

Born Again

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Born Again

Nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ proclaimed the infinitely profound words, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” In this simple statement, our Savior revealed man’s ultimate and transcendent destiny! But what exactly did He mean by “born again,” and just how do these two simple words relate to the magnificent Kingdom of God?

Christ’s statement has echoed down through the corridor of time, eventually affecting the entire world. In our modern age, these words have become some of the most frequently quoted in the Bible. Tragically, however, few students of the Bible have fully understood the true meaning of Christ’s powerful proclamation!

As a result, many sincere people today, claiming to be “born again,” are convinced that Christ’s utterance simply meant that one need only experience a change of heart by accepting Him as their personal Savior. As one religious tract states, “Being born again is something that happens the instant you genuinely believe in Him, receive Him, and confess Him as Lord.”

Based on such teachings, many individuals who merely profess a belief in Christ feel a sense of eternal security, believing this makes them born again—but are they?

The words of Jesus mean much more than simply a change of heart. They actually unveil a far deeper spiritual truth than most people have realized. Now *you* can know and understand the transcendent meaning of Christ’s extraordinary words.

The Context is the Kingdom

The apostle John recorded the account of Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, visiting Jesus one night under the cloak of darkness. During this clandestine meeting, Jesus’ visitor explained that the Jewish leadership considered Jesus to be a teacher sent from God. Seeming to disregard this comment, Christ apparently went in a completely different direction, stating that Nicodemus needed to be “born again” to see the Kingdom of God. Why did Jesus respond this way?

The answer requires an understanding of the motivation for this visit to Jesus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and a member of the Sanhedrin, the official Jewish ruling council. This high-ranking religious body defined doctrine, teaching, and behavior in the Jewish community.

As Jesus began His public ministry, He soon became a matter of concern to these religious leaders. Jesus seemed to appear from nowhere—preaching a message about the Kingdom of God. As Mark records:

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the **gospel of the Kingdom of God**. (Mark 1:14)

The gospel, or good news Jesus taught was that God’s Kingdom was close at hand. Christ warned people everywhere to prepare for its inauguration. Christ’s message was not entirely foreign to the Jewish people. They understood from reading the Scriptures that one day a Messiah would appear, providing divine leadership for Israel and all of mankind.

The Jews looked forward to this coming Kingdom, eagerly anticipating its glorious future. The Scriptures promised that the nation of Israel would become the divine headquarters for God's world government (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Centuries earlier, the prophet Daniel had prophesied of this Kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had a dream of a great image with a head of gold, a chest of silver, thighs of brass, legs of iron, and toes of iron and clay. God caused Daniel to understand that the dream depicted the future of four consecutive nations. Beginning with Babylon, each would rise and fall, until finally Christ would establish God's Kingdom. Daniel spoke to the king, saying:

Thou *art* this head of gold. And after thee shall arise another Kingdom inferior to thee, and another third Kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth Kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all *things*: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise . . . And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the Kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these Kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. (Daniel 2:37-44)

The religious leaders of Christ's time clearly understood the identity of these four kingdoms. They realized that Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian kingdom had been replaced by the Persian Empire. The Persians had been defeated by the Greeks, who were finally supplanted by the powerful Romans. The Jewish nation now found themselves subject to this fourth empire, and many religious Jews believed that Rome was the prophesied fourth realm that would precede God's Kingdom.

During this time, when many Jews were wondering if it was time for the promised Messiah to appear, Jesus began preaching a message about the coming Kingdom of God. Christ's powerful pronouncement brought great hope to many, but others found Him, and His message deeply disturbing.

Jesus had no official credentials from the existing religious leadership—yet He taught publically and with authority. The Jewish establishment felt threatened as it watched crowds of people flock to hear Christ's teaching. Even worse, His doctrine seemed in direct conflict with much of the long-standing traditions of the Rabbis.

Christ offended the Sadducees because He was not of their priestly line. He infuriated the Pharisees, who controlled the Sanhedrin, by speaking with a religious authority which they had not conferred. Perhaps even more importantly, Christ appeared to be a threat to those holding political positions at Rome's discretion.

These Jewish leaders were faced with a dilemma. Christ openly preached an unorthodox message, performed astounding miracles, and His popularity with the common people flourished. The possibility of His teachings starting a rebellion created fear in the minds of these Jewish political and religious officers. They understood their obligation to maintain the peace in Judea for the great empire which held their reins. A revolt could cost them their positions.

Nicodemus was deeply entrenched in this system. He realized that the Jewish leadership would likely deem it necessary to oppose Christ. Fearing to be seen with the controversial Jesus, he chose to visit Him in the shadow of night. To Nicodemus, the issue was not just political, it was also spiritual. Was this unorthodox religious teacher an imposter—or the prophesied Messiah? Would He bring forth the promised Kingdom? This deeply religious Pharisee had to know—who was this man, Jesus?

Against this backdrop Nicodemus approached Jesus with these questions swirling in his mind. Should he ally himself with Rome thereby guaranteeing his office, or should he join forces with Jesus? If Jesus truly was the Messiah, the consequences of opposing Him would be tragic. Such a mistake could cost him the opportunity to be part of the glorious coming Kingdom of God. In this context, John explains:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. (John 3:1)

Jesus knew the innermost thoughts of men, and He immediately realized the purpose of this visit by Nicodemus. The Savior addressed Nicodemus' deep-felt, yet unspoken concerns, stating:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, **Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.** (John 3:3)

With these straight forward words, Jesus notified His visitor, not only that the coming Kingdom was an absolute reality, but that inclusion in that Kingdom would not come about as the result of the well-intended political maneuvering of men. Entrance would not be granted as a consequence of being a descendent of Abraham. The Kingdom would not be established through a revolt of the people or by any human power whatsoever. In fact, the Kingdom would not be attained by any means that Nicodemus could imagine. There was only one way he could be a participant in the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus would have to literally be—born again.

What Does it Mean to be Born Again?

Jesus clearly stated that in order to even see the Kingdom, one must be born again. But, precisely what did He mean?

An analysis of the words John chose can be helpful. The word “born” is “gennao” in the Greek language, and it can mean either “conception” or “parturition,” giving “birth.”

The Greek word for “again” is “anothen.” This word has the following four possible meanings: 1) “from above,” 2) “from the top,” 3) “from the first, or beginning,” or 4) “anew” or “again.”

When recording Christ's statement to Nicodemus, it is highly probable that John specifically chose “anothen,” because all four meanings apply. We must be supernaturally born from above—by the authority of heaven. We must be born from the top—born of no less than God the Father. Answering our high calling, we must also be born in a way that will become a new beginning for us as sons and daughters of the great King. However primarily, Jesus literally meant “rebirth,” to be born a second time.

It is also important to recognize that Jesus did not actually use the word “anothen.” Aramaic was the common language of Christ's day, and it was Aramaic that Jesus spoke.

That being the case, it is far more important to understand the actual context of a verse, rather than the technical meaning of a Greek word. Therefore, we should consider the meaning that the man who was talking with Jesus understood Him to convey. What did Nicodemus understand Jesus to have said? Notice the direct and clear understanding reflected by his next question. Christ's visitor asked:

How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? (John 3:4)

In his search for truth, this religious leader understood that Jesus was talking about a **literal rebirth**. *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament Words* confirms this by stating:

Nicodemus was not puzzled about birth from heaven; what perplexed him was that a person must be born **a second time**.

The words that Jesus actually spoke, and what Nicodemus understood Him to say was that a man must literally be born a second time! Nicodemus realized that the first birth occurred from his mother's womb. But what is this second birth? Jesus was referring to a very real, second birth—one of the spirit and not of the flesh.

Typology in the Bible

To understand Christ's words, it is helpful to consider the way God uses typology in the Bible. First, however, what exactly is typology? Webster's Dictionary defines this word as follows:

(Typology is) A doctrine holding that things in Christian belief are prefigured or symbolized.

Types are symbols that God used to prefigure spiritual aspects of His creation. He literally patterned everything in the physical universe in the likeness of the spiritual realm. For example, mankind was created in God's image. Therefore, it is possible to observe man and perceive what God looks like. As the Scriptures reveal, He has a head, arms, and legs just like humankind (Revelation 1:4). In another illustration, God required the tabernacle to be built after a specific pattern. The book of Hebrews reveals that Christ gave Moses an exacting blueprint from which to work. The author states:

(Christ is) A minister of the sanctuary, and of **the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.** . . . For if he were on earth, He should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and **shadow of heavenly things**, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith He, that thou make all things **according to the pattern shewed to thee** in the mount. (Hebrews 8:2)

The tabernacle on earth was patterned after the heavenly tabernacle that is yet to come. The high priest in the Old Testament, represented our High Priest, Jesus Christ. The city of Jerusalem on earth is symbolic of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem which will one day descend to this earth (Galatians 4:26; Revelation 21). Earthly things are physical types that picture the spiritual ante types—the reality or fulfillment to come.

God repeatedly uses physical examples as symbolic forerunners of final events. It is essential to understand this relationship of the physical to the spiritual in order to comprehend what is said next. Jesus revealed:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be **born of water** and **of the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. (John 3:5)

Born of the Water

In the verse above, Jesus Christ speaks of two separate occurrences. The first event He makes reference to is being "born of water." For centuries people have puzzled over the interpretation of this statement. The Scriptures make it clear, however: Being born of the water is an expression which describes the act of being baptized in water.

The baptism ceremony undergone by each new convert portrays putting to death the person one was before being called of God—the burial of the old self (Romans 6:6). For this reason, when the new convert is baptized, he is to be totally immersed, buried in the water, thus figuratively signifying burial with Christ.

Being raised up out of the water also has tremendous symbolic significance. This act pictures being raised as a new person in Christ (Colossians 3:10). It also foreshadows the Christian's literal physical death, being buried in a grave, and finally the magnificent reality of one day being resurrected, in the manner that Christ was—born of the Spirit.

Many religious leaders require people to become baptized in order to join their church. In such cases, the candidate goes under the water and rises again never fully realizing why God commanded the baptism ceremony in the first place. Consequently, they do not understand the incredible message God incorporated within this profound ceremony. Paul discusses this at great length in the book of Romans. There he states:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore **we are buried with Him by baptism into death**: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life.** (Romans 6:3-4)

The apostle Paul explains that new converts are partakers of Christ's death in baptism. This means that by their act of baptism, Christians simulate being buried with Christ—another reason why complete immersion in water is absolutely necessary. The candidate then rises up out of the watery grave, picturing Jesus' supernatural resurrection to glory.

Baptism also portrays our belief that, just as Jesus was raised from the dead, Christians will also one day be raised up out of their graves in a similar resurrection. The apostle Paul continues to explain:

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, **we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.** (Romans 6:5)

When Christ was raised from the dead, His form was completely different from that which He had as a human. Jesus was completely changed in composition. When this occurred, He again became the magnificent, powerful spirit being He previously was when He sat at the right hand of God the Father. Paul proclaims that:

(Christ was) Declared *to be the Son of God with power*, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. (Romans 1:4)

When Jesus Christ returns, those Christians who have remained faithful will also be resurrected and made sons and daughters of God. They will then be empowered as Christ was. They will be entirely new creatures—composed of spirit and capable of exerting supernatural powers beyond human imagination.

The Christian baptism in water foreshadows this awesome event that is yet to come. In a precursory sense, being born of the water is a symbolic new birth. A Christian comes out of the water a new person in Christ. Paul describes this, saying:

Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (II Corinthians 5:17)

Once born of water, by the act of baptism, the new Christian begins to live the way God desires. The new convert is not yet a full-grown Christians however—only a babe. As the apostle Peter explains:

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby. (I Peter 2:2)

Once born of the water, Christians have symbolically put to death the former man or woman they once were. Each person raised out of the water is cleansed of sin and is as pure as the white snow. A minister then lays his hands on the new convert and the gift of the Holy Spirit is given. Spiritual conception takes place, the new Christian becomes anchored in the body of Christ, and he or she begins to live a new way of life, striving to imitate Jesus.

Following baptism, the new Christian studies God's Word, continually striving to grow in grace and knowledge (II Peter 3:18). With God in the lead, the individual matures spiritually. The fruits of the Spirit begin to show forth manifesting God's divine nature. Christ's character becomes more and more visible until it begins to radiate out, beaming like a light to the world (Galatians 5:22; II Peter 1:4).

It is obvious that being born of the water is a significant part of the conversion process, but it must also be understood that it is only a symbol of the expectation of a far greater experience that yet lies in the future. It is NOT the ultimate reality! Baptism is simply acting out the typology of our eventual death, burial, and final resurrection to transcendent glory.

At Christ's return, those who were born of the water and have overcome their human nature will be resurrected. They will be born of the spirit, finally possessing the very nature and character of God. Being born of the water is only the precursor to the transcendent end of being born again.

Born of the Spirit

The second event that Christ addresses is that of being “born of the spirit.” After being properly baptized, all that the new believer experiences in their life is designed to prepare them for this single magnificent reality of being “born of the spirit!”

When Jesus spoke these words, He meant no less than a literal birth into an entirely different realm. God is spirit, and He ultimately desires that all men worship Him in spirit (John 4:24). To accomplish this high calling, the Almighty must transform His called out ones into spirit—like He is. The process the Eternal chose to accomplish this transcendent goal is rebirth. Just as man is born into this physical world, he is destined to one day be born into the spirit world.

For this reason Christ stipulated; “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” Those things that are composed of spirit are invisible to the human eye. Therefore, in order to see God’s Kingdom, we must first be transformed into the same substance of which God and the angels are composed. The Apostle Paul echoes this transcendent truth with the words:

I say, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God**; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. (I Corinthians 15:50)

Flesh and blood cannot exist in the realm of spirit where God lives. So awesome is the world of spirit, and so glorious is the Almighty, He warns humans that they cannot look upon Him and live (Exodus 33:20). Therefore, in order to be included in God’s Kingdom and to view God’s majesty, man must become spirit. Once supernaturally transformed, man will be able to look upon God’s radiant face and live—having finally attained immortality. Paul continues to explain:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but **we shall all be changed**, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For **this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality**. (I Corinthians 15:51-52)

This is both the great hope and the ultimate destiny of all true Christians—to be resurrected to immortal spirit! We must be changed from corruptible flesh to incorruptible spirit. The apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthians makes this crystal clear as he writes:

The resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: **It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body**. So it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam [was made] a quickening Spirit. (I Corinthians 15:41-43)

It is undeniable. The Scriptures reveal that humans have the potential to experience a change from this physical, natural body, to a supernatural, spirit body. Therefore, Jesus Christ professed to Nicodemus that there were indeed two births—the first being of the flesh, and the second of the spirit. Jesus continues to explain this truth to His visitor, saying:

That which is **born of the flesh is flesh**; and that which is **born of the spirit is spirit**. (John 3:6)

Our human mothers gave us the gift of physical birth. We were fashioned from the flesh and blood of their body, and therefore, **we are composed of flesh**. Like they, we are corruptible. The Bible reminds us of this mortality, stating:

For dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return. (Genesis 3:19)

Professing that the second birth is of the spirit, Christ explained that it is a supernatural birth—coming from our spiritual mother, New Jerusalem (Galatians 4:26). When finally born of the spirit, **we will then be spirit**. However, this change takes place in the future, not at the time we are baptized in water. As Paul writes:

That was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is Spiritual. The first man *is* of the earth, earthy: the second man *is* the Lord from heaven. As *is* the earthy, such *are* they also that are earthy: and as *is* the heavenly, such *are* they also that are heavenly. And **as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.** (I Corinthians 15:46-49)

Paul reveals that one day we shall bear the image of the heavenly. Christians are now made in God's physical image, however, when finally born again, they will be created in His spiritual image—glorious, majestic, and invisible to humans. They will be composed of the very same supernatural material as the Almighty God and His angelic realm.

Clearly, when Jesus Christ speaks of being born again, He is not talking about becoming spiritually-minded or undergoing a change of heart toward Jesus as some claim. Notice the very words of Christ as He explains:

Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (John 3:7)

Jesus Christ explained that, when His followers were born again, they would actually be changed in composition. They would be mighty, transcending the physical laws of nature—able to supernaturally pass through walls as Jesus demonstrated, to the awe of His disciples, after His resurrection.

Upon being resurrected, the saints will take on the very nature of Christ. They will be like Him, able to command the physical elements to obey their word! They will be like the wind, invisible to the human eye, but possessing tremendous power. Resurrected spirit beings will literally be capable of travel anywhere in the universe at the speed of thought while completely outside the realm of human perception.

Man's Awesome Destiny

The resurrection to glory and man's inclusion in the Kingdom of God is one of the most significant doctrines to understand in all the Bible. Nicodemus did realize the importance of the Kingdom, and wondered both, if Christ might be the Messiah, and if He would soon establish God's realm on earth.

Jesus taught that He was indeed the prophesied Messiah, but that His Kingdom would not be established at that time (John 18:36). He would return to heaven. There, He would prepare a place for His faithful followers in the magnificent New Jerusalem (John 14:2-3). Upon His second coming, Christ would resurrect His faithful people and change them from flesh to spirit—at this point they would truly be born again. They would be glorified, inherit the Kingdom, and rule with Him on the earth for a thousand years—destined for citizenship in the holy city, New Jerusalem (Revelation 20:4, 21:1-27).

This is the transcendent future that the Eternal has awaiting true Christians. This magnificent destiny is the reason for our current existence. It is why we were born in the first place! The apostle Paul explained this to the Colossians with these words:

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: . . . which is Christ in you, **the hope of glory.** (Colossians 1:26)

The mystery that has been hidden for millennia is that mankind is destined for the glory of God. This hope of glory has been portrayed symbolically in a conversion process designed by God. It begins with sincere, true repentance and baptism, picturing the Christian's death and final conversion in composition by rebirth into God's family and Kingdom.

God's unique symbolism is not limited to just baptism, however. For example, various facets of the Almighty can be understood by observing aspects of the physical world that He created (Romans 1:20).

We are part of the physical world that God created, but unlike the animals, we are wondrously and marvelously made in His image (Genesis 1:26). We have traits and abilities far above any other creatures on the face of the planet.

Fashioned in the image of God, we are like Him in the physical realm. Therefore, there is literally nothing that is impossible for mankind. The truth is that anything man can conceive, in time, he can achieve.

With no less than god-like powers on the earth, man has built great cities, computers, and space craft capable of flying to other planets. Man has gone so far as to harness nuclear power and unravel the mysteries of DNA, actually cloning living creatures.

In addition to man's incredible skills, he also has been given the ability to experience emotions just as God does. Our Creator both loves and hates, feels joy and sadness. In His divine affection, He has conferred these faculties upon humanity. Therefore man can empathize, feel compassion, and show mercy. Mankind possesses such abilities because, as the Scriptures state, God is our Father, and we were made in His image.

God has created man as a physical being in hopes that during this temporary human life, he would experience the exhilaration of success, joy, and happiness, accompanied with physical problems, trials, and difficulties. God's desire is that over the course of a lifetime, man would learn the magnificent lesson—man's way does not, and cannot, ever work! (Proverbs 16:25).

True Christians are those who, upon learning this lesson, respond to God's call, repent, and turn from sin. Once the individual understands the vanity of man's selfish way, that person begins to obey God. After being baptized, and receiving God's Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, the new believer begins to develop Godly Character by following God's direction in the use of his or her talents and abilities.

At Christ's return, those who have overcome will be resurrected to glory—reborn into the royal family of God. Receiving a new spiritual body, free from diseases and decay, they will be God's children, having His awesome likeness and incredible powers living in the spirit dimension forever.

God is a Father

According to the Bible, God is actually reproducing after His kind—the God kind! This is the awesome and transcendent meaning of being born again! God is literally creating a perfectly righteous holy family, and as a Father, He has lovingly offered mankind the opportunity to become His children. As the apostle Paul writes:

Of whom **the whole family** in heaven and earth is named. (Ephesians 3:15)

In these verses, the apostle Paul reveals that God is a family. Jesus further stated that He came to reveal that God is our Father (Matthew 11:27). By this, Christ did not imply that God was an impersonal father such as an author, inventor or even as the Creator. Instead, Jesus taught that the Eternal God is our Father in the fullest and most personal sense—as a faithful and loving parent.

For this reason, Jesus instructed His followers to pray "our Father" (Matthew 6:9). Paul also encouraged Christians to call God "Abba"—an intimate paternal term, much like the endearing word, "Daddy" (Romans 8:15). Jesus further taught that once converted, God becomes our spiritual Father, and we Christ's brothers and sisters. As the author of Hebrews states:

For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause **he is not ashamed to call them brethren.** (Hebrews 2:11)

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and those who have God's Spirit become His brethren. Therefore they too are God's children. As the apostle Paul continues to explain:

The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that **we are the children of God.** (Romans 8:16)

Converted Christians are now the children of God, but not yet born! They are in a relationship with the Father, whose wife, their mother, Jerusalem above, is pregnant (Galatians 4:26). The child is the father's offspring even before birth. It is heir to all that the father has while yet inside the womb.

The apostle Paul describes this relationship even further. He explains that we are God's children, and therefore:

If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *Him*, that we may be also **glorified together.** (Romans 8:17)

Notice that the Scriptures tell us that we are now heirs of God, but not yet glorified—we are not yet born! This is the magnificent plan that God has purposed for mankind—to one day be born again, glorified as Christ was after His resurrection. Man will miraculously be delivered from human life with all its limitations, trials, and sufferings into the Father's spiritual family. Paul elaborates on this theme, saying:

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the **glory which shall be revealed in us.** For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the **sons of God.** For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of **the children of God.** (Romans 8:18-21)

The apostle states that the creature will be delivered from the bondage of corruption. This word "creature" is "ktisis" in the Greek, and it literally means "building," "original formation," or "creation." He is saying that the entire creation will be rescued from the rampant corruption of this present world at Christ's return, when finally, the children of God are born.

These verses, and those that follow, are speaking specifically about the experience of being born again. The imagery is that of the creation being in the pangs of labor. It is as if a baby is soon to be delivered from its mother. The analogy also portrays true Christians walking in the ways of their Father, waiting for their adoption as sons and daughters. Paul continues to say:

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, (Sonship with God) *to wit*, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:22-23)

The focus of this set of passages is the Christian's birth into the Kingdom and family of God. Our physical human birth actually foreshadows this spiritual birth, the hope of every Christian.

Consider how the embryo develops safely within the confines of the mother's womb until maturity. Finally, at the appointed time, the contractions begin, and through the pain of these convulsions, a child is born. However, in the warm watery darkness of the uterus, the child never realizes just how confined and limited it really is, the womb being the only environment it has ever known.

The child about to be given birth cannot grasp the liberty it will soon experience. The baby cannot comprehend the vast size of the world it will be born into. Neither does the newborn understand the future opportunities it will enjoy by exercising its human abilities and talents. Its tiny mind cannot foresee its potential to build cities, author books, write software for computers, or any of the many creative endeavors that adults often take for granted.

Once born, the child is free from its "watery grave," thus foreshadowing baptism, and its ultimate destiny to be born again. At first, the newborn child is awed by the incredible images and colors of the creation as it opens its eyes to see light for the very first time. It can now more clearly hear various audible sounds from which its communication skills will develop in the future. A marvelous and incredible world of growth, creative accomplishment, and fulfillment awaits the new human being.

Similarly, the Christian that will be born into the spirit dimension has little grasp of the enormity of God's universe, or the profound new powers and abilities he or she will inherit as a child of God. How vast is the expansive spirit world? How majestic will our new bodies be? What will it be like to finally gaze on the glorious light of the Eternal God? How satisfying and fulfilling will it be to work directly with God Almighty for eternity in creative accomplishment for the good of all?

Like a physical baby about to be born, we cannot fully imagine what awaits the overcomer. The apostle Paul explains:

Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (I Corinthians 13:12)

We cannot fully visualize the world into which we will be born, however, when this magnificent event occurs, an entire new universe of exhilarating discovery, growth and development will be given to us. Born into a dimension far greater and more wonderful than we can now imagine, we will possess superior knowledge and will understand all things with perfect clarity. The long awaited moment of seeing God face to face will be a reality, and we will know God in the same manner that He knows us (I Corinthians 13:12). It will be an awesome and fulfilling life, working with and learning from Christ and the Father forever.

Having dwelt in the Father's Kingdom throughout eternity past, Jesus had perfect understanding of God's plan and purpose for mankind. He would actually be the first to be born again, and therefore knew exactly what His ultimate destiny was. Hence, when it was time for Him to be crucified, in His agony, distress, and sorrow, Christ took comfort by focusing on His previous life and being born back into the family of God. As He reflected on the imminent glory of His future, Jesus also comforted His disciples with the following words:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, you shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you. (John 16:20-23)

Knowing that His anticipated time of trial and anguish was near, Jesus concentrated on His faith in the ultimate destiny God had in store for Him. He would emerge from this terrible trial, resurrected—born again, into the Kingdom of heaven. Christ would once more be a spirit being. He would once again enjoy the powers of being God and sharing eternity at the right hand of His Father!

The profound truth is that man can share in the glorious destiny of Jesus Christ. Man can enter the family of God! Jesus informed the religious leaders of His day that He and the Father were one (John 10:30). These self-righteous Pharisees understood that He was declaring Himself one with God. Objecting vehemently, they sought to stone Him to death. When Jesus asked the reason for this verdict, they answered:

For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, **being a man, makest thyself God.** (John 10:33)

Voicing that He and the Father were one, Jesus Christ established Himself as being equal to God. In this context, it is of great importance to realize that Jesus also stated that we are to be one with Him—just as He is one with the Father.

The significance of this statement is enormous—it literally means that we have the potential of being God! This is the ultimate destiny for believers. It is to literally be included as a precious member of the family of God along with Christ. Jesus makes this absolutely clear, answering His interrogators with these words recorded in holy Scripture:

Is it not written in your law, **I said, Ye are gods? If He called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;** Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? (John 10:34-36)

In the verse above, Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6. There God's word stated that the ancient Israelites had the potential of being gods. After reiterating the profound truth found in the psalm, Jesus said that the "scripture cannot be broken" (verse 35). Therefore, this truth is an absolute, unalterable reality.

Because this was Christ's ultimate destiny, it is also yours—the very reason that you were born! Humans will one day be born into the family of the Most High, ultimately sharing in the very glory of our God.

This truth is so fundamental that God demonstrated it in His creation. He designed life so the physical world is patterned after, and literally reflects, the spiritual truths of God. Therefore, children mature to become like their mother and father. Reaching adulthood, they have the same rights and privileges as their parents. Likewise, once born into the Almighty's family, Christians will live on the same plane that God does, experiencing similar powers, glory, and much more than our limited human minds can now imagine. Paul explains:

When Christ, [who is] our life, shall appear, then shall **ye also appear with Him in glory.**
(Colossians 3:4)

At the return of Jesus Christ, faithful Christians will be raised from the dead. Those still alive on earth will be miraculously changed in the twinkling of an eye. By virtue of this change at the resurrection, those accounted worthy, will be born sons and daughters of the Father. As Luke states:

They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and **are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.** (Luke 20:35-36)

At this marvelous time, true Christians will literally be refashioned—recreated—and made in the likeness of Christ. The apostle Paul writes of this glorious metamorphosis:

Our conduct is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, **the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body,** according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself, (Philippians 3:20-21)

It must be understood that this change to reflect God's likeness is NOT symbolic! It is NOT a type!. It is no less than an absolute, magnificent, reality. The apostle John writes of this wonderful transformation when he states:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, **we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.** (I John 3:2)

When Christ returns for those who are His, true Christians will experience this awesome conversion to spirit by a rebirth. They will be fashioned in the same form as God. Composed of glorious, supernatural, spirit, they will at last be able to see the Father's Kingdom.

Believers are provided a glimpse of this spiritual state, as the apostle John describes the resurrected and glorified Jesus:

His head and *His* hairs *were* white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes *were* as a flame of fire; And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. . .and His countenance *was* as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. (Revelation 1:14-17)

This vision witnessed by John is of great importance to every believer. In it, each one of us is given remarkable insight concerning man's final destiny.

Consider the glory that John saw in Christ after His resurrection. The apostle felt very close to the Savior when He walked on this earth as a man. He even laid his head on the chest of Jesus. However, when he witnessed this vision of Christ as a glorified spirit being, John was so awed that he became fearful, literally collapsing at His feet.

This vision reveals the glorified state of Jesus after His resurrection from the dead. Therefore, it also points to our ultimate, majestic destiny, to one day be born again. The Scriptures promise Christians that they will be raised, born of the spirit, and glorified with majesty, just like Jesus. For now, however, only Christ has experienced this wondrous change.

Christ is the Firstborn

Throughout the history of human existence, only one person has ever been born again. The apostle Paul explained that it was Jesus Christ who was the first to undergo this final fulfillment of the conversion process. True Christians will also be born again, but their change will occur later. Paul writes:

For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He (Jesus Christ) **might be the firstborn among many brethren.** (Romans 8:29)

Jesus Christ is the firstborn of God. And the entire creation is anxiously awaiting the glorious moment when those in His Church will, at last, be born in a like manner.

Numerous sincere Bible students have misunderstood this wonderful truth, being misled by a false teaching that the word "firstborn" refers only to Christ's "preeminence." As a result, many have not realized the profound truth that Christ is the first—and others will follow.

Therefore, an examination of this vitally important word is necessary. *Strong's Dictionary of Greek Words* explains that "firstborn" is the Greek word, "prototokos."

This unique term is derived from two roots. The first is "Protos," which means foremost in time, place, order, or importance. The second root is "Tikto," an expression that connotes producing seed as a mother, a plant, or the earth. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia* further defines this vitally important word as:

"FIRST-BORN (Prototokos) meaning first in sequence to be born or, figuratively, first in rank, preeminent."

Could it possibly be more clear? The apostle Paul specifically chose to use the expression "prototokos" because, when speaking of Jesus, both meanings perfectly apply.

Interestingly, "Protos" is the root word from which we derive our modern term, prototype—a pattern from which all others are fashioned. Therefore, Jesus Christ has preeminence as a reflection of His being the human prototype. He is the very first to be born again, and His life is the ideal. He is the perfect model to which Christians are ultimately to conform.

The second root word is "tikto," and it also reflects the fact that Christ's office as firstborn gives Him preeminence. However, this prominence stems not only from being the first in time order, but by His being born through the seed of God's Holy Spirit.

According to the words recorded in holy Scripture by the apostle Paul, Christ was the first to be born, and as such, He has a place that is both primary in time, order, and in rank. However, which birth does Paul refer to? Jesus was actually born twice. The first of these was in the flesh through His mother, Mary. Paul explains:

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was **made of the seed of David according to the flesh.** (Romans 1:3)

Matthew reiterates this truth, stating that Jesus was the firstborn child of Mary. Referring to Joseph, he writes:

(He) knew her not till she had brought forth **her firstborn son**: and he called his name Jesus.
(Matthew 1:25)

Matthew unequivocally states that Christ was Mary's firstborn child. The fact that she was a virgin makes this absolutely clear. Other Scriptures concur, revealing that Jesus was the first to be born among other siblings. As Mark's gospel discloses, the people in the local community were stunned by the miracles of Jesus. They wondered:

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? (Mark 6:3)

In this verse, Mark validates Matthew's statement that Christ was Mary's firstborn. He was delivered prior to at least three brothers and two sisters, thus demonstrating that the word "firstborn" does, in fact, mean first in order of time.

In addition, the word firstborn, found in Matthew's gospel, is the exact term that Paul uses when explaining that Christ was the firstborn among many brethren (Matthew 1:25; Romans 8:29). The truth undeniable. Jesus Christ was the first in His physical birth order, but He was also the first to be born of the spirit—"born again." As Paul states, Jesus is:

The image of the invisible God, **the firstborn of every creature**: (Colossians 1:15)

This verse proclaims that Jesus is literally the firstborn of EVERY creature. This cannot be speaking of Jesus' physical family. Neither does it refer to humanity in general. Adam was the first to be given life by God. Thus it is Adam, not Christ, who is God's physical firstborn (Luke 3:38).

Further establishing the true meaning of "born again," Paul calls Christ the "last Adam" (I Corinthians 15:45). Jesus is no less than the spiritual Adam—the first born of an entirely new generation comprised of those who will be born into the spirit dimension by a change at the resurrection.

The Firstborn in the Old Testament

Millennia ago, in the writings of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ was foreshadowed as the firstborn of God's spiritual creation. In the book of Exodus Moses records how ancient Israel was freed from Egyptian slavery when God slew all of the firstborn of that nation. Subsequently, God claimed the firstborn of both man and beast to be His. Moses writes:

Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, [both] of man and of beast: it is mine. . . thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males *shall be* the LORD'S. And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. (Exodus 13:1-13)

Clearly, in these verses, the term "firstborn" refers to first in birth order. Further, all would agree that the sacrifice of the firstborn is symbolic of Jesus Christ. He is the first to be born of God, and the sacrifice of the firstborn of man and beast by the ancient Israelites was intended to be a continual reminder of God's firstborn Son who would die for mankind.

Without question, at midnight on that very first Passover in Egypt, all who died were also the first in birth order. In their own way, they too pointed to the Messiah who would taste death to save mankind, and rise again to become the firstborn of God's spiritual creation.

Relating how Christians differ from those brought out of Egypt, the book of Hebrews reveals that Christ is also the spiritual firstborn. Relating that believers are called to greater obedience, and will experience a superior destiny, the author states:

Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and **church of the FIRSTBORN**.
(Hebrews 12:22)

Christians are brought to the New Jerusalem after being resurrected to spirit. They will then be able to see the spiritual city and literally take part in governing from this magnificent edifice in the Kingdom. Those who come to the Church of the firstborn are individuals who are now brought to Jesus Christ—the firstborn—the first to be born again.

The Firstborn From the Dead

As noted thus far, the title “firstborn” implies that if Jesus is the first to be born, others will naturally follow in the same process. What must also be understood is that this second birth clearly does not occur at baptism—instead, it takes place after the death of the body. As the apostle Paul writes:

He (Christ) is the head of the body, the church: who is **the beginning, the firstborn from the dead**; that in all [things] he might have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:18)

Realize the incredible truth that this verse brings to light. Jesus Christ is the “beginning” of what God has planned for mankind. He was the first to go through the process of being born again. The scriptures make it plain, however, that this did not occur at His baptism. Jesus was the firstborn “from the dead.” This thoroughly answers the question of when a Christian is “born again.” It cannot be at baptism, or when a person decides to give “their heart to the Lord.” The truth is that before Christ was “born again,” He died. Likewise, all who follow Him must first die before finally being “born again.”

Christians will not be made alive again through the process of spiritual rebirth until their physical bodies perish. The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians of this truth. He states:

For **as in Adam all die**, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. . . But some *man* will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? *Thou* fool, **that which thou sowest is not quickened (made alive), except it die**. (I Corinthians 15:35-36)

The Scriptures liken believers to seeds which are planted in the soil. To be reborn, like seeds, they must first die and be buried in the earth. Even those who are alive when Jesus returns will perish in the flesh as they are instantly changed to spirit.

Jesus Christ was the first to experience this rebirth after death—the firstborn of many brethren. Thus the Bible reveals that we will follow in the same path as our Savior. Our birth will occur at Christ’s second coming. Paul further explains:

But every man in his own order: **Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's** at his coming. (I Corinthians 15:23)

It could not be more plain! Jesus Christ was the first to be born again, and true believers will also be born again at the resurrection which will occur at Christ’s return. At that time, they will be changed to spirit and be given immortality.

Until this momentous transformation occurs, Christians merely have the “earnest” of the spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). Equivalent to our modern term “down payment” the word “earnest” confirms that God’s spirit now engenders new life in Christians—they are begotten of the spirit. Like spiritual embryos, they will finally be born at a later time.

Christians are Begotten not Born

Christians have this blessed hope of one day being miraculously born again—born into the Family of God. For now, however, this new spirit life is merely conceived in each individual believer. Therefore, during this present age Christians are only begotten by the spirit—they are not yet born. As the apostle Peter writes in his first epistle:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath **begotten us again** unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (I Peter 1:3)

The translator's use of the word "begotten" is informative. Begotten is the past tense of begettal. The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language defines this word as follows:

To procreate, usually said of the father, sometimes of both parents. To cause.

To beget means simply to engender, or begin new life. Much more is required for birth to occur, however. There is an exact time-line of events that absolutely must transpire during procreation, and our understanding of God's plan for mankind can be greatly enhanced by an examination of this process.

As God demonstrates in numerous other instances, the physical processes on earth mirror magnificent spiritual truths (Romans 1:20). This is never more true than in the case of human reproduction. There we see that life originates with the Father. His sperm unites in a marvelous way with the mother's egg, thus producing a new life. Begettal takes place when the mother conceives, and gestation then begins. Finally, the embryonic growth culminates in parturition—the birth of a child.

In like manner, upon complete surrender to God, baptism in water and the laying on of hands issues the Holy Spirit from the Father in heaven. God's Spirit unites with the mind of man and spirit life is miraculously engendered. Thus having been conceived the first time spiritually, the new Christian is now "begotten again" by the Spirit.

The newly conceived Christian must now grow in Christ-like character while in the body of the mother, Jerusalem above which is represented physically on earth by the Church. Finally, the entire earth will experience contraction-like convulsions as it undergoes the great tribulation, after which God's children will be raised—"born again"—at Christ's triumphant return (Romans 8:15-30).

Begotten or Born?

Some Bible students and scholars have been confused regarding the subject of born again because of the specific Greek word that John uses. For example, the definition of the English word "beget" means to father or to engender, and does not include the entire birth process.

On the other hand, the actual word God inspired John to record in the Bible is "gennao." Defined as "procreate," this word is primarily used of a father, but sometimes of the mother. Further, it has the dual meanings of either to beget, meaning to conceive, or to bring forth, bear, be delivered, or be born.

Literally including the entire process of birth, the Greek word, "gennao," has a much broader meaning than its English counterpart. Therefore, when translating the scriptures it is necessary to sometimes translate gennao as "beget." Other times, the correct word required is "born." The only way to be certain of the true translation is through a careful examination of the word's context. The translated meaning must be in accord with the surrounding verses, the message of the Bible, and the entire plan of God.

Illustrating this point, in Matthew's account of Mary's pregnancy, the gospel writer uses the word gennao to mean conception. As Matthew writes:

But while he (Joseph) thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is **conceived** (gennao) in her is of the Holy Ghost. (Matthew 1:20)

The word “conceived” in the above verses is “gennao.” In the original Greek text, the apostle is clearly speaking of that which had begun in her womb—not what had been born. Then in the next chapter, “gennao” is used twice to refer to Jesus after He had been born:

Now when Jesus was **born** in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is **born** (gennao) King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. (Matthew 2:1-2)

While in these verses translators properly render “gennao,” in other instances they misunderstood the context in translating the word. For example, in Peter 1:3 “gennao” is properly translated “begotten.” Twenty verses later it is mistranslated as “born” as the following verses show:

...see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: **Being born again**, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. (I Peter 1:22-23)

The context of this verse shows Peter using “gennao” in connection with “incorruptible seed.” Seed is never born. It is that which is planted, thereby begetting life. Therefore, it is clear that “gennao” should have been translated to reflect the truth that Christians are not yet born again. They have the seed of the Holy Spirit and are therefore “begotten again” as is correctly translated in verse three of this same chapter!

Why Gennao?

In the New Testament Scriptures, gennao is sometimes used to mean spiritual “begettal.” Other times it is clearly meant to refer to after the individual has been resurrected and is “born of the spirit.” Why use this unique word that can have two meanings? John could have easily chosen another term for begettal. The Greeks also used the word “sullambano” to represent the act of conception. In fact, in several places in Scripture, the gospel writer, Luke, used this very term to refer to that which is conceived (Luke 1:24, 31; 36; Luke 2:21).

“Sullambano” literally means to take together, or to catch. Incredible as it may seem, the Greeks, as far back as the time of Christ, knew that the sperm “catches” the egg, resulting in conception. John could have easily used “sullambano” when referring to conception and “gennao” for birth. Why didn’t he?

The answer may be that God inspired the term “gennao” to be used when referring to the spiritual birth process where He is directly involved in the person’s salvation. It could well be that God inspired the Scriptures so that the term “gennao” was used for a magnificent reason. As a Greek born Bible student stated, “When gennao is used to mean beget, the connotation is that which is begotten ultimately—SHALL BE BORN!”

To emphasize this positive aspect of our calling, God may have inspired both the apostle John and Peter to use the word “gennao” in reference to being spiritually begotten for the following reason.

While Christ’s followers are only begotten now, after overcoming, they will “**surely**” be brought to birth. As the apostle Paul explained, Christians should be:

Confident of this very thing, that **He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it** until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

Christ is the Only Begotten?

Christ is often lovingly referred to with the endearing term as the “only begotten” of the Father. In one example John writes:

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory the glory as of the **only begotten** of the Father full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

If Christ is called the “only begotten,” does this mean that others cannot be begotten? Absolutely not! Christ being the “only begotten” does not mean others cannot follow. “Monogenes” is the Greek word from which this term in John 1:14 is derived. The definition is primarily that of being unique. As *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament Words* explains:

With reference to Christ, the phrase ‘the only begotten from the Father’ indicates that, as the Son of God, He was the sole representative of the Being and character of the One who sent Him . . . The expression also suggests the thought of the deepest affection . . . (p. 447).

We see that Christ being the “only begotten” does not refer to Jesus as being the only one who ever will be begotten. Instead it points to the utter uniqueness of His begetting.

Consider some of the ways in which Christ’s conception was supernaturally superior:

- He had no beginning or end of days (Hebrews 7:3).
- He first existed without a mother or father (Hebrews 7:3).
- He emptied Himself of His power to be a man (Phil. 2:6).
- He was conceived without sexual union (Isaiah 7:22).
- He was fully God in human form (Colossians 2:9).
- He had a full measure of the Spirit (John 3:34).

Abraham was a Biblical type of God the Father, and his son Isaac was a type of Christ. Isaac was considered the patriarch’s only begotten son even though Abraham had other children. Hebrews explains:

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his **only begotten**. (Hebrews 11:17)

The term “only begotten” refers to the deep affection and closeness of a father as well as the unique status of the child. Christ is, and will always be, the “only begotten.” He was always with the Father, and was the first to be born again. The Father is especially pleased with the sacrifice and love Jesus bestowed on us, and we should feel eternally indebted and grateful to Him. Only through Him, we can be begotten and finally born into the eternal Family of God.

Nicodemus should have Understood

When Jesus informed Nicodemus that he must be born, the religious leader did not grasp the meaning of Christ’s statement. Christ’s nocturnal visitor was perplexed, and asked Jesus, "How can these things be?" Noting his confusion, Jesus spoke again, saying:

Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? (John 3:10)

Nicodemus was a high ranking teacher of God’s word in the Jewish community. By virtue of his training, He certainly should have possessed an understanding of Scripture that would enable him to grasp the meaning of Christ’s words. This teaching of Jesus had already been recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures which Nicodemus professed to follow. As Paul explained to Timothy before the New Testament existed:

From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation . . . All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (I Timothy 3:15-17)

The Old Testament scripture reveal all that is necessary to understand the seemingly enigmatic statement by Jesus. For example, the oldest writing in the Bible, the book of Job, makes reference to the Eternal God creating a work of great value in man—something which would finally be complete at the resurrection. The patriarch, Job, asks the question:

If a man die, shall he live *again*? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands. (Job 14:14-15)

Job knew that a resurrection would come, and with it a change in his physical composition—the finished work of his Creator.

The prophet Daniel also confirmed the resurrection from which God’s faithful will emerge in a glorified state. He writes:

Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. (Daniel 12:2-3).

The great king, David understood that his ultimate destiny was to one day see the Almighty. Looking forward to arising from the sleep of death and being transformed into to the marvelous likeness of God, he wrote:

As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness. (Psalm 17:15)

The prophet Isaiah foretold this monumental event at the end of this current age. Speaking of a time of terrible apostasy among God’s people just prior to Christ’s return, Isaiah shows that when God finally intervenes in the affairs of men, He will raise an entire nation from the dead, to be born again:

Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? **Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.** Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut [the womb]? saith thy God. (Isaiah 66:8-9)

As a teacher of God’s Word, Nicodemus certainly should have understood Jesus when He spoke about being born again. This subject is discussed throughout the prophets and depicted as a resurrection from the dead. God’s servants from ancient times knew the truth! The Almighty would one day raise His faithful—the earth would give up her dead—delivering them from bondage into the glorious liberty of the Sons of God.

Why Didn’t Christ Just Say Resurrection?

If Christ really meant a resurrection from the dead, some Christians wonder, why didn’t He simply say so? Why didn’t He use that very word? Why didn’t Jesus tell Nicodemus “except a man be ‘resurrected’ he cannot see the Kingdom of God?”

The answer is that Christ would actually have misled people if he used the term “resurrection” because being “born again” means far more than simply being raised from the dead. To be resurrected means simply to be brought back to life. According to the Scriptures, this occurs at different times for varying purposes.

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John actually documents three different resurrections. The first is shown to take place at Christ’s return. Those who are a part of this resurrection are changed to spirit (Revelation 20:4). A second resurrection to physical life takes place 1,000 years later (Revelation 20:6). Finally a third resurrection occurs in which all the rest of mankind are judged—some to eternal life, and others to the second death. This is prophesied to occur at yet a later time (Revelation 20:12-15).

Additionally, not everyone who will be born again will be resurrected from the grave. Some faithful over-comers, living at Christ's return, will be instantaneously changed. Paul writes: :

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (I Thessalonians 4:16-17)

True Christians who are alive when Christ returns will not need to be resurrected from the dead. They will simply be changed miraculously at His coming.

Another possible reason why Jesus may have not used the term resurrection is that most of the Jewish people of His time would have misunderstood His meaning. The vast majority of His contemporaries had a false concept of the resurrection. For example, the Sadducees denied the existence of a resurrection altogether. The Pharisees, on the other hand, believed in a resurrection, but as will be demonstrated, their view was a radical departure from the teaching found in the holy Scriptures.

The Pharisee's Belief in the Resurrection

Flavius Josephus was a devoted Pharisee and Jewish general who became a noted historian after his capture by the Roman general, Titus. While imprisoned in Rome, he authored his famous work, *Antiquities of the Jews* in which he addressed many of the beliefs of his religious organization. Regarding the Pharisaic belief in the resurrection, he explained:

They also believe that souls have an immortal vigour in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but the former shall have power to revive and live again, (Antiquities 18, I, 3).

The beliefs of the Pharisees were more like the Greek view of hell than the message of hope found in the Bible. In his book, *Wars of The Jews*, Josephus also writes of the Pharisees that they say:

All souls are incorruptible; but that the souls of good men are only removed into other bodies, but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment (Wars 2, 8, 14).

Though they believed in a resurrection, the philosophy of the Pharisees had very little with the Bible's view of an after-life. In spite of their desire to be separate and pure from the influence of the Greeks, their view had become deeply colored by the pagan concepts of the immortal soul and reincarnation. If Christ would have used the term resurrection, Nicodemus and the Pharisees would have been led to believe they were correct in their distorted views of the after-life.

Instead, of using the term resurrection, Jesus used the phrase "born again" because it has a much more profound meaning than simply being brought back to life. The second birth is an entirely new and different existence in the Kingdom and family of God. Being born again transcends all the thoughts and writings of the world's great philosophers and religious teachers.

Being born again means to be transformed—composed of the same glorious spirit that God is made of, sharing in the same awesome powers that He has, and interacting in God-like love after being changed to become a full son or daughter in His family forever. It includes being a part of God's eternal reigning government—ruling with Him in His marvelous Kingdom forever.

You must be Born Again

The doctrine of being born again is indeed one of the most beautiful, profound, and meaningful teachings in the Bible. It gives the Christian's life a deep significance and awesome purpose. Understanding that we will be born again explains why we were born in the first place, and what God's purpose for man actually is as we live on this tiny planet in our vast spiraling universe.

Being born again is not just a conversion experience. It is not simply giving your heart to the Lord, professing belief in Him, or being baptized. It is a literal future rebirth into God's family.

God the Father is reproducing His own kind by creating sons and daughters. He is developing a family composed of spirit beings who will one day live with Him, enjoying pleasures, creative endeavors, and accomplishment on His level. As such, those who are born again will have His holy righteous character, keep His law, and live in love, peace, and harmony for eternity.

As awesome as this future is, many will not understand. They will continue living their lives in ignorance, completely unaware of their transcendent purpose.

However, as the reader, by now you must have realized that this teaching could not possibly come from the cunning minds of philosophers. It could not be the concoction of men, but is rather a truth revealed by no less than the Spirit of God. It is stated many places in the Bible, and it is mirrored by the types and patterns found in God's incredible creation. As the apostle Paul writes:

The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead. (Romans 1:20)

With this understanding, given to us by the apostle Paul, we realize that the physical is a type of the spiritual. It is possible to understand God's plan by taking a close look at His creation. When we observe the planet upon which we live, we see that every living thing is reproducing. Looking at humankind, we see that God made man in His own image, and He reproduces by creating a family. It would be utterly foolish to think that man can reproduce, but God cannot. The entire creation is living proof that, in fact, this is God's very purpose for mankind.

In the physical world, we understand that a new human being is created by the supreme act of love between a husband and wife. The seed of the father unites with the egg of the mother, and thus a child is begotten. This pictures the Holy Spirit uniting with our human spirit. When our spirit unites with the Spirit of God, new life is engendered in us. We become "new creatures." However, we are not yet born again. We are only begotten—conceived a second time.

Once a human female is impregnated, the miracle of new life created in the mother's womb begins to form. The new embryo grows, developing attributes inherited from its parents. Likewise as Christians we begin to grow in the body of Christ, His Church. Having partaken of God's divine nature, we commence a spiritual journey of immense proportion in which we begin to develop attributes that reflect the mind of the Almighty, and begin to exhibit the very character of God (II Peter, 1:4).

When the physical process of gestation is complete, the human embryo is ready to be born. Contractions begin. There are birth pangs, and finally, to the joy of the whole family, a child is born. In a similar manner, Christians are now begotten of God, growing in grace and knowledge, and when the joyous time arrives, they will be born again at Christ's return.

As Isaiah prophesied, a nation will be "born at once." And as Peter writes, we are called to be that nation:

Ye are a chosen generation a royal priesthood, **an holy nation**, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (I Peter 2:9)

God is reproducing Himself, and true Christians have the tremendous opportunity of being part of an entire nation of His children. If we are called and choose to live His way of life, we can be begotten of God while yet flesh and blood. We then can call the Almighty, “Abba”—Father, but then, very soon, true Christians will be born into God’s divine, immortal family. They will live with Him in everlasting joy, reaping the blessings of His way of life forever.

This is the profound meaning of the words that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus one night. Through the scriptures preserved for centuries, Christ’s words now speak to you. They tell of a grand truth of such magnitude, it cannot be contained:

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God (John 3:3).

Thank God for this wonderful truth!

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