

## John 3:1-10 – Are You Born Again?

Have you ever had someone ask you, “Are you born again”? In 1976, Charles Colson’s book “Born Again” was released. Also in 1976, Jimmy Carter ran for president and called himself a “born-again Christian”. In 1977, Billy Graham’s book “How to be Born Again” was first printed. In John 3, did Jesus say that Nicodemus needed to be “born again” or did he say that he needed to be “born from above”? What is the difference?

### Read John 3:1-2.

Who was Nicodemus? What did Nicodemus say about Jesus? What Nicodemus said about Jesus was similar to what the man born blind said about Jesus in 9:31-33. Notice that Nicodemus also used the phrase “we know” just like the blind man did in John 9:31. Who was the “we” of “we know” in verse 2? Did Nicodemus speak for all the Pharisees?

### Read John 3:3-4.

What did Jesus say to Nicodemus? Did Jesus say that one needed to be “born again” to see the kingdom of God or did Jesus say that one needed to be “born from above” to see the kingdom of God? The word Jesus used can mean “again / anew” or it can mean “from above”. ESV, NKJV, NASB and NIV all have “again”. ESV, NASB, and NIV all have a footnote which indicates that the word can also mean “from above”. This is truly a case of being lost in translation. There is no word in English which is equivalent to the original Greek word which is found in John 3:3, 7. The English translators needed to choose between “again” and “from above”. I believe that they chose “again” so that Nicodemus’ response would make sense. If the word was translated “from above”, then the response by Nicodemus about a man entering into his mother’s womb and being born a second time would make no sense. John used the word “again / from above” in 3:3, 3:7, 3:31, 19:11 and 19:23. The meaning “from above” in 3:31 seems to be clear. ESV, NKJV, NASB and NIV all have “from above”. The word is in contrast to “he who is of the earth”. It is also used in parallel with “from heaven”. “He who comes **from above** is above all ... He who comes from heaven is above all”. In John 19:11, Jesus told Pilate that he would have no power over him unless it had “been given you **from above**.” ESV, NKJV, NASB and NIV all have “from above”. John 19:23 mentions Jesus’ tunic which was woven from top to bottom. What is the difference in meaning between someone being “born again” and someone being “born from above”? “Again” implies repetition. How did Nicodemus understand Jesus? Did Nicodemus think Jesus meant “born again” or “born from above”? Did Nicodemus understand what Jesus was talking about? Nicodemus understood Jesus to say that someone needed to repeat the physical birth process with the same mother in order to see the kingdom of God. He chose the meaning “born again” and not “born from above”. He chose the meaning which made Jesus sound ridiculous. How could someone enter into their mother’s womb again and be born? Nicodemus understood “born again” to mean “doing the same thing a second time”. One needed to be born physically for a second time. Obviously, that is not what Jesus meant. It is odd that many Christians have chosen to use the understanding of Nicodemus, “born again”. It is unfortunate because Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying. Jesus clarified what “born from above” means.

### Read John 3:5-10.

In verse 5, how did Jesus describe the second birth? What does it mean to be born of “water and the Spirit”? ESV, NKJV, NASB, and NIV all have “water and the Spirit”. Does “water and the Spirit” refer to one birth or to two births? Does “water” refer to physical birth? Explain. Does “water” refer to baptism? Explain. Does “water” refer to the cleansing which occurs with spiritual birth? See Ezekiel 36:25-27. It is interesting to note Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16. John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and fire”. Is this two different baptisms or just two words referring to the same baptism? The parallel passages of Mark and John record John the Baptist saying that Jesus would baptize “with the Holy Spirit”. They did not mention “and with fire”. In John 7:37-39, Jesus spoke of the living water which will flow from the heart of one who believes in him. John said that Jesus was speaking about the Spirit.

In verse 6, what did Jesus mean by “that which is born of the flesh is flesh”? What did Jesus say about the nature of the second birth? So, Jesus was not talking about being born physically for a second time. He was talking about a second birth which was a spiritual birth. What is implied by a spiritual birth? See John 1:13. Aren’t “born of God”, “born from above” and “born of the Spirit” all the same?

In verse 7, Jesus told Nicodemus not to marvel at what he said. Jesus said “it is necessary for you [all] to be born from above”. It was not just Nicodemus who needed to be born from above. Anyone who will enter the kingdom of God needs to be born of God. They need to be born from above.

In verse 8, how is the spiritual birth, the birth from above, like the wind? It is not true that everyone who is born from above immediately gets an ΙΧΘΥΣ (fish) bumper sticker, a cross around their neck, and a WWJD bracelet. That would make it easier to identify someone who is born from above, but it doesn’t work that way. How can those who are born from above be identified? In verse 8, Jesus used another word with two very different meanings. “Spirit” and “wind” are translated from the same Greek word. Obviously “the wind blows where it wishes”. “Spirit” would not make sense there. Later Jesus said, “so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit”. Jesus used the same word in verse 8 twice. First, it had the meaning “wind”. Second, it had the meaning “Spirit”.

In verse 9, how did Nicodemus respond to what Jesus said? In verse 10, how did Jesus respond to Nicodemus? I don’t know how Jesus could have made things more clear. At this time, Nicodemus did not have ears to hear. That seems to have changed later in his life. It is sad that a religious leader had his mind set on earthly things and not on the things which are above.

So, instead of asking someone if they are “born again”, ask them if they are “born from above”.