desire** the receiving of that promise. We see for example that Peter took the time to explain it to his listeners in Acts 2. They were Jews, so they knew what Scriptures said about it, but not how it was supposed to happen. That is why Peter considered important to explain it.

Here is a list of the signs that manifested when people received the Holy Spirit in the New Testament:

	OCASSION	SIGN				
		Foreign or angelical tongues	Boldness	Undescribed visible evidence	Praise	Prophecy
Acts 2:4-12	Pentecost	✓			✓	
Acts 4:31	Prayer for guidance		✓			
Acts 8:18-19	Samaritan converts			✓		
Acts 9:17-22	Paul's conversion		✓			
Acts 10:44-46	Cornelius conversion	✓			✓	
Acts 19:4-7	Ephesian disciples	✓				✓
		3	2	1	2	1

Paul spoke about more gifts in his letter to the Corinthians, making a difference between the manifestation when receiving the Holy Spirit and the growing into exercising different gifts as a personal pursue of spiritual growth:

*But **to each one is given the showing forth of the Spirit** to our profit. For through the Spirit is given to one a word of wisdom; and to another a word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; and to another faith by the same Spirit; and to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; and to another workings of powers, to another prophecy; and to another discerning of spirits; and to another kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues. But the one and the same Spirit works all these things, **distributing separately to each one as He desires**. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11*

*Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak languages? Do all interpret? But **zealously strive after the better gifts**. And yet I show to you a more excellent way. 1 Corinthians 12:30-31  
Keep on pursuing love, and keep on desiring spiritual gifts, especially the ability to prophesy. 1 Corinthians 14:1*

*Now I wish that **all of you could speak in other tongues, but especially that you could prophesy**. The person who prophesies is more important than the person who speaks in another language, unless he interprets it so that the church may be built up. 1 Corinthians 14:5*

*Therefore, my brothers, desire the ability to prophesy, and do not prevent others from speaking in other tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:39*