

WHAT DOES “BORN OF WATER” MEAN?

All sorts of controversy have been waged over the meaning of this passage. The first thing to do is to carefully read John 3:1-12.

Note some of the wrong interpretations and theories:

First is the Wrong Theory That Water Baptism is Meant

One whole denomination interprets this passage to mean that one must be immersed to be saved. “Born of water” to them means being immersed. This passage is pressed into teaching baptismal regeneration.

Why This Isn’t True:

- (1) Because baptism isn’t under consideration at all in the conversation that is taking place. Nothing else in the chapter indicates that baptism was being discussed.
- (2) Because if baptism were meant, then in less than a minute Jesus contradicted himself by putting salvation upon the basis of faith. (See verses 16, 18, 36.) This is of course ridiculous to assume.
- (3) Because to assume that baptism is referred to is to wreck the teaching that salvation is “by grace through faith... not of works....” (Ephesians 2:8)
- (4) Because to assume that baptism is referred to, is to make the New Testament teach two ways of salvation. For certainly the thief saved on the cross was not immersed. Certainly Cornelius was saved before he was baptized. These cases prove that salvation precedes baptism. The person who teaches baptismal salvation is bound to teach that Christ and his work must be plussed with water and works. But salvation is not by *waterworks*.

Second Is The Theory That *Water* Here Means *The Word*

The idea is that water is a symbol of the Word of God. This would make the passage to mean: except one be born of the Spirit and the Word.... Many good and reverent students of the Bible hold this view. While we have no quarrel with those who hold such a view, we do not believe that this theory is the correct one. Why?

- (1) Because we believe that if Jesus had meant *word* he would have said so plainly.
- (2) Because they were not talking about the Word.

- (3) Because such an interpretation requires that one go outside this Scripture for the key to the meaning whereas we believe that the key to the passage is right in the passage itself.

What We Believe to Be the Correct Meaning

We believe that this passage means this: that a person must be born of the flesh (or naturally] and likewise of the Spirit (supernaturally] in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Why we believe this:

1. Because it is certainly true that one must be born twice to enter the kingdom.
2. Because in the very next breath, Jesus makes plain that He is speaking of two births-flesh and spirit. For he says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." It seems to us that he clearly gives his own explanation of his meaning.
3. Because the point of confusion in the mind of Nicodemus was the matter of the contrasting births. His words in verse 4 make clear his point of misunderstanding. Jesus had to say to him in substance: I am not talking about the physical birth... one must be born in that way, and in yet another way to get into the kingdom of God.
4. Because according to Bible scholars, the writings of the Jewish rabbis often refer to the natural birth as a *water birth* for reasons which any physician can make clear.
5. Because we believe that the obvious and simple meaning is in this case, as generally, the true meaning.

—Grace and Life.

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