

Born From Above



No one born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in Him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

(1 John 3.9 NASB)

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Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."** Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus said to Him, **"How can these things be?"** Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"

(John 3.1-10 NASB)

The following material appeared in various issues of
The Upward Call and edited for this book.

ABBREVIATIONS OF SCRIPTURE VERSIONS

The following Scripture versions are referenced in this book.

ALT	Analytical-Literal Translation (2001)
ASV	American Standard Version (1901)
BWD	Benjamin Wilson's Diaglott (1942)
CV	Concordant Version (1926, 1983)
ESV	English Standard Version (2001)
GW	God's Word
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
ISV	International Standard Version
JMT	James Moffatt Translation
KJV	King James Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1960, 2002)
NKJ	New King James
REB	Rotherham's Emphasized Bible (1959, 1994)
WNT	Weymouth New Testament
YLT	Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible (1898)

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Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
(John 3.3 KJV)

Jesus answered and said to him, “Indeed I assure thee, if any one be not born [begotten] from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3.3 BWD; also JMT/REB/YLT [CV])

Many Christians speak of being **born again**, but it seems that few speak of being **born from above**. In many translations, this phrase appears as **born again**, but as will be shown, **born from above**, or perhaps **begotten from above**, seems to be the more accurate and appropriate way to translate the Greek and to remain consistent with the meaning throughout Scripture. **Born from above** speaks of the source and origin of the new birth.

This book has been written to examine the meaning of **born from above** as presented in Jesus’ discourse with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The focus will be on John 3.1-15.

Spiritual with spiritual.

The term *born again* leaves one in the same position as Nicodemus when he was challenged by Jesus. “**How can a man be born when he is old**” (John 3.4 NASB)? Nicodemus was thinking as a natural man which hindered him from understanding that Jesus was speaking of a **birth from above**, not an earthly birth through a human womb. Being **born from above** is a heavenly matter, not an earthly one. We know this as a fact because Jesus later told Nicodemus: “**If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things**” (John 3.12 NASB)?

Heavenly means that Jesus was presenting a spiritual principle to this ruler of the Jews. We also know this as a fact because Jesus told him: “**That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit**” (John 3.6 NASB). **God is spirit** (John 4.24); consequently, *heavenly* refers to the spirit realm of God or, we could say, the spirit world.

So, right from the start, if one seeks to understand Jesus’ discourse with Nicodemus, one must seek for that which is heavenly or spiritual, or as Paul wrote, one must combine ***spiritual [ideas] with spiritual [words]***, or ***spiritual [thoughts] with spiritual [words]*** (1 Corinthians 2.13 ALT/NASB).

Simply, interpretation of Scripture must be based on ***spiritual with spiritual***. This point cannot be stressed enough because it appears that many in our day are

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not doing so. We cannot understand God's word if we read it through the lens of the natural mind, which sees things from the physical, earthly realm, just as Nicodemus did. As Paul exhorted: **Set your mind on above, not on the earth** (see Colossians 3.2), and **the mind on the spirit is life and peace** (see Romans 8.5-8).

Perhaps the challenge begins with the many translations that use the term *born again*, rather than *born from above*. Some would argue that *born again* conveys the proper thought; however, *born from above* conveys it in greater measure, for it speaks of the source and nature of this birth, as well as a glorious destiny. Although the expression *begotten from above* perhaps is the most accurate rendering, a search of at least thirty translations failed to discover its use. However, the Concordant Version uses the expression *begotten anew*.

But of God.

Now, before proceeding to the heart of this subject, there is one principle that undergirds all other principles, and it is discovered in the expression **but of God**.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born [begotten], not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1.12-13 NKJ [ALT, BWD, WNT])

In the beginning of John's gospel, the spirit of God has laid down the unchanging principle that to become a child of God, one must be begotten from God; it takes a special act of God to bring a person into His family. Simply, becoming a child of God is not based on anything of man. One **cannot** make this claim based on being born into a certain household, on having a certain pedigree, or on one's own determination (will). It is only of God that one becomes a child of God and receives the privileges associated with being in the family of God. God alone is the One who begets His family.

This principle is so fundamental that it should hardly be necessary to make the point; nevertheless, it is one of those truths that we need to remind ourselves of in a day in which the world's emphasis is on man as the center of his universe. Even amongst some Christians, there seems to be a lack of understanding in the matter of **but of God**. After all, there are those who declare that unbelievers must apply their own "free will" if they expect God to save them and that God will not and cannot forgive their unbelief. If this were true, which it is not, then no one would ever be saved. The good news is that **but of God**, all mankind eventually will be saved.

By the way, the issue is not whether man has a free will or is able to make his or her choices. Obviously, we all make choices all day long. The issue is whether God's will can and will trump man's will. As the Creator of all, He alone is responsible for

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His creation. Consequently, He alone is responsible to bring all mankind into His presence through His Son. **But of God** will do it because His will is supreme.

Whether speaking of the unbeliever being saved or the believer entering the coming kingdom, the principle does not change. **But of God** the lost are saved. **But of God** the saved are being saved to enter the coming kingdom of Christ. **But of God** the whole creation will be restored and reconciled. If God is not the initiator or the agent of change, then nothing of any eonian or eternal value will ever happen.

But of God declares that only that which comes from God is of value. God must act in the affairs of mankind. This principle is seen throughout Scripture in the use of a similar expression, **but God**. Only God can raise the dead, demonstrate His love to sinners, cause growth in the believer, and give a believer a new body in the image of His Son. Consider the following verses.

“But God raised Him from the dead...” (Acts 13.30 NASB)

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5.8 NASB)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.... (Ephesians 2.4 NASB)

I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. (1 Corinthians 3.6 NASB)

But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. (1 Corinthians 15.38 NASB)

Perhaps, James best sums up the whole matter of **but of God**.

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (James 1.17 NASB)

Everything that is good and perfect must come from the Father. So, as you read this book, please keep in mind **but of God**; for without God, there is no salvation, there is no new birth, and there is no entrance into the kingdom of God.

But of God, we need to be ***born [begotten] from above!***

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Begotten, born.

Now, let us consider the word ***born***.

Who were begotten [*gennao*] not of Blood, nor of the Flesh, nor of the Will of the Flesh, nor of the Will of Man, but of God. (John 1.13
BWD [*begotten* in CV])

The Greek word *gennao* (and its derivatives) is the primary word translated into English as *begotten* or *born*. In the New Testament, it is used nearly 100 times. According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, *gennao* (#1080) means "to procreate (properly of the father, but by extension of the mother); figuratively to regenerate: – bear, beget, be born, bring forth, conceive, be delivered of, gender, make, spring." *Young's Analytical Concordance* defines *gennao* as "to beget, bring forth." *The New Englishman's Greek-English Concordance & Lexicon* defines *gennao* (a verb) "to procreate, to father, to beget; figuratively to regenerate, produce." According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, *gennao* means "to beget, in the Passive Voice, to be born, is chiefly used of men begetting children, in Matthew 1:2-6; more rarely of women begetting children, Luke 1:13, 57."

A footnote in *Bullinger's Companion Bible*, in reference to Matthew 1.2 and, by extension, John 3.3, states: "**beget**. Gr. *gennao*. When used of the father = *to beget or engender*; and when used of the mother it means *to bring forth into the world*."

Abraham beget [*gennao*] Isaac; and Isaac beget [*gennao*] Jacob; and Jacob beget [*gennao*] Judas and his brethren.... (Matthew 1.2
KJV)

Thus, Abraham did not give birth to Isaac; he merely beget or engendered him or, better yet, planted the seed in Sarah's womb; Sarah gave birth. Another example is found in Matthew 1.20 when the angel of the Lord explained to Joseph that "**the Child that has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.**" At this point, Jesus had not been born yet; He had been conceived in the womb of Mary through a divine act of the Holy Spirit. Again, the word *conceived* comes from the same root word *gennao*. The Holy Spirit as the Father beget or engendered Jesus in Mary's womb.

The point of all this is that the Greek word *gennao* does not necessarily refer to one being brought forth into the world through the birth process, that is, through the mother; rather, it refers to the begetting of a child through the father. It is the seed of the father that begins the process that will lead to a new life coming forth into the world from the womb of the mother. When the seed is implanted in the egg, the embryo begins to take shape and grows in a water sac for nine months until it is ready to enter the world. During the gestation process, the embryo gradually takes on the image of the parents, but it does not start that way; it takes time to

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look like the parents. It is with this thought in mind that we need to consider Jesus' words to Nicodemus.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born [*gennao*] again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3.3 KJV)

Jesus answered and said to him, "Verily, verily, I am saying to you, If anyone should not be begotten [*gennao*] anew, he can not perceive the kingdom of God." (John 3.3 CV)

To see or perceive the kingdom of God, one must be engendered or begotten anew or from above. This means that one must receive the spirit of God, the spirit that comes from God the Father. The spirit of God must take up residence in a person if he or she is ever to see and to enter the kingdom of God. One must be begotten of the spirit. The reason is that **God is spirit**, and His kingdom is inherently a **spiritual kingdom**.

The question at hand is this: Does begotten from above mean that one needs to be begotten like an embryo in the womb, or does it mean that one needs to be begotten like a baby outside the womb? Another way of stating this is: Is it a conception in the womb or a birth into the world?

It is probably safe to state that most who preach on this matter of being "born again" look at it as a birth from the womb. It is as if the believer is outside the womb. For the most part, they are told to do good things, even "church things," and to try "to get people saved," as they wait to go to heaven when they die.

Of course, I do not believe that Scripture teaches this latter point. I refer you to my book *The Purpose and Plan of the Eons*, Volume 2, chapters 1, 2, and 7.

There may be some emphasis on growth of the believer; but, by and large, it seems to be related more to what it will bring to the "institutional church" than to the individual, especially in relation to the resurrection and transfiguration into spiritual bodies in the oncoming eons. It is as if they have already arrived, and all they are waiting for is either death, since they see life in death, or the so-called "rapture" to take them out of this "old world."

However, I believe the point of Jesus' words to be *begotten from above* is that believers are still in the womb. They have not arrived yet in this life and will not arrive until the resurrection, and hopefully will be counted worthy to attain to what John called the *first* resurrection and Paul called the *out*-resurrection. After all, Jesus said: "**The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection**" (Luke 20.34-36 NASB).

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Dear beloved in Christ, we must grow in Christ so that we will be counted worthy of the *out*-resurrection, at which time we will be conformed to the image of His Son by taking on spiritual bodies (Romans 8.29; Philippians 3.20-21; 1 John 3.2). Until then, we must walk by the spirit as Christ is formed in us (Galatians 4.19; 5.16). We must put off the old and put on the new. We are still in the womb going through our gestation into the image of Christ as we await our birth into spiritual bodies.

We don't look like the Celestial One yet. We have been born of the flesh and, in many respects, we still look like Adam. We need to be brought forth into spiritual bodies so that we can enter the celestial kingdom. Until then, we groan in our bodies of death as we wait to put on our dwelling from heaven, a spiritual body in the image of the Heavenly or Celestial One, our Lord Jesus (see Romans 8.23; 1 Corinthians 15.44-57; 2 Corinthians 5.1-5). We have the seed of Christ *in* spirit within us, and it must grow in order for us to attain to a full birth in the eon to come.

This point is so important that it is needful to elaborate on it before moving on.

The expression *born from above* refers to being begotten from a father as the father's seed impregnates the mother's egg and gestation of an embryo begins. Initially, the embryo does not look like the parents; it must grow in the sac of water until it is ready to emerge from the womb, at which point the mother brings forth the child into the world. Consequently, it is the father who begets the child, that is, conceives the child in the womb, and it is the mother who brings forth the child outside of the womb.

We are to have the same picture of our spiritual birth. **But of God** we receive His spirit within us. It is the seed of Christ that dwells in us that is to grow as Christ takes shape in us, that is, as Christ is formed in us. This forming is not outward appearance but inner character. We are to be conformed to the very character of Christ. This growth is a moral growth. However, we need to recognize that there are still vestiges of Adam's life in us. We were born of the flesh of Adam. We have not arrived at our glorious destiny in Christ, which is not only to be like Him in moral character and in righteousness, but also to be like Him in His glorified, spiritual, celestial body. We are awaiting our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body (Romans 8.23).

We have a new life in us (***Christ in you***), and this life must take shape; it must be formed in us until we are fully conformed to this new life, but we will not enter into it in full maturity until we are resurrected to enter the celestial kingdom of Christ. Maturity in this life comes through the implanted word of God being worked into our lives and our walking by the spirit.

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From above.

Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Verily, verily, I say to thee, If any one may not be **born from above** [*gennao another*], he is not able to see the reign of God.’ Nicodemus saith unto him, ‘How is a man able to be **born** [*gennao*], being old? is he able into the womb of his mother a second time to enter, and to be **born** [*gennao*]?’ Jesus answered, ‘Verily, verily, I say to thee, If any one may not be **born** [*gennao*] of water, and the Spirit, he is not able to enter into the reign of God; that which hath been **born** [*gennao*] of the flesh is flesh, and that which hath been **born** [*gennao*] of the Spirit is spirit. ‘Thou mayest not wonder that I said to thee, It behoveth you to be **born from above** [*gennao another*]; the Spirit where he willeth doth blow, and his voice thou dost hear, but thou hast not known whence he cometh, and whither he goeth; thus is every one who hath been **born** [*gennao*] of the Spirit.’ (John 3.3-8 YLT)

Now, let us consider the words *from above*. The Greek words have been inserted in the above verses in order to prove that Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born or begotten from above. Clarity is given to the meaning of His words to Nicodemus by the fact that Jesus used the word *gennao* in conjunction with the Greek word *another*, which clearly means “from above,” for Jesus later used this same word in reference to Himself: “**You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above [another]**” (John 19.11 NASB).

But what does *from above* refer to or mean? It is so obvious that it is hardly necessary to state it, but Scripture clearly identifies above as heaven, where the Father resides and from whence the Son came.

Jesus declared: “**No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man**” (John 3.13 NASB).

John the baptist referred to heaven and also linked it to the word *another*.

John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven.” (John 3.27 NASB)

“He who comes from above [another] is above all, he who is of the earth is from the earth and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all.” (John 3.31 NASB)

James also used the word *another* and linked it to all good things, including wisdom, that come from above, that is, come down from the Father.

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above [another], coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (James 1.17 NASB)

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This wisdom is not that which comes down from above [*anohen*], but is earthly, natural, demonic. ... But the wisdom from above [*anohen*] is first pure.... (James 3.15, 17 NASB)

Considering its use in the above references and the fact that John, at the beginning of his gospel, laid down the principle of **but of God** adds weight to translating Jesus' words as **born from above** rather than *born again*. By the way, John carried this same theme forward to his first epistle as well, where he referred to being **born of God** six times (1 John 2.29; 3.9; 4.7; 5.1, 4, 18).

Although it is acceptable to translate *anohen* as simply "again," it seems to lose some of the import of the message given by Jesus. If **from above** is an appropriate translation for the word *anohen* in other Scripture, then it should be appropriate, if not required, in Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus as well. Similarly, in 1 Peter 1.3 and 1.23, we discover the use of another word, *anagennao*.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again [*anagennao*] to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.... (1 Peter 1.3 NASB)

The prefix *ana* means "up." Again, although most translations use the phrase *born again*, there seems to be a better way to translate this Greek word. Notice that Peter joined this with a living hope and the resurrection of Christ. To remain consistent in translation throughout the New Testament and to remain true to God's principle, perhaps the phrase **born from above** is the best translation of *anagennao*, as well as *gennao anohen*.

All the above references should be ample evidence to prove that the better rendering of *gennao anohen* is **born from above**. One might ask: Why make such a big deal over a few words? Because **born from above** gives the source and nature of this birth; whereas *born again* leaves one asking what it truly means, just as Nicodemus missed the point and asked: *Is he able into the womb of his mother a second time to enter, and to be born?* Take note that Jesus started the conversation with *gennao anohen*. If Nicodemus had understood what Jesus was stating, he would have used the same expression, but he did not because he approached the matter according to the mindset of a natural man. Nicodemus had to ask: **"How can these things be?"** This is actually quite a profound question that all born of Adam's race need to ask.

According to the flesh.

The mind not set on above where Christ is seated will inevitably ask: **"How can these things be?"** How can one be **born from above**? Nicodemus was approaching the matter from the mindset of a Jew according to the flesh. The nation of Israel that came out of Egypt under Moses was given the Law. The Lord made a covenant with the sons of Israel, and if they obeyed His voice and kept His

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covenant, they would be His own possession among all the peoples, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (see Exodus 19.4-6). They were to be a theocratic kingdom on earth. But they fell in unbelief because they failed to see that the Lord was after circumcision of the heart, not of the flesh.

Consider what Paul, the apostle of the nations (uncircumcised [Galatians 2.7]), wrote to believers from among the nations (*ethnos*, often translated *gentiles*).

Wherefore, remember, that ye were once the nations in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that called Circumcision in the flesh made by hands, that ye were at that time apart from Christ, having been alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope, and without God, in the world.... (Ephesians 2.11-12 YLT)

Paul also testified to the Philippians.

Though I also have cause of trust in flesh. If any other one doth think to have trust in flesh, I more; circumcision on the eighth day! of the race of Israel! of the tribe of Benjamin! a Hebrew of Hebrews! according to law a Pharisee! (Philippians 3.4-5 YLT)

In other words, Paul had every reason to brag about his Jewish background according to the flesh. But he came to see that true circumcision relates to those who worship in the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3.3).

Paul also wrote: **For he is not a Jew who is so outwardly, neither is circumcision that which is outward in flesh; but a Jew is he who is so inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, of which the praise is not of men, but of God** (Romans 2.28-29 YLT). Consequently, Paul came to the point that he knew no one according to the flesh (2 Corinthians 5.16).

Now, Nicodemus was still looking at things according to the flesh, just as Saul (Paul) had done when he was a zealous Pharisee and before the eyes of his heart were opened to see Christ *in* spirit. At one point, Nicodemus and Saul were in the same condition as they looked at the things of God according to the flesh and not the spirit. In speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus was attempting to lead him to the same place that Saul was led to on the road to Damascus.

So, when Nicodemus heard that he had to be born from above or born again to see the kingdom of God and that he had to be born of water and spirit to enter the kingdom, it must have startled him. By his response to Jesus, it is quite apparent that, although Nicodemus was a learned Pharisee, he had no comprehension of the meaning of Jesus' words. Consider how ridiculous it is to wonder if a man in old

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age could reenter his mother's womb, unless perhaps he was being facetious or questioning Jesus' own sanity.

Personally, I think he was so caught off guard that he was not thinking straight. The thought of the kingdom being a spiritual matter and not one according to the flesh, that is, his Jewish pedigree, was totally absent from his thoughts or even his teaching.

However, in one fell swoop, Jesus took all of Nicodemus' privileges according to the flesh as an Israelite and, figuratively, swept them off the table. It was as if Jesus said, "Nicodemus, your religion, and even your pedigree, will not lead you into the kingdom; you need something else that you do not currently possess." To be sure, Nicodemus was on the right track, but Jesus declared that there was one thing missing in Nicodemus' life that was essential to seeing and entering the kingdom of God, and it involved receiving a new spirit.

Seeing and entering the kingdom.

Now, what did Jesus mean by seeing and entering the kingdom?

Jesus answered and said to him, "Indeed I assure thee, if any one be not born from above [*gennao anothen*], he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus says to him, "How can a Man be born, being old? Can he a second time enter into his mother's womb, and be born?" Jesus replied, "Truly indeed I say to thee, if any one be not born of Water and Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." (John 3:3-5 BWD)

First, seeing and entering could be viewed as one and the same thing. In the English language, the word *seeing* can be used not only in the sense of vision, that is, seeing with the eyes, but also of entering into something. For example, it could be said of one who is rewarded for working very diligently that he is seeing the fruit of his labor. Later in chapter 3, John wrote that **he who does not obey the Son will not see life** (John 3:36). Obviously, in this case, *see life* refers to entering into life, for how else does one see life unless he enters into it or experiences it?

According to the Greek text from which the NASB is translated, the word for *see* is *horao*, which can mean "to discern clearly, to experience or to perceive." This word is used in both verses sighted above (John 3:3: **see [*horao*] the kingdom**: John 3:36: **see [*horao*] life**). Thus, one could conclude that seeing the kingdom is the same as entering the kingdom. **If any one be not born from above, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**

Second, although seeing and entering could be viewed as one and the same thing, they also could be viewed differently. One translation, rather than using the word *see*, uses the word *perceive*, which refers to receiving knowledge through any or all of the senses, including the eyes. *Perceive* pertains to one discerning or receiving

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understanding of the kingdom. It is not so much about entering into it as it is about perceiving it, which refers to spiritual perception or vision, a vision not through the physical eye but through the spiritual eye, the eye of the heart.

It takes spiritual vision to see the kingdom of God. Have you ever tried to speak to unbelievers about the kingdom of God? It is as if, as we say, their eyes glaze over, and they give you this dull look or blank stare. They cannot see what you are talking about because they are not born from above with the spirit of God to give them spiritual sight. They are blinded by the god of this age, and they simply cannot perceive the kingdom of God for what it truly is. They could even be religious like Nicodemus, and like Nicodemus, they cannot see the kingdom of God.

Third, entering the kingdom of God is only possible if one is born from above of water and spirit. In other words, Nicodemus could not enter the kingdom of God based on his flesh alone. Even though he was a descendant of Jacob, he had no right to this kingdom, for one can only enter it if one is born from above, or out of heaven, or of God, of spirit. It is God's kingdom, and God is spirit, and if one is to enter into God's realm, one must also be born from above by the spirit. **But of God** one enters the kingdom of God.

Consequently, Jesus was declaring that the kingdom of His Father is a spiritual kingdom, and as such, one can only perceive and enter into His kingdom as one is given a new life from above that is a spiritual life, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit that gives life.

The expectation.

Clearly, Jesus imparted a truth that challenged Nicodemus' normal mode of thinking. We could say that Jesus challenged his worldview as well as his religious view. Part of the challenge to Nicodemus was related to his understanding of the kingdom of God and the expectation of the Jew in that day in light of the kingdom. Therefore, before proceeding further with Jesus' discourse, it is needful at this point to look at the expectation of Nicodemus and his brethren. One could say that Nicodemus represented the Judahite nation at that moment in history.

Who was Nicodemus? He was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, which meant that he was not counted among the gentiles who were outside the commonwealth of Israel. As an Israelite, Nicodemus had applied the blood and continued in the teaching of Moses, including the law given to Moses at Mount Sinai. In other words, he was on the right side of the blood and a seeker of God. After all, when he approached Jesus, he said: **“Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him”** (John 3.2 NASB).

Nicodemus approached Jesus as a seeker of God who sought to know how to enter *the kingdom of the heavens*. Let us not forget that the Jews were looking for the

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Messiah to come and establish His kingdom on earth. In fact, many of the leading Jews knew that Jesus was the promised King of Israel, even though they rejected Him (see Matthew 21.38-39; Mark 11.10). So, when Nicodemus sought out Jesus at night so as not to be detected by others, he was seeking the kingdom, even though he did not state so to Jesus. According to Scripture, Jesus knew what was in the heart of man (John 2.25; Luke 9.47), so He knew what Nicodemus sought; and He gave him the answer.

But what kingdom were Nicodemus and his Jewish brethren looking for in that day? Or, to ask it another way: What aspect of the kingdom were they looking for? They were looking for *the kingdom of the heavens* or, according to one translation, *the reign of the heavens* (YLT) to come to the earth with the Messiah seated upon the throne of David ruling over the nation of Israel (Luke 1.32-33).

When Peter's brother Andrew realized that Jesus is the Messiah, he ran to Peter and declared: **"We have found the Messiah! (which is, being translated, Christ)"** (John 1.41 ALT). However, they were looking for a political kingdom with a political leader that would deliver them out of the rule of Rome. This is confirmed in the way that Jesus' closest disciples responded to certain situations (see Mark 10.37; Luke 9.54; John 18.10). They desired the literal rule of God on earth with all power and observation; however, it is apparent from the discourse with Nicodemus, who was a leader of the Jews, they did not expect a *spiritual* kingdom.

According to Daniel the prophet, **the heavens do rule** (Daniel 4.26 ASV), and their expectation was to see the rule of heaven come to earth. We see this expectation in Jesus' instruction to His disciples on prayer: **Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven** (Matthew 6.10 KJV).

We need to be clear that their expectation was not a false one. It was real and it was according to Scripture. What they desired will come about one day. As Jesus walked with His disciples, a day came when He said: **"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom"** (Matthew 16.28 NASB). Then, he took three of them, Peter, James, and John, up on a high mountain to observe His transfiguration, which was a glimpse of His coming kingdom of glory. In Christ they saw the Messianic kingdom that will rule over the entire earth in the seventh millennium of the second earth.

Seeing the Son of Man coming in His kingdom was a preview of a literal day that was yet future for the three disciples and which is still yet future for us as well; a 1,000-year day, the seventh millennial day, comes after six days or 6,000 years. Jesus was transfigured after six days, and on the seventh (compare Exodus 24.16 with Matthew 17.1-2). God restored a ruined earth that had been brought into disruption in six days, and He rested on the seventh day. In like fashion, after Adam brought death into his race, most likely at the age of 33½, Elohim purposed to restore mankind and this earth in 6 days or 6,000 years, followed by a seventh

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day or a Sabbatical rest of 1,000 years. Peter reminds us: **But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day** (2 Peter 3.8 NASB). It is a fact that a thousand years is like one day.

Nicodemus, just like Jesus' disciples, was expecting this aspect of the kingdom to come in his day. They were expecting *the reign of the heavens*, the literal rule of Messiah over Israel and the nations of the earth. After all, Jesus was performing all the signs that would indicate that this kingdom was at the door, or even in their midst. Even after His resurrection, right before His final ascension, the disciples asked Jesus: **“Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”** Instead of the kingdom literally being manifested on the earth at that point, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1.6-8), and this is the key to our understanding of Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus.

Simply, Jesus was referring to the kingdom of God not as the literal kingdom of Christ that is coming to this earth but as the present spiritual kingdom of God that one can only enter into **today** by being **born from above** by the spirit of God.

Born of water and spirit.

Jesus answered and said unto him—Verily, verily I say unto thee: Except one be born from above [*gennao anothēn*] he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him— How can a man be born when he is old? Can he into the womb of his mother a second time enter and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily I say unto thee: Except one be born of water and spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which hath been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which hath been born of the spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to thee: Ye must needs be born from above [*gennao anothēn*]. The spirit where it pleaseth doth breathe, and the sound thereof thou hearest; but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth: Thus is every one who hath been born of the spirit.” (John 3.3-8 REB)

Now, let us look at the meaning of water and spirit.

Throughout Scripture, water and spirit represent new life. According to Moses, every living creature has **the breath of the spirit of life** (Genesis 7.22 ASV/CV/REB). In the natural realm, water and spirit represent new life or birth. In simple terms, once impregnation occurs, human life begins in a sac of water in the womb of the mother, and growth continues in this sac for nine months. When it is time for the baby to be released from the mother's womb, the water sac breaks and, shortly thereafter, the baby emerges into the world and takes its first breath of air; the breath of the spirit of life enters the lungs of the baby, and it becomes a living soul. This is the primary meaning of Jesus telling Nicodemus that he must be born of water. Simply, He was referring to the natural birth. In other words,

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first one must be born of mankind, which would exclude the angels (see Hebrews 2.5-8), and then one must be born of the spirit to enter the kingdom of God.

Of course, not all see it this way, for some see water as representing baptism based on Old Testament types, and others see it as representing the word of God; both views have some merit.

Regardless of one's view, water and spirit are intimately connected as a symbol of life. After all, water is the universal solvent of life, without which there would be no life on earth. Our physical bodies are mostly water (70% by weight). Also, the spirit gives life (John 6.63; James 2.26). Death ensues with the departure of the spirit. There are many examples in Scripture that illustrate the connection of water and spirit to life. Let us consider eight of them. Obviously, there is much that could be said about each example, but all that is needed is a brief summary to make the point.

First, in the very beginning of Genesis, it is recorded that the earth was a waste land; it was in ruin and darkness with water raging over its surface. Some describe it as having been a watery grave. However, when it came time to bring restoration to this disrupted earth, the spirit of God hovered or brooded over the waters. Then the word went out to bring forth new life on earth, which culminated on the sixth day with the forming, from the soil of the earth, of a new creation called *man* (see Genesis 1-2). Thus, we find water and spirit operative in bringing forth new life.

Second, about 1600 years later, the moral fiber of man had sunk to such depravity that God determined to wipe out mankind, except for a family of eight. So the Lord opened up heaven and the aquifers underground, and flooded the earth, killing all except Noah and his family. They were saved through the water by living in the ark. When the rains stopped, a dove, which is a symbol of the spirit, was sent forth to see if the water was receding. Finally, the dove came back with a freshly picked olive leaf in its mouth. New life had sprung up on dry ground (see Genesis 7-8).

Third, the sons of Israel were called out of Egypt under Moses by applying the blood of a freshly slain lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. They were then commanded to move out of Egypt by passing through the water of the Red Sea. After they arrived on the eastern shore, they moved on to Mount Sinai. Then for forty years in the wilderness, the pillar of cloud guided them by day, and the pillar of fire lighted their way by night; they were led by the spirit of God (see Exodus 12-14).

Fourth, John the baptist came on the scene of world history preaching “**Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.**” He was a voice crying out in the wilderness, summoning the people to repent and be baptized with water for repentance. Jesus then came on the scene and approached John to be baptized by him. To fulfill all righteousness, Jesus was baptized, and when He came up out of the water, the heavens opened and John saw **the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Jesus** (Matthew 3.16).

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Fifth, midway into the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, Jesus went up into the temple and began teaching, which, as usual, stirred up the ire of the Pharisees and chief priests who sought to seize Him. However, they could not lay their hands on Him for His hour had not yet come. On the last day or eighth day of the feast, Jesus cried out, saying: **“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified** (John 7.37-39 NASB). So we see a very clear connection between water and the spirit, which gives life.

Sixth, when the Roman soldier pierced the side of Jesus’ broken and dead body as it hung on the cross, John, the apostle of love, with his own eyes, saw blood and water come forth from His side (John 19.34). Later, John would write: **This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement** (1 John 5.6-8 NASB).

Seventh, today, all who believe have received an earnest of the spirit, with a view to the redemption of the purchased possession (Ephesians 1.14), and are called to be water baptized, not as a requirement for initial salvation but as a testimony of their death, burial, and resurrection with Christ, so that they can walk in newness of life, walking by the spirit (Romans 6.4; Galatians 5.25). Baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3.21). Thus, water, resurrection life, and the spirit of God are intimately connected.

Eighth, John was in spirit in the Lord’s day and saw the holy city, New Jerusalem come down out of heaven, having the glory of God. Many people view this city as a physical city of gold and precious stones, but *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* describes word-pictures that signify things that are spiritual. The city is a picture of the dwelling of God *in* spirit, the spiritual house of God, built with living stones; all who have been glorified with spiritual bodies because they were born from above. Now, John saw a river of the water of life coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22.1). What is this river? It is the spirit of God that gives life (see fifth item above). Thus, according to Scripture, water and spirit speak of life and the kingdom of God.

So, we can see that water and spirit go hand-in-hand to typify life. In type, this is seen in Scripture through the matter of baptism. The earth that was in disruption, that is, in waste, ruin, and darkness, was baptized in water, and it took the spirit of God brooding over the surface of the deep to bring forth life out of the watery grave that ultimately yielded the new creation of mankind.

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The deluge of the earth 1,656 years later is another type of resurrection life. Peter tells us that the baptism of the believer corresponds to Noah and his family being saved from the flood (water) by riding above it in an ark. Their entombment in the ark typified death, burial, and resurrection. As the water receded, the dove (a type of the spirit) was sent forth and returned with an olive leaf (a type of new life). Then the ark rested on dry land; the family of eight departed the ark and entered a new day on earth.

Israel passing through the Red Sea is another type of baptism of the saved. The sons of Israel had applied the blood (saved) and were commanded to leave Egypt (a type of the world) in pursuit of the land of promise (a type of entering the kingdom). They were baptized into the water of the Red Sea as a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection. When they reached the eastern shore of the sea, they entered a new life of being guided by the spirit of God, as typified by the pillar of cloud and fire.

Today, the saved are commanded to be water baptized to identify with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The saved have been given an earnest of the spirit as a down payment that, one day, they will literally experience the resurrection of their dead bodies to receive immortal life and inherit the kingdom.

Finally, on the eighth day of the feast of the Tabernacles, Jesus cried out: **“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”** John explained what Jesus meant. **But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified** (John 7.38-39 NASB). Therefore, according to Jesus and John, water typifies the spirit that gives life. Again, Scripture links water and life, as revealed through John’s Patmos vision, especially of New Jerusalem, the dwelling of God in spirit, when he saw the river of the water of life coming forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22.1). All of these types are helpful in understanding the meaning of **born from above**. Water and spirit speak of life, and in the context of born from above, it is spiritual life.

Actually, one commentator has stated that water and spirit should not be viewed as two things but as one. In the Greek, there are no definite articles preceding water and spirit, contrary to many translations, which makes spirit an adjective of water. Thus, one is to be born of **spiritual water**, as opposed to physical water. Given this thought, Jesus was telling Nicodemus that to be born from above, he had to be born not of the physical water of a woman’s womb but of the spiritual water of the spirit of God that truly gives life. Jesus was simply drawing a comparison between what is of the natural realm and what is of the spiritual realm. One needs to enter the womb of the spirit to be brought forth through resurrection into a spiritual body in the celestial kingdom of the coming eons.

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Born of the flesh is flesh.

Jesus answered, Verily, verily I say unto thee: Except one be born of water and spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which hath been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which hath been born of the spirit is spirit.” (John 3.5-6 REB)

Now, moving on, Jesus told Nicodemus: **That which hath been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which hath been born of the spirit is spirit.** In other words, Jesus made a very clear distinction between two different, even opposing, sources of life. That which has been born of the flesh is flesh. Its very source is the flesh, and its very nature is flesh. It is as if Jesus drew a line in the sand and declared that which is of the flesh has no part of that which is of the spirit; it is like mixing oil and water. That which is born of the flesh always remains of the flesh; it cannot be made into spirit because its source is not spirit. There is more to be said about the matter of being born of the spirit, but first we need to be clear about being born of the flesh.

For Nicodemus, the matter of the flesh meant that although he was born of the commonwealth of Israel and was of the bloodline that could be traced back to Jacob, he could not expect to enter the kingdom of God. Circumcision of the flesh was of no value to him or to anyone else, for that matter, in seeing and entering the kingdom. Being born of man or from any bloodline of man will not afford one the privilege of entering the kingdom of God. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus should have immediately related to the promise of the Lord to his forefathers, as recorded by Ezekiel.

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” (Ezekiel 36.25-27 NASB)

Notice that water is for cleansing, which, in the natural sense, is what water does best; the new spirit removes the heart of stone from the flesh. If Nicodemus had considered this prophetic word, then he would have understood that a new spirit, the spirit of God, had to come from above. Through this account with Nicodemus, as well as the long history of the sons of Jacob, we see a clear warning to the Jews that so proudly trust their flesh and assert that they are entitled to the kingdom of God based on their flesh. But what about the rest of mankind? Is it any different? No!

The word *flesh* in the Greek is *sarx*, which, strictly speaking, refers to the meat or body of animals. It also refers to human nature or the natural man. Jesus said: **“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing”** (John 6.63 NASB).

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According to Paul, **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God** (1 Corinthians 15.50). We need to be clear that all mankind is born of the flesh.

There is an aspect of the flesh of Adam's race that profits nothing. When Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, all in accord with the purpose and plan of God, death entered into mankind. Mankind became a dying race; all are destined to die as soon as they are born. This is proven through history and the innumerable graves in the earth today. No one is exempt from physical death, even the saved of our day. We all die because this is the legacy of Adam to his race (see 1 Corinthians 15.22).

Most likely, when he was created, Adam was formed with a spiritual, glorified body. However, this changed when he partook of the forbidden fruit. He discovered that he and his helpmate were naked. But there was more to the change, for with the death sentence now upon him and his race, a new nature resided in mankind; it is the sin nature, the carnal nature that is opposed to the spirit. This is what is often referred to as the flesh (in a negative sense). For Adam, sin came first and then death; but for his progeny that followed, the process of death is passed on, and in death, sin reigns (Romans 5.21).

Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned. (Romans 5.12 CV)

Notice the order: death is passed on first, and on account of this, all sinned. This is the kind of flesh born of the flesh that profits nothing and that cannot inherit the kingdom of God; it is not of the spirit from above.

Born of the spirit is spirit.

That which hath been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which hath been born of the spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to thee: Ye must needs be born from above [*gennaō anōthen*]. The spirit where it pleaseth doth breathe, and the sound thereof thou hearest; but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth: Thus is every one who hath been born of the spirit." (John 3.6-8 REB)

Now, based on Jesus' words to Nicodemus that one must be born again or, more accurately, **born from above**, many rightfully preach to the lost that they must believe, and when they do, they are born from above by the spirit of God. They are given a new life, a life in Christ, as Christ takes up residence in them and gives them the hope of glory (Colossians 1.27). **Christ in you!**

According to Scripture, when we are given the faith to believe in Jesus and the finished work of His cross, we receive the Holy Spirit, which takes up residence in

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us, and the love of God is poured out within our hearts (Romans 5.5; 1 Corinthians 6.19; 1 Thessalonians 4.8). According to Paul, we receive **the earnest** of the spirit.

God, who also sealed us, and gave the earnest [*arrhabon*] of the Spirit in our hearts. (2 Corinthians 1.22 YLT)

God, who also did give to us the earnest [*arrhabon*] of the Spirit....
(2 Corinthians 5.5 YLT)

The good news of your salvation--in whom also having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, which is an earnest [*arrhabon*] of our inheritance, to the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1.13-14 YLT)

The Greek word for *earnest* is *arrhabon*, which, according to Strong's Concordance, is of Hebrew origin and means "a pledge, that is, part of the purchase money or property given in advance as security for the rest: earnest." Searching other translations reveals that it is most often translated as *earnest*, *pledge*, *down payment*, or *guarantee*.

The use of this word adds to our understanding of being *born from above* because it indicates that if we are counted among the saved, we have something of great value within us that is our assurance that not only are we in the spiritual kingdom of God now, but we also have a hope or expectation of entering the kingdom of Christ that is coming. But let us not forget that we have not arrived yet. As Paul forgot what lies behind and reached toward to what lies ahead, so must we (Philippians 3.13). Yes, we are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5.5.17), and we have an entirely new life residing in us, but this is only a foretaste of the glory to come when we receive glorified, spiritual bodies in the image of Christ.

When we believe, we receive the spirit of God as a pledge or earnest of what is to come; it is only a part, not the whole of what we are destined to be. In other words, we must wait for a future day to receive the promise of the inheritance. Today, we have a foretaste, which means the full flavor has not yet come, and it is not unusual to groan for more of this taste. Consider how the *Weymouth New Testament* words it. Receiving the spirit of God is both an earnest and a foretaste of what is to come, a foretaste of the bliss of glory.

And He who formed us with this very end in view is God, who has given us His Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that bliss. (2 Corinthians 5.5 WNT)

Now, what is the inheritance that has been purchased for those who are saved? The inheritance is related to the earnest of the spirit that is received and the adoption as sons, the redemption of the body (Romans 8.23). The inheritance is the new body conformed to the body of His glory. It is the **glorified, immortal,**

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spiritual, and **celestial** body in the image of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15.49; Philippians 3.20-21; 1 John 3.2) that comes forth with the transfiguration (complete change of life). In other words, since believers receive a down payment of God's spirit, when the full payment comes, it must be a full measure of Christ, and this requires a full measure of the spirit of God when we are given new, glorified, spiritual bodies.

When do believers receive this new spiritual body? If they have fallen asleep in Christ, they will receive it in resurrection, either the first resurrection of conquerors in Christ at the end of our present eon, or the general resurrection of the just and the unjust 1,000 years later. Regardless of the timing, the result is the same, for only through the resurrection **and** transfiguration can it be proclaimed that one is truly born from above or born again.

Until then, our lives are to continually change for the better as we taste Jesus under the discipline and training of the spirit of God. But we must also be alert to the flesh that still resides within all of us. Remember that which has been born of the flesh is flesh. Paul declared: **For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please** (Galatians 5.17 NASB). Or, consider the exhortation of the one who denied the Lord three times: **Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul** (1 Peter 2.11 NASB).

For this reason, we are exhorted in many ways to put off the old self and put on the new self and to walk in a manner worthy of our calling (e.g., Ephesians 4.1, 22-24; 1 Peter 1.14; 2.1), until **Christ be formed in you** (Galatians 4.19).

All of this pertains to the process of sanctification or, as some call it, the salvation of the soul (Hebrews 10.39; James 1.21). **For this is the will of God, your sanctification** (1 Thessalonians 4.3 NASB). **For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification** (1 Thessalonians 4.7 NASB). Paul also wrote: **Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God** (2 Corinthians 7.1 NASB).

We need to be mindful of these things, but let us rejoice in the Lord, abiding in Him and trusting Him to lead us by His spirit each day until we are fully conformed to His image. There is nothing greater than to walk with Jesus in this life, but what is to come is even more glorious.

As Paul wrote: **Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit** (2 Corinthians 3.17-18 NASB).

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We have this treasure in earthen vessels that one day will break forth into heavenly vessels, a dwelling not made with hands, reserved in heaven for all who are born from above. Until then, we groan, as Paul groaned, to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven. **Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge** (see 2 Corinthians 4.7; 5.1-5).

The same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Do not wonder at me telling you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it wills; you can hear its sound, but you never know where it has come from or where it goes; it is the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3.7-8 JMT)

When we are born from above, we are just like a newborn baby that must grow up. In spirit, we are a new creation in Christ, not based on the flesh, **but of God**. However, this is only the beginning, not the end.

I realize that, generally, the term *born from above* or *born again* is viewed strictly as a spiritual birth, which does not include the redemption of the body. However, I see it as all connected. After all, according to Paul, the redemption of the body means that we will receive a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15.44). The spirit comes from above and so will our spiritual body come from above, for it is the dwelling from heaven (2 Corinthians 5.2).

When we first believe, we enter the kingdom of God, which is a spiritual kingdom; however, the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has not come yet. One must be constituted to reign with Christ in His kingdom, as He sums up all things in the heavens and on the earth (Ephesians 1.10), and this requires a birth that comes from above or, we could say, comes out of heaven or the very realm of God. All of mankind is born of the flesh, which cannot inherit the kingdom. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and simply, this cannot be altered, for it is God’s unchanging principle.

If one hopes to enter the kingdom that Paul called the *celestial* or *heavenly* kingdom (2 Timothy 4.18), then one must be born of the spirit so that one day he can receive a new body—a glorified, immortal, spiritual body in the image of Christ. Writing to the saints, Peter said that this new body is reserved in heaven for us who believe (1 Peter 1.4), and Paul said that our hope is laid up for us in heaven (Colossians 1.5).

This does not mean that when believers die, they go to heaven (**the dead know nothing whatsoever** [Ecclesiastes 9.5]); it means that when they are resurrected, they will receive their glorified body that is heavenly and constituted in such a way that it can traverse the earthly or physical realm, as well as the celestial or heavenly realm.

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The inheritance of the saints is not a piece of real estate in heaven but a body that comes out of heaven, a body born from above, born of the spirit. The saints are to possess an immortal body. **Heaven is not our goal or our hope; immortality is our hope.** What is immortality? It is a life beyond death; a life that is no longer subject to death and, consequently, is no longer subject to sin, which reigns in death.

Paul's heart was to press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3.14 NASB). Paul was pressing on toward the goal of the *out-resurrection* from among the dead that will afford him and all the other conquerors (overcomers) in Christ the privilege of being counted worthy to enter the coming celestial kingdom of Christ, being clothed with a dwelling from heaven, a building from God, a house not made with hands (see 2 Corinthians 5.1-2).

Consequently, being born from above leads to a glorious consummation, or, to put it in terms of human growth, it leads to full maturity. When we first believe and are given a new life in the spirit, this life begins to grow in us as Christ is formed in us, until one day, we become like our Lord in full measure, lacking in no area of life, full of the life of Jesus. What bliss!

What I am proposing is this: The whole matter of being born from above starts with a new life in the spirit that continues to advance in us until we receive a new body from above. I believe that this can be discerned in Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus.

“The wind blows where it wills; you can hear its sound, but you never know where it has come from or where it goes; it is the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

After He was resurrected but before He ascended for the final time to sit at the right hand of God, Jesus appeared to His disciples, but not as any of us could appear. He appeared in ways that His disciples did not recognize Him. He appeared and disappeared from rooms that had closed doors. In other words, no one knew where He came from and where He went during that time. He simply appeared and then disappeared, unhindered by locked doors and walls. He was like wind!

But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ... Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples ventured to question Him, “Who are You?” knowing that it was the Lord. (John 21.4, 12 NASB)

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be to you.” But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. (Luke 24.36-37 NASB)

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So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (John 20.19-20 NASB)

This is a picture of one born of the spirit. The disciples could hear Jesus and even see Him at times, but they did not know where He came from or where He was going. What needs to be understood is that after He was resurrected on Sunday, April 5, 33 AD, later that day, Jesus ascended to heaven and presented Himself alive as the wave sheaf offering in the heavenly temple. He then returned to earth and appeared to His disciples over a forty-day period leading up to Pentecost, during which time He spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God (see Acts 1.3). Jesus had been glorified and had taken on an immortal, spiritual, celestial body. But obviously, His appearance changed as He met with His disciples. Also, He could move through time and space unhindered. At one moment, He could be in the physical realm, even eating with His disciples, and the next moment, He could disappear into the spiritual realm. In other words, time and space did not hinder Him.

Dear beloved in Christ, this is what it means to be born from above and to take on a spiritual body in the image of Christ. This is the hope of those who are considered worthy to attain to that age (eon) to come and the resurrection from among the dead. They will be like the angels. They will be the sons of God, the sons of the resurrection (see Luke 20.35-36). No longer will they be hindered by bodies of death or by the physical realm. Their realm will be both the spiritual, celestial realm and the earthly, physical realm. They will move freely between these realms to minister to the Lord and to judge and reign over the world and the angels as Christ heads up all in the heavens and on the earth.

In case some of what has been presented has come across as merely things to which we are to attain, let us be reminded that being born from above is all about our Lord Jesus. Being born from above is being intimately joined with the One who came down out of heaven for us. In that day, we will not only be like Jesus, but we will see Jesus, not only the love of our life but the very source of our life.

When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Christ in you, the hope of glory!

This is the very heart of being born from above. Praise God!

His seed abides in him.

Now, I want to conclude this book with another word given to us by John that adds to the discussion about the seed within every believer. The following appeared as an issue of *The Upward Call*.

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Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3.4-9 NASB)

As we have seen, all born of God are born from above; they have received a new life that has its source in heaven or, as I like to state, among the celestials. We could say that a piece of heaven or that which is of the spirit realm has been planted within all who believe.

Please do not take this thought to support the notion that believers die and go to heaven. This is not what I mean. Quite the contrary; I believe that God's purpose and plan of the eons is to bring heaven, which is better called the spirit realm, to earth.

Through God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, *the reign of the heavens* will be brought to earth, and the conquerors through the life of Christ shall be reigning on the earth (Revelation 5.10). Although, as of this writing, the reign has not come upon the kingdoms of this world, it has come in some small measure upon the ecclesia, the body of Christ, the dwelling of God that is being built *in* spirit (Ephesians 2.19-22). All who believe are new creations *in* Christ (2 Corinthians 5.17; Galatians 6.15), having received an earnest of the spirit of God (2 Corinthians 1.22; 5.5; Ephesians 1.14), and each has received a foretaste of living *in* spirit, for God has seated us together *among* the celestials, *in* Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2.6 CV).

These are undeniable verities according to the word of God and have been made possible because of the seed of Christ, which is implanted in all who by grace through faith are given the faith of the Son of God to believe on Jesus. It is the very life of Christ, for, as Paul wrote, it is **Christ in you** (Colossians 1.27), and **Christ, who is our life** (Colossians 3.4).

Now, a natural seed is made up of the outer coat called the seed coat and an embryo within the seed coat that contains all the genetic material that transforms the seed into its species, that is, what kind of plant it will be. Spiritually speaking, the seed coat is our body that now contains the heavenly embryo, which is the seed of Christ. Our heavenly Father is the father of the seed, and we are likened to a woman who ingests the spiritual food of God's word and, along with the spirit of God, brings this seed to gestation. Paul wrote of this seed as **Christ formed in you** (Galatians 4.19) and referred to it as **this treasure in earthen vessels** (2 Corinthians 4.7). This seed is to grow until you are **complete in Christ, to a**

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mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ (Colossians 1.28; Ephesians 4.13 NASB).

In other words, when we first believed, by the grace of God through the faith of the Son of God, the Father impregnated us with His seed, which is the very life of His Son, Christ in you. God is the Father of this seed and we became the mother of the seed, which is to grow until it bursts forth from our earthly tents into our dwellings from heaven, our glorified bodies.

The nature of the seed is actually a celestial seed. It is called our inner man, and we are to nurture it by feeding upon the word of God under the leading of the spirit of God so that it grows until it is a complete man in Christ. Sin may continue to operate in some measure in our bodies of death, for sin reigns in death.

However, our lives are to grow in such a fashion that our inner man, the new man, the seed of Christ in us matures to the likeness of Christ so that sin no longer has sway in our lives. When unrighteousness or lawlessness does rear its ugly head, we know that it is not coming from our inner man, the new **I**, but from the old **I** and our bodies of death in which sin dwells. Consider Paul's testimony.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.
(Galatians 2.20 KJV)

However, Paul did not mean that there is no longer an **I** in the believer, as if all identity is lost. On the contrary, he saw a new **I** in the believer: **Nevertheless I live! The life I now live! I live by the faith of the Son of God!** The new **I** is who you are in Christ; it is the new you and who you are becoming.

In reference to sin, Paul wrote: **So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me** (Romans 7.17 NASB). Or, according to another translation: **Now it is no longer I that do these things, but the sin which has its home within me does them** (WNT). Paul had a new **I** in him that was not capable of sinning. It was what he also called the inner man. **For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man** (Romans 7.22 NASB).

Notice how Paul did not do away with the law of God but concurred with it, for, as he wrote, the law is good. Sin is lawlessness. The inner man, the new **I**, does not sin because it concurs with the law of God. Simply, the inner man is law-abiding and practices the righteousness of God.

According to John, the heavenly seed planted within cannot sin because it is of God and God knows no sin. As Paul wrote: **For the One not having known sin, He made sin on our behalf, so that we shall become [the] righteousness of God in Him!** (2 Corinthians 5.21 ALT).

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So now, those who have this seed within them do not practice sin, which is lawlessness, but practice righteousness because the seed within only knows righteousness. The seed of God is perfect, and we must nurture this seed.

I have heard it said that a believer can never sin, but this is not what John meant at all. Of course, some use this as an excuse to do what they want to do, even if it is sin, and explain away their lawlessness based on this verse. It is called licentiousness. However, earlier in his epistle, John wrote that if we say we have no sin, then we are deceiving ourselves (1 John 1.8). In other words, John saw that sin can and does continue to operate in a believer, but its source is the old life from the seed of Adam housed in a body of death, not the new life from the seed of God that is growing into a celestial body.

Let us be clear that the flesh cannot be reformed, cleaned up, or made to be righteous. All attempts to make the flesh into something holy will fail. Our focus must be on nurturing the seed of God within that is life itself, and not on trying to reform the flesh that is dying. The seed is a new **I**.

The seed coat, that is, our body of death, must be put off one day when the embryo has grown to maturity. For all who conquer through the life of Christ while they lived in bodies of death, there is a day of glory coming. This new life within will burst through the old seed coat of those who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, and they will be transfigured into the new creation that is *in* Christ; glorified as Christ is glorified, celestial as Christ is celestial, *in* spirit as Christ is *in* spirit. Those who are asleep in Jesus will be roused from among the dead through the *out*-resurrection, and they too will be transfigured. The seed that grew in them while in bodies of death is being preserved by the Father and is waiting to burst forth from the cords of death.

If you have been born from above, then His seed abides in you. Nurture it!