

Walking Through the Land of God's Promises - Part 3



Part 3/6
Walking Through the Land of God's Promises
By Derek Prince

How to Become a Child of God

In each of the teachings in this "Walking Through the Land of God's Promises" series, our premise has been very basic and practical. Our goal has been to isolate a need or problem that commonly arises in our lives, then find and apply the biblical solution to it. I have tried to show you in a practical way how you can meet such needs and solve such problems by locating and claiming the specific promises of God's Word which address that particular situation.

In our last teaching, we discussed the problem of sin and the biblical promise that can make us sure that God will forgive us. In this teaching, we deal with another topic that is basic to our spiritual lives: how to become a child of God.

A Profound Discussion

We begin by referencing a conversation between Jesus and a religious leader of His day, a Pharisee named Nicodemus. This interchange, recorded in John's gospel, chapter 3, verses 1–11, is as follows:

> "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night, and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and

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> 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. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony.'" (NAS)

A truly remarkable conversation! It is interesting to note that although Nicodemus was obviously a sincere, good, intelligent and educated man, he simply could not understand what Jesus was trying to say. Here was Jesus —obviously talking about one of the most important aspects of life— an experience He describes as being "born again," "born from above" or "born anew" (all legitimate translations). Yet Nicodemus was wrestling with this vital concept.

Two Natures

Jesus was telling Nicodemus about an experience so important that without it, no one could see or enter the kingdom of God. His statement greatly shocked Nicodemus, who struggled to understand what Jesus meant by it. Jesus explained to him that, in essence, there are two different types of nature. There is a fleshly nature (a physical nature) and then there is a spiritual nature. He said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Nicodemus somehow thought that to be born again, he would have to go back into his mother's womb again and be born as a little child. Jesus made it clear He was not referring to the natural birth process—that birth which produces a fleshly nature like the one Nicodemus already had. Instead, Jesus was talking about a birth that produces a spiritual nature—one which Nicodemus had not yet experienced.

To further explain, Jesus compared the spiritual realm to the wind—one of the most familiar elements in our physical world. Jesus said, "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The Wind of the Spirit

We need to bear in mind that both in the Hebrew of the Old Testament and in the Greek of the New Testament, each language uses the same word for wind, breath or spirit—in Hebrew, ruach, and in Greek, pneuma. When Jesus uses the wind as an example, He is directing us to that which the example illustrates—that is, the behavior of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is saying, "The Holy Spirit is like the wind. Nobody tells the wind where to blow. It comes into our lives; we do not know where it comes from, nor where it is going." He then makes the connection: "That is what the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth is like. We do not know where the Spirit comes from, nor where it goes. But we certainly do know what it does."

The Activity of the Spirit

How do we know the wind is blowing? Not because we see the wind—but because we see what it does. What do we see? We see the clouds scudding across the sky. Maybe we see dust rising up in the street or the trees bending. We might see a lady whose hat or scarf is blown off her head and she goes running after it.

All these indicate that the wind is moving in a certain area. The same is true when a person is born again. The Spirit of God comes into his life, and he does not know where it comes from or where it is going. But he is aware that something is definitely moving and happening within him.

Many years ago, when I was a pastor in London, a young lady from Denmark came to our home to find out more about this new birth experience. I would describe this woman as a nominal churchgoer. My first wife and I instructed her and explained to her what she had to do to be born again. Then I led her in a very simple prayer in which she did what God required of her.

This young lady was a rather formal type of person—not in any sense emotional. (The Danish people, by and large, are not a very highly emotional group of people.) However, after she had said this prayer in our living room, two large teardrops appeared in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. Rather self-consciously, she dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief—immediately two more tears appeared and trickled down her cheeks. At that point, she said, "I

don't know why I'm crying." I replied to her: "You see, the wind has just started to blow."

What this woman was experiencing was one of the evidences of the Holy Spirit at work. This woman felt a sense of tenderness—a sense of relief and joy—that she did not understand and could not explain. Though she was somewhat embarrassed by it, what she felt was so real that she could not hide it.

How It Happens

Let's look again at Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, recorded in John chapter 3. Very likely, Jesus made these same statements to many people. However, I believe the conversation with Nicodemus is recorded for a special reason. Why? Because if there were anything other than the new birth which could have given Nicodemus what he needed, it is likely that he would have had it. He was a religious man; he was an educated man; he had high social standing; and he belonged to a race (the Jewish race) which God had set apart for special purposes. Please notice, however, that neither religion, education, social position, nor racial designation are any substitute for the new birth.

So far, we have discussed two topics: the necessity of being born again and the nature of what happens when a person is born again. There remains one more very important topic that we must cover: how a person can be born again. It is so very important that we take special note of it.

In his gospel—chapter 1, verses 11–13—John says this about Jesus:

> "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." (NAS)

Jesus came as a Jew to the Jewish people. Yet, as a nation—not as individuals, but as a nation collectively—they rejected the One who was their Messiah. I thank God that there is a "but" in the next verse that follows.

> "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." (NAS)

One Key Step

What is the key transaction that leads to being born of God—that is, being born again or born anew by the Spirit of God? For anyone who desires this experience, what must that person actually do? The Bible states it very simply. "As many as received Him [Jesus]." What is the one step you must take in order to be born again? You must receive Jesus as your personal Savior, confessing Him as your Lord. When you do that, He gives you the right and authority to become a child of God. You take this step by faith through believing in His name.

You cannot do it by virtue of any religious good works or any claim to your own righteousness—but rather it is simply through believing in His name. The result of this step of faith is that you are born of God—born again.

In his reference to this born again experience, John excludes three characteristics that we might think apply to the new birth. He says that the new birth is "not of blood." In other words, it is not by natural descent. No matter how good your father and mother were, their goodness does not make you good in this sense. You must have a new spiritual birth—a new nature that is not by natural descent.

Secondly, John says it is not "of the will of the flesh." It is not the satisfaction of some natural, carnal desire or appetite.

Thirdly, he says it is not "of the will of man." The Greek word there for man is the word for husband. That indicates that this new birth is not the result of the natural sexual relationship between husband and wife. It takes place on a different plane. It is not physical, but spiritual. Born of God's Spirit—born anew.

Applying the Promise

In closing, if you see your need to be born again, I want to give you a promise you can lay hold of. Jesus gives this promise in Revelation 3 verse 20:

> "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." (NAS)

If you desire to be born again, that is a vital word for you. Jesus is standing at the door of your heart right now, knocking. He is a gentleman. He will not force His way in.

If you want Jesus to come in, you will have to invite Him in. But if you do invite Him in, you can be sure He will come in —because He is a gentleman and He keeps His word.

Jesus goes on to say: "I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me." You must give Jesus your dinner first, and then He will share His dinner with you.

What do you have to do? You have to invite Him in. You have to yield to Him; and then in faith you have to thank Him that He has come in. Remember that all of this takes place by faith in His name.

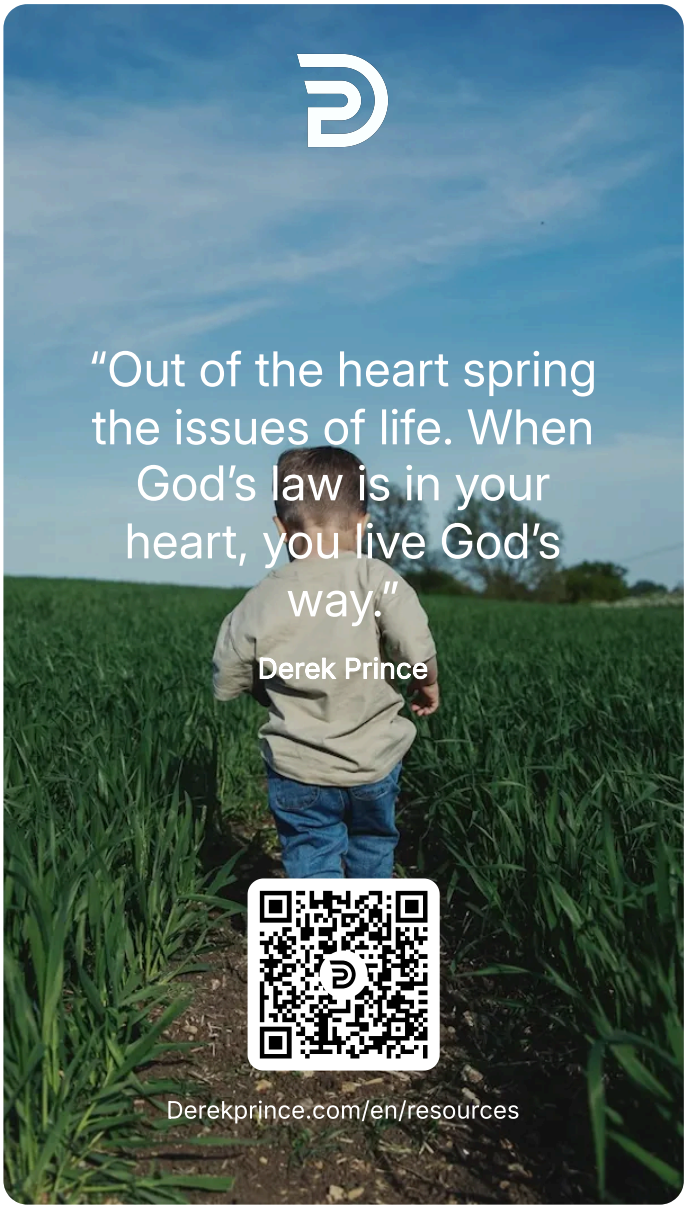
It may be that the wind of the Holy Spirit is stirring your heart to take this step right now. You may be sensing your need to be born again, or to reaffirm this step in your life.

If that is the case, let's apply the biblical promise contained in Revelation 3:20, and express it to Jesus with the following prayer:

Lord, Jesus, I know I need to be born anew by the Spirit of God. Like Nicodemus, I may not understand the process entirely, but I want the Spirit of the Living God to touch my heart and make it alive. I need something beyond blood, the will of the flesh or the will of men. I want to receive Jesus and be born again as a child of God according to the Spirit.

Jesus, I sense You knocking at the door of my heart. I now hear and respond to Your voice—inviting You in, yielding my life to You, and thanking You for coming in. Thank You, Jesus, that You have come into my life—bringing me into new birth by Your Spirit. Amen.

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