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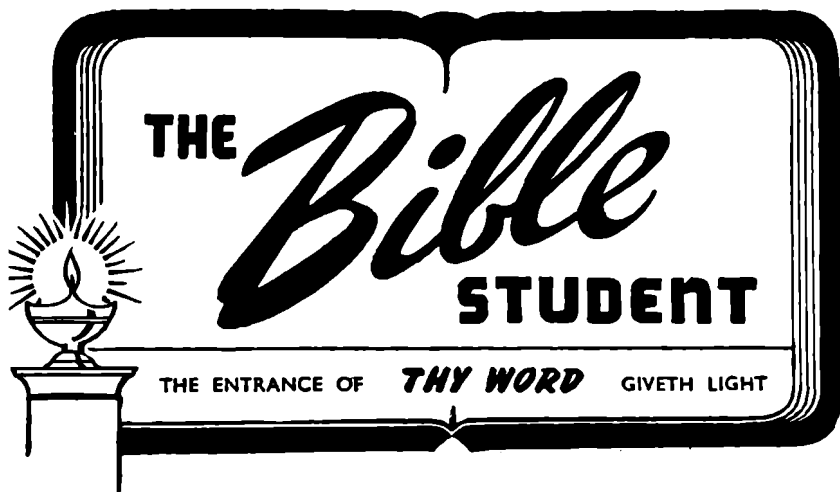
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Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

who are told that, though they may be excluded from the kingdom, they will certainly get to heaven eventually; and thirdly, because it lacks Scriptural authority.

Although the attainments of Christians vary with the individual, all are equally '*in Christ*,' and all should be united in Christian fellowship not only 'ideally' but in practical ways as far as possible.

(Concluded in next issue)

THE GENITIVE CASE OF THE NOUN

There is no case to which more attention ought to be given in the New Testament than to the genitive. There are at least five or six different uses which should be carefully studied, as doctrinal deductions of considerable importance will often be found to depend on the view taken. We have, for instance, a gen. of *possession* as in 2 Thess. 2 : 14 ; of *origin* (Col. 2 : 18) ; of originating *cause* (Col. 1 : 23 ; 1 Thess. 1 : 6) of characterizing *quality* (Gal. 5 : 1) ; of *material* (Phil. 3 : 21) ; of *contents* (1 Thess. 2 : 5) ; of *opposition* (Eph. 6 : 14) ; of *point of view* (Phil. 2 : 30) ; and the general divisions of the gen. *subjecti* and *objecti*, the due distinction between which always tests the accuracy of thought and perspicacity of the interpreter.—BISHOP ELLICOTT.

AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

F. F. BRUCE, M.A.

II. Jesus reveals Himself to the World (John 1 : 18—12 : 50)

(b) MINISTRY OF JESUS IN GALILEE, JERUSALEM AND SAMARIA (John 2 : 1—4 : 42)

iii. *Nicodemus and the New Birth* (2 : 23—3 : 21)

Ch. 2, v. 23—*Now when He was in Jerusalem at the passover, during the feast, many believed on His name, beholding His signs which He did.*—The last three verses of this chapter probably serve as an introduction to the Nicodemus episode of Ch. 3. It is frequently said that, whereas Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels deprecates the faith that must have a sign to depend on, and indeed refuses to give a sign when asked (cf. Mark 8 : 11 f.), the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel performs signs expressly to produce belief. A passage like the present one shows that the antithesis is by no means so sharp as is often represented. (Compare also John

4:48, 'Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe'). A clear distinction is made between a certain degree of faith which springs from the impression made by the external sign, and the true faith which passes beyond the outward and visible and grasps the spiritual reality signified. Nicodemus came to positive conclusions about Jesus through seeing the works which He performed, but he soon showed how far he was from appreciating their spiritual inwardness. What believing on (literally 'into') the name of Christ means when real and full faith is exercised has been suggested in the note on Ch. 1:12; it involves unreserved acknowledgment of the ownership of Christ. But this faith will not be attained so long as 'we see the signs but see not Him'.

v. 24—*But Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, for that He knew all men,*—Other leaders and teachers may at times be misled into giving their followers and disciples more credit for loyalty and understanding than they actually possess; not so Jesus, who read the hearts of men like an open book. It was only those whose faith and allegiance were beyond question that He admitted into the inner secret of His person and purpose. So in the Synoptic record it was not until the apostles, in the face of all appearances to the contrary, confessed Him spontaneously as Messiah, through the lips of their spokesman Peter, that Jesus 'began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things' (Mark 8:31).

v. 25—*And because He needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for He Himself knew what was in man.*—The Word-made-flesh has direct apprehension of the mysteries and complexities of human nature. He does not depend on spoken words as the index to inward thoughts and feelings; the hidden depths of every heart lie open to his penetrating insight. This is revealed in conversation after conversation in the following chapters—in those which He holds, for example, with Nicodemus, with the woman of Sychar, with the invalid at Bethesda—as He goes straight to the root of the trouble in each case. Thus, in the opening verses of Ch. 3, He pays scant attention to Nicodemus's complimentary salutation, but insists on the truth which Nicodemus most required to learn—the necessity of the new birth.

Ch. 3, v. 1—*Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named*

Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.—Nicodemus is frequently identified with one Naqdimon ben Gorion who is mentioned in the Talmud as a wealthy Jerusalemite who was entrusted with the supply of water to pilgrims at the great festivals. But the grounds for the identification are quite inconclusive. The Pharisees, to whose ranks Nicodemus belonged, supplied (as was said above in the note on Ch. 1:24) an influential minority in the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jewish nation, and since Nicodemus is called 'a ruler of the Jews' he must have belonged to this minority group among the Sanhedrists. (His membership of the Sanhedrin is further implied in Ch. 7:50). Perhaps the conjunction *de* should be rendered 'But' rather than 'Now'; Nicodemus, to be sure, had been impressed by the signs which he saw without realizing their deeper significance, but there was in him a sincere willingness to learn more to which Jesus responded by 'trusting Himself' to him more than He did to many others. The adversative force of the conjunction is therefore apposite.

v. 2—*The same came unto Him by night.*—It is best to take the statement that Nicodemus's interview with Jesus happened at night as a simple factual reminiscence, without giving it an allegorical interpretation, as though the darkness without reflected the inner darkness of Nicodemus's mind. Nor need we inquire why he chose to come at night—whether he did not wish his fellow-councillors to know of his errand, or chose a time when he knew that Jesus was likely to be undisturbed, so that there would be leisure for a long conversation.

And said to Him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with Him.—Nicodemus may have been deficient in comprehension, but at least he was not blinded by prejudice, as were some of his colleagues, whose only reaction to the works and words of Jesus was to put them down to demon-possession (cf. Mark 3:22 ff.; John 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20). Even if he did not grasp the significance of the miracles, he recognized by their character that they could only be wrought by the power of God. And therefore, although Jesus did not belong to one of the acknowledged schools of sacred learning, this leading teacher in Israel saluted Him as an

equal with the title 'Rabbi' (see the note on Ch. 1:38). Nicodemus's conclusions were true so far as they went, but they did not go far enough. Jesus saw beyond his words of greeting to the state of his heart, and answered him in language which, baffling and unintelligible as Nicodemus found it to begin with, was carefully calculated to speak to his condition.

v. 3—*Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.*—Most of the speeches and conversations recorded in the New Testament are brief summaries, and this helps to explain at times the apparent abruptness of transition from one thought or topic to another. But the abruptness is probably intentional here. Whatever Nicodemus's expectation of the course of his talk with the Galilean Rabbi had been, he was quite unprepared for words like these. The kingdom of God in the Old Testament is presented on occasion as His eternal and universal rule: 'Jehovah shall reign for ever and ever' (Ex. 15:18); 'Jehovah hath established his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all' (Ps. 103:19). But more particularly the kingdom or kingship of God is manifested on earth where it is accepted and obeyed by men—that is to say, in His own nation of Israel, or at any rate among the righteous in Israel. Members of other nations might submit to His rule by incorporation as proselytes in the commonwealth of Israel; persons who did this were sometimes described as 'taking upon themselves the yoke of the kingdom of heaven.' (The difference between 'the kingdom of heaven' and 'the kingdom of God' is one of idiom and not of substance; 'heaven' was a common substitute for 'God' in Jewish parlance, as it is to some degree even with us.) A proselyte in effect entered upon a new life when he thus assumed the yoke of the kingdom of heaven. 'The proselyte', it was said, 'is like a new-born child.' A proselyte might therefore fittingly be spoken of as 'born anew'. But how could such language have any application to a true-born Israelite?

To 'see the kingdom of God' was an expression commonly used of witnessing the final consummation of God's kingly rule, when it would be accepted and obeyed universally. This future aspect of the divine kingdom is also present in the Old Testament,

notably in the Book of Daniel (cf. Dan. 2:44; 7:14, 27). To a Jew with Nicodemus's upbringing, to see the kingdom of God meant to participate in the age to come, the resurrection life, the 'regeneration' as it is called in Matt. 19:28. But our Lord was speaking of a regeneration to be experienced here and now. To be begotten anew—or to be begotten from above (Gk. *anothen*)—in the sense which His words have here is to be 'begotten of God' in the sense of John 1:13, to enter immediately into the life of that coming age. We who have read the prologue to this Gospel know that those who are thus born into the divine family, those who have received the right to become children of God, are those who have received the Word-made-flesh, those who have believed on His name. But Nicodemus knew nothing of this; hence his bewildered reply.

v. 4—*Nicodemus saith unto Him, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*—Had Jesus been speaking of proselytes, Nicodemus might have understood something of His meaning. But it was plain that His enigmatic words were intended to apply to Nicodemus himself. But in what sense? Surely He could not mean a repetition of the experience of physical birth, or a reincarnation? As Justin Martyr was to put it later, probably alluding to this passage: 'It is clear to all that those who have once been born cannot re-enter their mothers' wombs' (*First Apology* 61. 4). Or was Nicodemus himself giving a figurative reply to what he understood as a figurative challenge? In that case perhaps he meant that when a man is old and set in his ways, he cannot be expected to change his nature and start all over again. At any rate, he did not understand Jesus' reference to the necessity of a new birth; Jesus therefore repeated His statement in somewhat different terms.

v. 5—*Jesus answered, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*—Solemnity is added to this affirmation (as to the previous one in v. 3) by the twofold 'Amen' which introduces it (see note on Ch. 1:51). The new birth is explained as being a birth 'from water and spirit' (Gk. *ex hydatos kai pneumatos*)—and we must

bear in mind that the word translated 'spirit' also means 'wind' and 'breath'. Did Nicodemus think it impossible for a man to acquire a new nature in old age? One who knew the Hebrew Scriptures so well as he did should have known that God had promised to do this very thing for His people Israel: 'I will sprinkle clean *water* upon you, and ye shall be clean. . . . a new heart also will I give you, and a new *spirit* will I put within you' (Ezek. 36: 25 f.). And this promise was further amplified in the vision of the valley of dry bones, when the prophet obeyed the divine command: 'Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live' (Ezek. 37:9).

Now, while these passages from Ezekiel had primary reference to a national revival, an application to individuals was not unknown. The cleansing with water in Ezek. 36:25 provided Scriptural justification for the baptism which, as was pointed out in the note on Ch. 1:25, every proselyte underwent at his entrance into the Israelite community. John the Baptist extended the principle to those who were Israelites by birth, as though baptism were the symbolical gateway to membership in the repentant and believing remnant of Israel. Here even an upright and illustrious teacher of Israel is told that he, too, must not rely on his natural birthright as a member of the chosen nation, but must take the outside place and enter the kingdom of God by a spiritual rebirth. 'In his reply the Lord reminds him of what was then going on in Jordan only eighteen miles away: John was preaching repentance through a baptism of water, he was promising regeneration by the Holy Ghost; there can be no life Godward without a new life which is independent of our ancestors, our choice, our wills, and which is eternal, defying death itself (John 1:13).'¹

The Evangelist was writing in a day when the baptism of John had long since been swallowed up by Christian baptism. But if even John's baptism taught this lesson, how much more does Christian baptism symbolize the new beginning for every believer who spiritually shares the death and burial of Christ and

¹ Harold St John in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Oct. 1953, p. 200.

rises with Him to newness of life! It is unfortunate that the baptismal allusion should be missed in this verse by some expositors in their reaction against the doctrine of 'baptismal regeneration' by an *opus operatum*, i.e., the doctrine that the baptismal rite itself has regenerative efficacy, without regard to the faith of the baptized person. (It need hardly be said that our Evangelist, who places such emphasis on faith as the indispensable condition of eternal life, could not have tolerated the view that there is any spiritual value in an external ceremony except as it signifies an inward reality.)

v. 6—*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.*—By natural birth we receive an earthly nature; to receive a spiritual nature, which alone can admit us to the kingdom of God, we must be begotten 'from above'. There is a complete contrast between the realm of the flesh and that of the Spirit, but those who have been born into the former may be reborn into the latter through faith-union with the Divine Word who, belonging as He did eternally to the spiritual order, yet became flesh for the redemption of men.¹

v. 7—*Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born anew.*—Once the distinction between the realms of flesh and spirit is appreciated, there is nothing strange in our Lord's insistence that two distinct births are necessary for entrance to the one and to the other. He was speaking to Nicodemus, but His words held good for others as well as Nicodemus; hence the transition to the second person plural: 'You must all be begotten from above.' Why should Nicodemus be surprised at such a simple and logical statement?

v. 8—*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the spirit.*—Since Gk. *pneuma*

¹ In 1 Pet. 1:23 believers are said to have been begotten again through the Word (*logos*) of God. The Spirit and the Word cannot be dissociated in the work of regeneration. In Eph. 5:26 (a passage to be interpreted on similar lines to the present one) the 'word' (*rhema*) which accompanies the 'washing (or "laver") of water' may be the convert's confession of the name of Christ or the baptizer's invoking of that name in the act of baptism.

may be translated 'wind', 'breath' or 'spirit' as best suits the context, some take the first part of this verse to refer to the Spirit of God Himself: 'The Spirit breathes where He will, and thou hearest His voice, but knowest not whence He comes or whither He goes.' (They point out that *pneuma* means 'spirit' everywhere else in the N.T.) But it is much more likely that the wind is referred to here as a picture of the Spirit's work in regeneration, especially in view of the passage from Ezek. 37 mentioned in the note on v. 5, where the wind is the vehicle of the life-giving Spirit.

(In Ezek. 37 one and the same Hebrew word, *ruach*, and one and the same Greek word in the LXX, *pneuma*, correspond to English 'wind' and 'breath' in vv. 9 and 10 and 'spirit' in v. 14.) We cannot control or see the movement of the wind, but we hear its sound, and its other effects as it blows are equally plain to our senses. So we cannot control or see the hidden work of the Spirit in the human heart, but in every one who is begotten anew by the Spirit the effects give unmistakable evidence of His operation.

(*To be continued*)

BIBLICAL HEBREW WORDS

H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

Man in Society (*continued*)

Alongside the words already dealt with in this section we must study *na'ar*, used 239 times, and its feminine *na'arah*, used 62 times.* The fact that they are translated babe, child, lad, servant, young man, damsel, maiden suggests forcibly that we have to deal with words expressing an outlook which we no longer possess.

* In the Pentateuch, in fact Gen. and Dt., except for Dt. 22:19, *na'arah* is written *na'ar*, 21 times in all. It used to be claimed that here we have the original epicene form, and hence it is a proof of the antiquity of the Pentateuch. Seeing that the feminine is already found in Ugaritic, i.e., early Canaanite, before the time of Moses, and the regular feminine plural form is found in Gen. and Ex., it is more likely that we are dealing with 'defective' writing. Allis: *The Five Books of Moses*, Young: *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, and Aalders: *A Short Introduction to the Pentateuch*, all ignore the point.