

Being Born Again

We believe being "born again" means to live a changed life by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we believe in Yeshua (Jesus) and accept Him as the Messiah, we are to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). The Holy Spirit helps us to do what is right and to live a godlier life. We are said to live by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

Being "born again" then has nothing to do with reincarnation or with the false doctrine of "once saved always saved." The definition of "once saved always saved" has to do with believing in Yeshua (Jesus) and doing that makes us automatically okay with God no matter what we do.¹

We should probably think of being born again as starting a new life. So, when we see the words born again used in the Bible, that is what we need to think; we start a new life through the Holy Spirit. Being born again then should also be understood as growing up in the spiritual community; we are part of a body which encourages each other (Eph. 4:16).

The idea of being "born again" sounds a little strange to those not familiar with the Bible. The concept of being born again in Jewish thought has to do with big changes in life or those who have repented. Most of us who read the New Testament portion think of Nicodemus and his encounter with the Messiah Yeshua when thinking of being born again. In order to understand these passages, we need to understand the context within its Jewish understanding. The Bible was written within a biblical Jewish culture that had specific ways of understanding things.

First of all, the Jewish understanding of being born again revolves around the stages of life (and not always about someone who is repentant). When a young man made his bar mitzvah, it was understood that he was born again. Then when he got married, he was considered born again. If he became a Bible teacher, he was considered born again. These all have to do with a change in life.

The bar mitzvah is a coming of age ceremony where the person is now of age to know and observe all of God's commandments. That doesn't mean they weren't responsible before that, but the bar mitvah means that they are now fully instructed; they know how to say their prayers, keep God's commandments, and in Messianic circles they often read from the Torah and Haftarah during their bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah ceremony; there is a spiritual responsibility that goes with having a bar or bat mitzvah. Marriage and the coming together of two people to form a family is also another big event. The couple is responsible not only for their own spiritual life, but those of their family. They are said to be born again if a person becomes a spiritual teacher (rabbi); they are responsible to teach the Torah and the truths of the Bible and be an example to others. It is a big responsibility (2 Tim. 2:2). God says teachers will be judged more stringently (Jam. 3:1).

Nicodemus asks, how can he be born again? He already was a teacher and had gone through all these changes in life. He didn't need to repent because he was already following God. Yeshua wasn't referring to those changes, but to the change that happens when one receives the Holy Spirit and has a changed life through the power of the Holy Spirit (after they accept the Messiah). Yeshua goes on to tell Nicodemus about receiving Him as the Messiah in John 3:12-20. Yeshua says He came down from heaven and predicts he will give his life to rescue mankind.

¹ Some people equate being "born again" with something spiritual that makes them permanent members of the heavenly community. If a person becomes part of the believing community and then doesn't act like they are part of the community are they really a member of the community? Believers for all time are called "sons of God" and that is a term used for those who believe and act like they are part of God's family and imitate their Father God. Noah was a son of God; Israel was a son of God; and, those that believe in the Messiah Yeshua and follow God's commandments are sons of God.