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DO YOU REALLY WANT TO BE "BORN AGAIN"?

BY RICHARD JORDAN

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" John 3:7

Undoubtedly Nicodemus was startled. The emphatic and penetrating statements of Christ had raised issues that had not previously engaged his attention. Yet, really, he ought not to have been so shaken and bewildered. Thus Christ's gently rebuking "Marvel not."

We say this was a gentle rebuke for after further explaining the process of this new birth (v. 8), He responds to the dullness of Nicodemus (v.8) in much sharper terms:

"Jesus answered and said unto him, ART THOU A MASTER OF ISRAEL, AND KNOWEST NOT THESE THINGS?

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and YE RECEIVE NOT OUR WTNESS" (John 3:10-11).

Before we think too poorly of Nicodemus, however, we should reflect upon the fact that this very subject is still one that eludes the grasp of most today. Although the term "born again" has come into popular usage, who can deny that its Scriptural meaning and significance has been almost totally lost and unnoticed.

The basic issue involved in the new birth is not reformation, nor is it religion; the basic issue is the doctrine of regeneration. This is clear from Christ's words to Nicodemus in John 3:5,8

"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."

Notice how careful the Lord is to define the character of the new birth: It is not the reformation of the outward man, nor the education of the natural man, nor the purification of the old man for 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh.' Rather it is the Spirit of God giving birth to a new life, a divine life and nature. It is partaking of the Divine nature (II Pet. 1:4). Simply put it is being born of God--"that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"

A COMMON DOCTRINE

Regeneration--i.e., being "born of the Spirit"--is a doctrine associated in Scripture with God's dealings both with the nation Israel and body of Christ. In fact the word itself is found only twice in the Bible, once in relation to Israel's program and once in reference to the Body of Christ.

The first occurrence is found in Matthew 19:28, where Christ is speaking to His Apostles:

"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, IN THE REGENERATION when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Notice carefully the wording here: "In the regeneration WHEN the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory." This is a future regeneration associated with the time when Christ sits on "the throne of His glory." Regeneration then, for Israel is clearly a part of her kingdom program and hope.

The second occurrence is from the pen of the Apostle Paul:

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by THE WASHING OF REGENERATION, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. 3:4,5).

Obviously the doctrine of regeneration is a spiritual truth which plays an integral part in God's purpose for both Israel's future kingdom program and the current administration of grace. Thus we must be careful to distinguish the dual application of this doctrine.

A CONTRASTING APPLICATION

Too often the true significance of John 3:7 is overlooked due to a failure to appreciate its usage of the second person pronouns "thee" and "ye." Notice the verse carefully:

"Marvel not that I said unto THEE, YE must be born again."

To the modern reader this may seem unimportant since most of us do not so readily understand the significance of the "thee, thou, ye, you" contrasts in our Bible. A bit of investigation, however, on this point will yield great rewards.

"Thee, thou" and "ye, you" are respectively the singular and, plural forms of the second person pronoun. While our modern English uses the pronoun "you" for both singular and plural, the older English was able to distinguish between in singular (thee, thou) and plural (ye, you). Thus "thee, thou" refers to an individual while "ye, you", refers to a group." 1 This same distinction is made in many modern languages and more importantly, is used by the Greek language of the New Testament.

1 (This explains why God is never addressed in the Bible by the word "you." There is one God and He is always to be addressed in the singular. Thus the use of the grave style in addressing God in prayer is not simply a matter of reverence or respect-- it is also a simple matter of grammar)

Thus our lord was, in fact saying to Nicodemus,

"Marvel not that I say unto THEE (i.e., Nicodemus), YE (i.e., the nation Israel)I must be born again."2

2 (As an aside, it is interesting to observe that one of the very things often used to complain against the King James Bible is in reality a tremendously helpful study aid! Try it in other passages, such as Matt. 16:18,19; 18:18, Luke 22:31-34, etc.)

In light of this, we should look carefully at Israel's history As a nation, Israel was born the first time when God led them out of Egypt. Two passages that make this very clear are Ex.4:22 and Deut. 32:18. In the former, God declares Israel to be His "first born" and thus in the latter rebuked them:

"OF THE ROCK THAT BEGAT THEE thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee."

The Exodus from Egypt marks the birth of the nation Israel and stands as the great declaration of God's purpose for that specially favored people. Paul alludes to this in 1Cor. 10:1,2:

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, now that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

"And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

They were "baptized unto Moses" and born as a nation. It is almost humorous--tragically so--to hear Moses "arguing" with the Lord over His rebellious people, saying

"...Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favor in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?"

"..HAVE I CONCEIVED ALLTHIS PEOPLE? HAVE I BEGOTTEN THEM..." (Num 11:11,12).

The point to notice here is that Moses clearly acknowledged that it was God who had conceived and given birth to this nation. They were His! And we are not left to wonder about His purpose for them:

"And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;

"Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

"And YE SHALL BE UNTO ME A KINGDOM OF PRIEST, AND AN HOLY NATION. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:3-6).

God gave birth to a nation which was to be a holy nation "a kingdom of priest." They were to be the agency and channel through whom His salvation and blessing was to be carried to "all the nations of the earth." This was what He had promised Abraham, when He had said:

"And I WLL MAKE OFTHEE A GREAT NATION, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

"And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and IN THEE SHALL ALL FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED" (Gen 12:2,3).

This was the hope set before them through the prophets He sent to them. For example, Isaiah declares,

"But YE SHALL BE NAMED THE PRIEST OF THE LORD: MEN SHALL CALL YOU THE MINISTERS OF OUR GOD: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves" (Isa. 61:6).

We do not have to read the sacred page for long however, to learn the obvious fact that Israel failed--failed miserably--to keep the covenant made with then through Moses. Because they did not keep the law, they were under the curse of God. Thus it became necessary for God to bring the nation to birth again--through new covenant and a new deliverer, a "greater than Moses."

Jer.31:31-34 teaches that God was to make a "new covenant" with Israel, one which would provide regeneration and forgiveness of sin for the nation. When this new covenant is realized, it will issue in spiritual regeneration and a resultant physical restoration for the national people of Israel. As it were, the nation will be born in a day (Isa. 66:8).

It was to this prophesied rebirth of the nation that our Lord pointed Nicodemus in John 3 and which he was so painfully unable to comprehend. Notice once again how the Lord used the "thou--ye" contrast as He responded to Nicodemus' dullness:

"...Art THOU a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

"Verily, verily I say unto THEE, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and YE receive not our witness" (vs.10,11).

Sadly, even the very teachers and leaders of God's favored people could not see the nation's true condition and need! Israel had lived under the Mosaic covenant for nearly 1500 years and had failed to meet their end of the agreement over and over again. Their continued rebellion had led God to allow their deportation and captivity in Babylon so that the land, at least, could have its rest (2 Chron.36:20-21). It was during this time of captivity that Jeremiah had written about the "new covenant" through which God would provide regeneration and restoration for Israel.

This was also the time of Ezekiel and his prophecies concerning the future regeneration of Israel--a regeneration which would result in the glorious physical restoration of Israel and ultimately the whole earth. In fact, our Lord's words in John 3:5 seem certain to have Ezek 36:25-30 in mind--a passage dearly describing the Divine preparation of Israel for her kingdom.

Also, in light of our Lord's words to Nicodemus in John 3:14, it is instructive to note that Psalms clearly associated with His being, "lifted up"--concludes where John 3 beings:

"For the kingdom is the Lord's and he is the governor among the nations.

"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 (Psa. 22:28,30,31).

The infancy stage of this "born again" nation is to be found among Christ's followers. He had promised them:

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Thus we are not surprised to find the Apostle Peter later writing to the believers who comprised this "little flock,"

"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"

"BEING BORN AGAIN, not of corruptible seed, by the incorrupted, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Peter 1:3, 23).

And there can be no doubt as to the hope and calling of those who had thus been born again for he goes on to identify them:

"But YE ARE A CHOSEN GENERATION, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, AN HOLY NATION, A PECULIAR PEOPLE; ,that ye should shew forth the raises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

The new birth spoken of by the Lord Jesus in John 3 is a reference to the future birth of the nation Israel when she is to be spiritually cleansed and then possess her land forever. But what about the Body of Christ and the believer today? If the new birth refers to the future hope of the nation Israel, do saved individuals today experiences a new birth or does God have something else for them? Remember: both Israel and the Body of Christ are regenerated--but into what?

There can be no doubt that today when a person places faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior when you rely exclusively on what Jesus Christ did for you at Calvary where He died to pay for your sins and was raised as the author of eternal live to those who trust Him; when you trust Christ today, that very moment God the Holy Spirit imparts His life to you.

Thus Paul declares: "And YOU HATH HE QUICKENED, WHO WERE DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS."

"EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN SINS, (GOD) HATH QUICKENED US TOGETHER WTH CHRTST (by grace are ye saved)" (Eph 2:1, 5).

We are therefore said to be "His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:10). But just what is it God is creating today? Eph.2:15,16 spell it out clearly

"Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for TO MAKE IN HIMSELF OF TWAIN ONE NEW MAN, so making peace;

"And that he might RECONCILE BOTH UNTO GOD IN ONE BODY by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

This is the "new creation" which God is forming during the dispensation of grace. God has temporarily set aside the nation Israel and His program for her (Rom. 11:11-15) in order to form another agency (Eph. 2:11-16) through whom He will accomplish a purpose which He planned "before the world began." This other purpose is called "the mystery" "because He kept it secret --"hid in God" (Eph. 3:9)--until He revealed it to that other apostle, the Apostle Paul. It is summed up in the words of Eph. 2:7:

"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Today God is creating a new species of humanity--"neither Jew nor Gentile." Just as Adam was not born but was rather created, so we go from the old creation into the new creation as we go from Adam into Christ!

To sum up: Regeneration is associated with God's program for both Israel and the Body of Christ. Regeneration for a few in the kingdom program made him a part of a born again nation. Regeneration for a person in the dispensation of grace makes him a part of the Body of Christ , a new creation.

A CONCLUDING QUESTION

Every person reading this article was born into this world spiritually dead in sins, "alienated from the life of God" The question is: Have you been regenerated? Have you passed from spiritual death to spiritual life by placing your faith in the finished work of Christ? If not, do so now!

"BUT GOD COMMENDETH HIS LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT, WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US" (Rom.5:8).

"BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED" (Acts 16:31)

DID GOD SEND THE DROUGHT LAST YEAR?

Pastor Tracy Plessinger

During this past summer our country has been suffering through one of the worst droughts in history. Hardly a single person has escaped being affected adversely in some way by this unusual weather condition. Many have speculated that this drought is some sort of a punishment from God on our nation for sin. Is this the case? Is the drought God's way of bringing judgment?

As we consider this question we must look at God's creation of the universe and the natural laws which govern it.

"And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years" (Gen.1:14).

In this passage of Scripture we learn that God created His universe with certain natural occurrences such as seasons, days, and years. These natural forces control the functioning of the universe without the continuing direct, supernatural intervention of God. In other words, God does not have to reach down from heaven with His hand and spin the earth around the sun, it does so because of the forces He has set in motion in nature.

In addition to the natural forces that God has created in nature there is another process at work in the universe. This force is the degenerative process of sin. Sin has stained and corrupted God's universe:

"For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

"Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom. 8:20-21).

The entire universe functions under the weight of sin. This sin brings destruction and misery to God's creation. Whatever sin touches, it destroys.

As a general rule God allows His laws of nature and the degenerative process of sin to control natural events on the earth. However, at times God has intervened and suspended His natural laws for a time. Such was the case of the flood in Noah's day.

The flood was not a result of natural process, it was a supernatural act of God. Immediately after the flood God promised that He would never again intervene as He had in the flood:

"While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen.8:20).

In general this is God attitude about intervention. Unless God specifically tells us in His Word that He is going to intervene supernaturally we should assume that the natural forces of nature are at work.

God does tell us in His Word of a time after the flood when He will intervene in nature in response to man's actions:

"And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth:

"And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God.

"The Lord shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow.

"But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:

"And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.

"The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed " (Deut. 28;1,2,12,15,29,24).

"If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or If I command the locusts to devour the land, or If I send pestilence among my people;

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from the wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:13,14).

It is important that we notice that both of these passages are dealing with the nation Israel under the law. The blessing and cursing of Israel under the law was based entirely upon that nation's performance of the statutes of the law. This intervention was for a specific people, Israel; at a specific time, living under the law; for a specific purpose, to bless for obedience. When God does supernaturally intervene in nature He is very clear about when and why He does so.

The question which we must answer then is whether the present drought is a result of natural processes or of the intervention which God speak of in Deuteronomy and 2nd Chronicles. Remember that intervention was for a specific people at a specific time for a specific purpose. Today God no longer recognizes Israel as His chosen nation.

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:27,28).

Today is not a day of law, but a day of grace. Thus Paul writes,

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

Today God is not blessing based on obedience to the law, but by believing the gospel and thereby being placed in Christ.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

None of the specific circumstances which applied in Deuteronomy and 2nd Chronicles are true today. The epistles of the Apostle Paul make very clear that we are the wrong people, at the wrong time, fulfilling the wrong purpose for this drought to be the result of supernatural intervention from God. The present drought is the result of the natural forces of nature and the degenerative process of sin on those forces.
